

Our Human Freedom in its Meaning and Being as taught by the Catholic Church

drawn from magisterial documents¹

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I. FREEDOM AS FACT OR ACTUALITY

God created man a rational being, conferring on him the dignity of a person who can initiate and control his own actions. "God willed that man should be 'left in the hand of his own counsel' [Ecclesiastes 15:14],² so that he might of his own accord seek his Creator and freely attain his full and blessed perfection by cleaving to him."³ No greater gift belongs to us in our human condition than this human ability to make free decisions and choices in the actions that we do.⁴

As rational, as intelligent, and therefore like God, as created in God's image and likeness, man is created thus with free will,⁵ having the “natural liberty” of his free will,⁶ and so he is master over his acts.⁷ Hence, if this is the case, through a negative kind of wording which has come to us from the proscriptive teaching of the Council of Trent in the context of a disciplinary canon: “if any one shall say that, after Adam's sin man's free will was lost and destroyed; or, that it is a thing only in name [“an

¹Please note that the substratum of this text is freely drawn and quoted from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), pp. 430-433, #1730-1748. For purposes of clarity however, additional information is added and nuances are noted as these can be taken from other magisterial texts that have come down to us from popes and councils. While the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* outlines the major characteristics and traits that denominate the Church's teaching about the meaning and being of human freedom, other magisterial texts, if consulted, indicate the kind of reasoning which is needed if we are to understand why the Church teaches as she does about the meaning and being of human freedom. In the summary that we have prepared here, we attempt to specify both aspects: the particulars of the Church's teaching and the reasoning which is used to explain this teaching.

²This same scriptural text is also cited by Pope Leo XIII in *Libertas Praestantissimum* 1 [“On the Nature of Human Liberty”] but in a way which explicitly refers to its scriptural origins. Cf. http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_1-xiii_enc_20061888_libertas.html (accessed October 15, 2019).

³Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* 17; *Sirarch* 15:14.

⁴Pope Leo XIII, *Libertas Praestantissimum* 1, http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_1-xiii_enc_20061888_libertas.html (accessed October 15, 2019).

⁵Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 68, as cited by *Dictionary of the Council*, eds. J. Deretz and A. Nocent, OSB (Washington and Cleveland: Corpus Books, 1968), p. 178.

⁶Pope Leo XIII, *Libertas Praestantissimum* 3, http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_1-xiii_enc_20061888_libertas.html (accessed October 15, 2019).

⁷St. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*. 4,4,3:PG 7/1,983.

empty concept”],⁸ indeed a name without a reality [“a term without real foundation”],⁹ a fiction introduced into the Church by Satan – *anathema sit*.¹⁰ Similarly, “if anyone shall say that it is not in man's power to make his ways evil, but that the works that are evil as well as those that are good God produces, not only permissively but *proprie et per se* [“properly and directly”],¹¹ so that the treason of Judas is no less his own proper work than the vocation of St. Paul – *anathema sit*.¹² The kind of government which God exercises should not be understood in such a way as to suggest that it exists in a way which suppresses and eliminates our human freedom, taking from us any responsibility that we can have in any deeds that we do (whether good or evil). The contrary is to be asserted.

The emergence of a tradition that reiterates proscriptive teachings which pertain to the being and the reality of human freedom can be traced back as early as the late 5th Century, to approximately 475. A local Council meeting at Arles in France receives a letter of submission from a priest named Lucidus and, in this letter, he publicly repudiates a teaching which he had held and taught to the effect that “after the fall of the first man the free choice of the will was totally destroyed.”¹³ Later, in the 6th Century, in 561, in Portugal, the First Council of Braga issues an anathema which says that “if anyone believes that human souls are bound to a blind fate as pagans and Priscillian said – *anathema sit*.¹⁴ “Let him be condemned.” If blind fate is not to be admitted as the gist or as the truth of our human condition, according to the principle of the excluded middle (in logic), the alternative which necessarily follows is one which must affirm that, to us as human beings, a form of self-determination is to be admitted. The reality of our self-determination points to the reality of our human freedom and a kind of self-control which allegedly belongs to this freedom. While the primacy of the kind of help which exists in God's grace is not to be denied, while God's grace exists for us as both a prior and as a subsequent condition (relative to the reality of our human existence), according to the teaching of Pope Leo IX in 1053, it belongs to the Church's creed that never, at any time, is the reality of “free will” to be denied of us to the degree that we exist as a species of “rational creature.”¹⁵ Freedom and rationality come with each other.

⁸*The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, 6th ed., J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, ed. Jacques Dupuis (New York: Alba House, 1996), p. 761, #1955.

⁹Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” as cited by *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, ed. Jacques Dupuis, p. 761, #1955.

¹⁰Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” as cited by *The Teaching of the Catholic Church: as contained in her documents*, originally prepared by Josef Neuner and Heinrich Roos, ed. Karl Rahner, trans. Geoffrey Stevens (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1967), p. 398, #742, Canon 5; see also <http://www.thecounciloftrent.com/ch6.htm> (accessed October 8, 2019).

¹¹Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” as cited by *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, ed. Jacques Dupuis, p. 761, #1956.

¹²Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” as cited by *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, Neuner and Roos, p. 398, #743.

¹³*The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, eds. Henry Denzinger and Karl Rahner, trans. Roy J. Deferrati (Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto Publications, 2007), p. 65, #160a.

¹⁴*Teaching of the Catholic Church*, Neuner and Roos, p. 120, #201; cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Council_of_Braga (accessed October 8, 2019).

¹⁵Pope Leo IX, “Symbol of Faith,” 1053, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, eds. Denzinger and Rahner, p. 142, #348.

In a reiteration that comes to us from Pope Leo X in 1520, in a papal bull known as *Exsurge Domine*, Pope Leo X condemns a teaching which allegedly comes to us from the complaints and the protestations of Martin Luther: a teaching which had said that “after sin, free will is just nominal [it exists as but “an empty concept,” or as “a matter of title only”];¹⁶ and when a man does his best [“when it does what is in its power” or when he, man “does what is in him”],¹⁷ [then] he sins mortally.”¹⁸ Similarly (although with different words), in a second papal bull, Pope Pius V in 1567 condemns a teaching that comes to us from Michael du Bay who had said that “without the help of God's grace free will can do nothing but sin.”¹⁹ Hence, in the light of this condemned teaching, with Luther, if this condemned teaching is held to be true, it would follow from it that our human freedom can only exist in the wake of grace (in the wake of our salvation) if, according to a belief and teaching that is rejected and condemned by the Church's Magisterium, it is held and proposed to us that “without the grace of the Redeemer the sinner is not free except for evil.”²⁰ Reiteratively, as a teaching that is rejected, “there can be no ascent...to the way of justice (that is to any justice) otherwise than through Him [Christ as “the way and 'the door' of...truth and life].”²¹ In this context, apart from grace, no choice between good and evil can truly and really exist. “Every action which a sinner, or a slave of sin performs is a sin;”²² “in all his actions a sinner serves his ruling passion.”²³ By extension, “all works of infidels are sins, and the virtues

16Pope Leo X, *Exsurge Domine*, as cited by *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, ed. Dupuis, p. 747, #1923/36; *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, eds. Denzinger and Rahner, p. 242, #776.

17Pope Leo X, *Exsurge Domine*, as cited by *Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, ed. Dupuis, p. 747, #1923/36; *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, eds. Denzinger and Rahner, p. 242, #776.

18Pope Leo X, *Exsurge Domine*, as cited by *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, Neuner and Roos, p. 382, #708; cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exsurge_Domine (accessed October 8, 2019). Hence, in 1547, in the “Decree of Justification,” in the context of a disciplinary canon, the Council of Trent ratifies this papal teaching when it conceptualizes and anathematizes the following doctrinal thesis: “all works [that are] performed before justification, no matter how they are performed, are truly sins or [they] deserve God's hatred, or...the more earnestly [that one] one tries to dispose oneself for grace, the more grievously [that one] one sins.” Cf. *Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, ed. Dupuis, p. 761, # 1957.

19Pope Pius V, *Ex Omnibus Afflictionibus*, 1567, as cited by *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, ed. Dupuis, p. 767, #1987/27, condemning propositions that are taken from the teaching of Michael De Bay.

20Pope Clement XI, *Unigenitus Dei Filius*, 1713, as cited by *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, Neuner and Roos, p. 406, #796, condemning a proposition that was allegedly taken from the teachings and the writings of Pasquier Quesnel.

21Michael du Bay, as quoted and quoted by Pope St. Pius V, *Ex omnibus afflictionibus*, 1567, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, eds. Denzinger and Rahner, p. 307, #1029.

22Michael du Bay, quoted by Pius V, *Ex omnibus afflictionibus*, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, p. 307, #1035.

23Michael du Bay, quoted by Pius V, *Ex omnibus afflictionibus*, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, p. 307, #1040.

of philosophers are vices.”²⁴ The good that men do can only exist later, through grace, in the wake of our reception of God's saving grace. Between or with respect to the realities of good, grace, and freedom, none of these can exist without the other: freedom, grace, good. Each implies or comes from the other. “It is a Pelagian error [it is wrong to say] that free will has the power to avoid any [kind of] sin.”²⁵ Natural virtue [as a reality] is not to be distinguished from supernatural virtue [as a reality] as if it truly exists as a species of virtue if we should believe and hold with respect to the order of things which exists in our world that the “distinction of a twofold love, namely a natural one, by which God is loved as the author of nature, and of a gratuitous love, by which God is loved as one who blesses, is [but] vain and false and [that it is] devised to ridicule the sacred literature and most of the testimonies of the ancients.”²⁶ In the absence of a real distinction, then to try to speak about how natural love arises “from the force [or forces] of nature” is to speak and teach in a way is that “is defended by some doctors according to philosophy alone through the pride of human presumption with injury to the Cross of Christ.”²⁷ A natural love of things (as a good and free love of things) is something which does not properly exist since no distinction can be properly drawn between either our natural love or our human freedom and that which exists as the “forces of nature” which impinge upon us in our being and on our desires and passions since allegedly, whatever exists in the wake of natural forces, exists with a necessity which precludes the value of drawing any distinction that would want to speak about the givenness or the reality of our human freedom. A voluntary act, if we should speak about a voluntary act, is simultaneously both a free act and an act that is done out of the requirements of pressing need and necessity.²⁸ No difference is to be alluded to which can indicate to us that, if an act is truly free, then it cannot be forced or necessitated in any way, whether through some form of external coercion or through some kind of internal compulsion.²⁹ The absence of a real distinction accordingly explains why, allegedly, within our fallen state or prior to our redemption, the voluntariness of an act is a quality which cannot belong to the meaning and definition of sin.³⁰ Our sin is not freely chosen since it exists as a form of compulsion that is caused in us through the power and impact of “original sin

24Michael du Bay, quoted by Pius V, *Ex omnibus afflictionibus*, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, p. 306, #1025. Similarly or, in other words in another magisterial context, it cannot be said that “of necessity, an infidel sins in every act,” as quoted by Pope Alexander VIII, listing the “Errors of the Jansenists,” 1690, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, eds. Denzinger and Rahner, p. 339, #1298.

25Michael du Bay, quoted by Pius V, *Ex omnibus afflictionibus*, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, p. 307, #1028.

26Michael du Bay, quoted by Pius V, *Ex omnibus afflictionibus*, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, p. 307, #1034.

27Michael du Bay, quoted by Pius V, *Ex omnibus afflictionibus*, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, p. 307, #1036.

28Michael du Bay, quoted by Pius V, *Ex omnibus afflictionibus*, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, p. 307, #1039.

29Karl Rahner, “Freedom,” *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (New York: Crossword, 1982), p. 544. See also Pope Innocent X, *Cum Occasione*, 1653, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, eds. Denzinger and Rahner, p. 316, #1094.

30Michael du Bay, quoted by Pius V, *Ex omnibus afflictionibus*, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, p. 308, #1046.

and in the will of Adam sinning”³¹ given the solidarity that would exist between ourselves as lacking in the good of our redemption and our first parent, Adam, to the extent that he lives and exists in his fallen state and to the degree that we participate in the kind of humanity which belongs to the condition of his fallen state. Necessarily, we are lacking in the self-control which we should have and so in the kind of control that is needed if we are to be said to be truly good, virtuous, and free in the manner of our human living.

In the wake of this kind of thinking and understanding, if we should then speak about the love of a rational creature, then this love would have to exist as either of two alternatives: as “either vicious cupidity, by which the world is loved, which is prohibited by John; or [as] that praiseworthy charity by which 'when poured forth' by the Holy Spirit in our heart [Romans 5:5], God is loved.”³² Something is good only if “it is meritorious of the eternal kingdom, in so far as it proceeds from a living member of Christ the Spirit of charity.”³³ To determine the goodness of a given thing, we do not refer to the identity of its object nor to the presence of any relevant, mitigating circumstances. Good, moral good does not exist as a specific determination of a genus which would refer to the being of all good things.

In the positive, affirmative teaching, however, which also comes to us by the Council of Trent and which is reiterated and augmented by later magisterial teaching, it is said by Trent that “the free will of man, moved and excited by God, can by its consent co-operate with God, Who excites and invites its action; and it can thereby dispose and prepare itself to obtain the grace of justification. The will can resist grace if it chooses [hence its freedom in matters of choice and decision]. It is not a lifeless thing, [something] which remains purely passive. Weakened and diminished by Adam's fall, free will is yet not destroyed in the race.”³⁴ Our human “free will [although] weakened as it was in its powers [by the original sin of Adam] and downward bent [“distorted”],³⁵ was by no means extinguished in them.”³⁶ The possibility of choice always remains and all the conditions which make for the free exercise of our human choice, apart from any questions and concerns which would refer to both the being and reality of sin and the being and reality of the gift of God's grace. So strong or so lasting is this freedom in us, that “whether induced by prejudiced opinions or [whether] instigated by desires and evil will, [as human beings we] can refuse and resist not only the evidence of external signs, which is pre-eminent,

31Pope Alexander VIII, quoting from the “Errors of the Jansenists,” in a Decree of the Holy Office issued on December 7, 1690, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, eds. Denzinger and Rahner, p. 339, #1291.

32Michael du Bay, quoted by Pius V, *Ex omnibus afflictionibus*, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, p. 307, #1038.

33Michael du Bay, quoted by Pius V, *Ex omnibus afflictionibus*, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, p. 309, #1062.

34Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” Session VI, cap. I and V, as cited by “Free Will,” *Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06259a.htm> (accessed October 8, 2019).

35Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” as cited by *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, ed. Dupuis, p. 749, #1925.

36Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” as cited by *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, Neuner and Roos, p. 384, #710, chapter 1.

but also the supernal inspirations which God brings into our hearts.”³⁷ We can resist the experience which exists within our experience of self and also the experience that is given to us through our extroverted acts of human sensing. In our freedom, we can reject the gift of God's grace in a way which gives the lie to any statements which would attempt to say that “in the state of fallen nature there is never any resistance to interior grace.”³⁸ No grace is ever irresistible even if we should want to refer to it as, allegedly, the “true interior grace of Christ.”³⁹ Our consent and cooperation is always needed.

In a reiteration of the Church's true teaching, we err if we think that God's grace is to be understood in a way which claims that it “is the working of the omnipotent hand of God which nothing can hinder or retard.”⁴⁰ We cannot argue that, when God works with us to effect our healing and salvation, God gives orders to us and, by the mere giving of these orders, we simply obey. We can obey. We might obey. But, the obedience cannot be understood to exist as a foregone conclusion.⁴¹

As the Council of Trent had decreed in the context of another disciplinary canon, “if anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone in the sense that nothing else is required by way of cooperation in order to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is not at all necessary that one should be prepared and disposed by the movement of one's will, *anathema sit*.” And yet, our freedom, despite its reality and objectivity, as given, it is not sufficient for us if we should want to turn and so move ourselves toward the justice of God in a way that will lead us toward the good of our salvation. Our freedom initially exists as a kind of in between. It is both something which we already have as a gift that has been given to us to the degree that we exist as contingent, created, human beings (we have not brought ourselves into the condition of our human existence), and it is also something that is added to and which is further given to us in a way which points to the actuality and the reception of another act which augments and which encourages our freedom, freeing it or liberating in a way which is not only additive but which is also constitutive of our human freedom if we should refer to the fullness of reality that can possibly belong to it in the context of our human lives.⁴² Our desire to be more free; our desire to be less limited in how we live because of biases and distortions that are restricting us in some way – all these desires exist not because we simply bring them into ourselves into our being but because we are being moved in some way by the reception of further gifts: by a prior or a prevenient type of grace

37Pope Pius XII, *Humani Generis*, 1950, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, eds. Denzinger and Rahner, p. 636, #2305.

38Pope Innocent X, *Cum Occasione*, 1653, as cited by the *Teaching of the Catholic Church*, Neuner and Roos, p. 406, #791, citing a proposition that was condemned by Pope Innocent when condemning five errant propositions that were taken from the writings and the teaching of Cornelius Jansen. See also *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, ed. Dupuis, p. 768, #1989/2.

39Pope Pius VI, *Autorem Fidei*, 1794, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, eds. Denzinger and Rahner, p. 376, #1521.

40Pope Clement XI, *Unigenitus Dei Filius*, 1713, as cited by *Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, ed. Dupuis, p. 770, #1992/10.

41Pope Clement XI, *Unigenitus Dei Filius*, 1713, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, eds. Denzinger and Rahner, p. 349, #1375.

42Rahner, “Freedom,” *Encyclopedia of Theology*, p. 544, citing, for instance, canon 4 of the Council of Orange which, in 529, declared that one errs if one thinks that “even the wish to be purged [of our sins] is [not] produced in us through the infusion and operation of the Holy Spirit.” Cf. *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, eds. Denzinger and Rahner, p. 76, #177.

which adds to our freedom by conditioning it in a way that can lead to its renovation, its increase, or its conversion. Some freedoms can now be enjoyed for the first time in a way which points to how one freedom can lead to another freedom that is enjoyed as, similarly, one grace leads to another grace to the degree that an initially received grace prepares the way for the possible reception of a later grace.

On the one hand thus, it can be said that “when it is said in the Sacred Scriptures, 'Turn ye to me, and I will turn to you' (Zach. 1:3), we are reminded of our liberty; and when we reply, 'Convert us, O Lord, to thee, and we shall be converted' (Lam. 5:21) we confess that we need the grace of God.”⁴³ Our freedom exists as an initial point of departure. However, later, in merely acknowledging our need for God's grace and in only thinking about the possible good of this grace, we are admitting that, here too, in another way, God's assistance is operative and present in us (it is already operative and present in some way) since this prior, conditioning, enabling kind of assistance exists in its own right as “a divine gift, both when we think rightly and when we restrain our feet from falsity and injustice; for as often as we do good, God operates in us and with us, that we may work’,” as the Second Council of Orange quotes St. Prosper in its decrees of 529.⁴⁴ More simply put as a general rule: “in every good action the first impulse comes from God.”⁴⁵ He is operative in some way although admittedly, as a consequence of the truth of this rule, according again to the principle of the excluded middle (in logic), in every bad action that we do, the first principle always comes solely from ourselves through how we are exercising our freedom of choice. With God, we are individually and cooperatively responsible for the good that we do and we are wholly responsible for the evil that we do. What leads to the good of faith and belief in God and what exists then as the good of faith and belief in God are realities (distinct realities) where both exist as gifts that come to us from God and, in receiving these different graces, we are acting freely. We are engaging in free acts which, yes, belong to us: in acts which exist for us as our free acts of obedience (as exemplifications of a “free obedience” that is now given by us to God who exists as our Creator and supreme lawgiver).⁴⁶ Nothing which exists as grace subtracts or removes from the reality of our human freedom. In addition, no real tension exists between our freedom and our obedience since each leads to the other as each helps and fosters the good of the other.⁴⁷

In terms of verification and self-knowledge, in turning to our experience of self and as we ask questions about ourselves, with sureness and certitude, through the use of our human acts of thinking and reasoning, we can move toward a knowledge that knows about the truth and the reality of our human freedom,⁴⁸ employing arguments that are divided into two related parts: one, cognitional; the other,

⁴³Council of Trent, “Decree on Justification,” as cited by the *Teaching of the Catholic Church*, Neuner and Roos, p. 386, #714, chapter 5.

⁴⁴Second Council of Orange, canon 10, 529, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, eds. Denzinger and Rahner, p. 77, #182.

⁴⁵Second Council of Orange, as cited by J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1978), p. 372.

⁴⁶First Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution concerning the Catholic Faith,” as cited by *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, , p. 445, #1791; Pope Leo XIII, *Libertas On the Nature of Human Liberty* 15 (s.l.: St. Athanasius Press, 2016), p. 28.

⁴⁷Pope Leo XIII, *Libertas On the Nature of Human Liberty* 15 (s.l.: St. Athanasius Press, 2016), pp. 27-28.

⁴⁸Pope Pius IX, “Decree of the Roman Congregation of the Index,” 1855, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, eds. Denzinger and Rahner, p. 417, #1650.

metaphysical.⁴⁹ In the exercise of our reasoning and thinking, we can discover that we can know about the contingency of very many things which exist within our world and about how many good things exist in a conditioned, contingent manner. This can be good for us or that can be good for us and we can decide what good we would like to have and how we can begin to bring it into being so that we can begin to enjoy it and so acquire it. If a given possible good is not truly necessary for us in the conduct of our lives, if we are not required or forced to accept or to obtain it for ourselves, then we can choose either this or that in a way which immediately reveals to us our sense of self in our awareness of self and how, to a degree, we have freedom of choice in our choices and actions.

However, if we attend to questions that go on to ask about why we are able to make different choices among a number of different options, if different options are known not so much through our acts of human sensing but more through our acts of thinking, understanding, and reflection, we can infer from all this, in terms of a likely or probable explanation, that our self-transcending, immaterial, cognitive operations are caused through a principle of subjective acts and actions which would refer to the being of an indwelling, immaterial soul. The immateriality of a soul points to how the soul is not subject to material determinations of one kind or another and how its being is such that it cannot be explained through the presence of any form of material determination. And so, as we begin to establish and to posit that “man's soul is immortal [given its immateriality and so its independence and its transcendence of spatial, temporal conditions] and [that it is] endowed with reason and [that is] not bound up with things material,” then, for all these reasons, as our cognitional reasons and as our metaphysical reasons all point to each other, as we can come to a natural knowledge or to a philosophic knowledge of things which point to each other, we should find that, in them, we find grounds that account for the being of a suitable or natural form of human liberty that belongs to all of us to the degree that we exist as human beings. How we live and how we exist with the nature that we happen to have explains or it grounds the reality of our human liberty. Through our self-knowledge, we can know about the extent and the breath of our freedom and also the limits which belong to the exercise of our freedom and that, *qua* freedom or purely in terms of freedom, it does not exist or it is not determined by any grace that can come to us from God although it can be assisted and encouraged by the reception of any grace that can be given to us as a gift from God. The help of grace which refers to our salvation differs from the help of gifts that come from God when God is thought about in terms which refer to how he exists as a creator.

In the general scheme of things that has been set up by God for the being of all created, existing things: as a first point: “To God, all moments of time are present in their immediacy. When therefore he establishes his eternal plan of 'predestination', he includes in it each person's free response to his grace.”⁵⁰ Hence, foreknowledge, as an act of knowing, is to be distinguished from predestination, as an act of doing and willing⁵¹ (even as we know that, within God, no real distinction exists between God's knowing and God's willing and doing). A real distinction differs from a distinction which exists as but a distinction of thought or reason. Hence, God, in his goodness and justice, predestines or He wills “only the good” (the good as referring to the being of all good things; hence, both the salvation of all

⁴⁹Pope Leo XIII, *Libertas Praestantissimum* 3, http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_20061888_libertas.html (accessed October 15, 2019).

⁵⁰*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 600, as cited by http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p122a4p2.htm (accessed October 8, 2019).

⁵¹Council of Arles, “Grace and Predestination,” 475, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, eds. Denzinger and Rahner, p. 65, #160a.

the just (the good who are deserving of eternal reward) and also the punishment which is to be meted out to those who have done evil things in the sight of God in the course of their lives; “eternal punishment” for all the damned,⁵² since the salvation and reward of one and the punishment of the other both exist as God's good works⁵³ that God can directly intend and which He directly intends and wills in lieu of the unrestricted good, the unrestricted justice, or the unrestricted loving which is alone constitutive of God in terms of how He properly exists in Himself in His being although, admittedly, at the same time too, in the context of God's unrestricted knowing, He also foreknows both “the good and the evil”⁵⁴ of all things (in this case, both “the good deeds which men will do, and the evil which evil men will do”).⁵⁵ The “foreknowledge of God” is such, however, that it leads to no harmful effects, no harmful consequences. It places no “necessity on any evil man, so that he cannot be different.”⁵⁶ No one “is condemned by a previous judgment on the part of God but [instead] by reason of his own iniquity.”⁵⁷ Our freedom is comprehended but it is not destroyed by the extent of God's knowledge and, in terms of cause and effect, from God's understanding and willing comes the gift and the contingency which exists within the exercise of our free human choices and actions.

II. FREEDOM AS FORM OR NATURE

Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one's own responsibility. With reason, we cannot have freedom.⁵⁸ Because thus, through our free will we shape the course of our lives, our freedom makes us *responsible* for our actions to the extent that, indeed, they are truly voluntary. As a force or spirit, through our freedom, we move toward experiences of truth and goodness. Because our freedom exists as the greatest good that belongs to us in the givenness of our human condition (as it exists for us within the circumstances of our spatial temporal world), from this good comes either the greatest of possible goods or the worst of possible evils.⁵⁹ The greater the goodness of our freedom, the greater will be the evil that comes from defective exercises or from defective performances of our freedom. Hence too, as we begin to think about an ordering which can exist among many different goods, as we begin to think about how one good can lead us to another good as a species of prior condition that must be given before something more or something new can be given to us (since without one, we cannot have an other), we find that

52Council of Quiersy, “Against Gottschalk and the Predestinarians,” 853, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, eds. Denzinger and Rahner, p. 126, #316.

53Pope Hadrian I, “Predestination and the Various Abuses of the Spaniards,” *Institutio Universalis*, 785, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, eds. Denzinger and Rahner, p. 120, #300.

54Pope Leo IX, “Symbol of Faith,” 1053, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, p. 142, #348.

55Third Council of Valence, “Against John Scotus,” 855, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, eds. Denzinger and Rahner, p. 128, #321.

56Third Council of Valence, “Against Scotus,” *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, p. 129, #321.

57Third Council of Valence, “Against Scotus,” *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, p. 129, #321.

58Michael Davies, citing Pope Leo XIII, in “Pope Leo XIII on True Liberty: A Great Pontiff Condemns a Modern Error,” <http://www.catholictradition.org/Tradition/true-liberty.htm> (accessed October 23, 2019).

59Pope Leo XIII, *Libertas Praestantissimum* 1, http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_20061888_libertas.html (accessed October 15, 2019).

our human freedom grows or it attains its greatest goodness or its greatest perfection when it is directed toward God and the things of God where, in the end, God exists as our true happiness and beatitude if, in fact, God being God, there exists nothing greater than God; if there is no higher good than God as the origin and the end of all good things.

The order of means and ends best explains why, in our humanity, we can speak about how we exist as rational creatures who go through life, as if on a journey or on a long searching quest, and about how, in our freedom, it has a sense or an intelligibility which is proper to it if we can refer and point to an order or an ordering which exists within the gamut of our many desires and which emerges for us within the pulls and strain of our many desires as, in experiencing the good of a given good in a given instance, we soon desire experiences of happiness which can be greater and more lasting and which would seem thus to belong to other kinds of good that we have yet to know, to enjoy, and to experience.

While, on the one hand, we cannot choose our proper ends in terms of the kind of good which best reflects or which best suits our human nature (that which is truly good for the life of an animal is not that which is truly good for the life of a human being), on the other hand however, our freedom revolves around determining the means which best lead to the greater goods which we could be desiring (the greater goods which make us more and more happy)⁶⁰ although we can err in our understanding of the goods which best suit our nature in a way which impedes or which clouds how we exercise our freedom of choice in determining what we should do in a given situation if we are to move from condition A to condition B: from our use and choice of a given means toward the enjoyment of some kind of greater good which exists as a specific end and term. Our freedom is first given to us in our experience of the option of choice that exists for us within the experience that we have of our acts of human willing although, in understanding and in penetrating this willing and in understanding how our acts of choice exist within the structure or the order of our acts of human willing, we soon find that good choices depend on good acts of understanding. Our freedom best exists within a context which points to the good of our having a good, prior understanding of things since a free act is more than merely an act of choosing within our willing or doing. It cannot be essentially an arbitrary act nor any kind of willful, licentious act since the freedom of a given act is more free or it is insured to the degree that it is wisely and intelligently guided or, in other words, to the degree that it is grounded in apprehensions of evidence in the context of judgments which can rationally know about the truth or the reality of that which has been initially grasped by us as an understandable, conceivable, possible good. Apprehensions of good come to us before they can be succeeded by evaluations which tend toward a knowledge of good through affirmations of good which would exist as the term of a reflective, evaluative judgment.

Ideally, or when things exist in the way that they should, the rationality of our understanding extends and moves into the rationality of our acts of human willing in a way which moves from the freedom which exists within our understanding into the freedom which exists within our acts of human willing: through the greater expressiveness that belongs to us within the order of our externalizing, external human actions. For good reason it has been said that “the wise man alone is free,”⁶¹ and conversely, the more that one does what is good, the freer one becomes in who or what one is as a human being. The goodness of our behavior redounds to the goodness of our understanding and judgment as each acts to

⁶⁰Pope Leo XIII, *Libertas Praestantissimum* 5, http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_20061888_libertas.html (accessed October 15, 2019).

⁶¹Pope Leo XIII, *Libertas Praestantissimum* 6, http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_20061888_libertas.html (accessed October 15, 2019).

effect the good of the other. A kind of circuit exists.

The rationality of our reason as “right reason” or, in other words, the compulsion which exists within our acts of reasoning as this is given to us through our experiences of rationality [“You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”]⁶² - this compulsion in turn explains or it points to why the ordaining or the prescribing of our reason (in its freedom) is to be identified with the principle of law (as a regulative norm) since law as “right reason” exists as essentially an “ordinance of reason”; it comes to us as a demand or precept from that which exists as acts of understanding and judgment and so, in the absence of any understanding and judgment, we would find that we have no law nor any freedom that is worth the name or which is true to itself as freedom.⁶³ In law, we are guided and directed through the stipulations and the requirements which exist within law. Hence: no essential conflict, opposition, or tension can be said to exist between the freedom of our understanding and willing and the freedom or the liberty which exists for us through the reasonableness and the good of laws as these exist within all of us as human beings, “engraved on our hearts” so to speak, and so indicating that which is right and that which is wrong for us through a chain of prescriptions and proscriptions that are determined by how the prescriptions and proscriptions relates to the other.

However, as we refer to laws of nature and to how laws of nature exist within all of us as human beings, because they are created or because they exist as effects, they exist in a way which must point us toward the being of an uncreated kind of reason which would have to exist as the eternal law of God.⁶⁴ The being of temporal things is explained by the being of eternal things. If, on the one hand thus, our human reason reflects the life and being of the laws which exist within it as determinations of understanding that, in a creaturely way, we participate in (as creatures), from God's eternal reason comes the life and the being of God's eternal laws, these laws of God in turn reflecting not only the kind of life which properly belongs to God alone if we attend to the being or the workings of God's eternal reason but, at the same time too, indicating why or how it can be said that the ultimate ground of our human freedom is God as He exist in Himself: God as our creator and God as our Savior where admittedly, in God's being and life, no difference exists between the kind of help that God gives to us as our Creator and Sustainer and the kind of help that comes to us from God to the extent that He is also our Savior and Redeemer.

Law, in its intelligibility, exists primarily as a principle or fount of freedom and only secondarily or accidentally as a principle of constraint since the rationality of law (if there is no rationality, there is no law) – this rationality is such that it protects and enhances our human freedom through the proscriptions and the prescriptions which are constitutive of law with respect to the kinds of demands that it legitimately makes upon us as living human subjects. “Nothing more foolish can be uttered or conceived than the notion that because man is free by nature, he is therefore exempt from law.”⁶⁵ No true freedom can exist other than in the service (through obedience) of that which is most liberating for us (that which is more or that which is most intelligible, good, and just for us); hence, ultimately and

⁶²John 8:32 as quoted by Pope Leo XIII, *Libertas On the Nature of Human Liberty* 27 (s.l.: St. Athanasius Press, 2016), p. 48.

⁶³Pope Leo XIII, *Libertas Praeantissimum* 7, http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_20061888_libertas.html (accessed October 15, 2019).

⁶⁴Pope Leo XIII, *Libertas Praeantissimum* 8, http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_20061888_libertas.html (accessed October 15, 2019).

⁶⁵Michael Davies, citing Pope Leo XIII, in “Pope Leo XIII on True Liberty: A Great Pontiff Condemns a Modern Error,” <http://www.catholictradition.org/Tradition/true-liberty.htm> (accessed October 23, 2019).

somewhat obviously, in a manner which must be obediently turned toward the good and the being of God as He exists in Himself.⁶⁶ Within this context, by our progress in virtue, by our progress in knowledge of the good, and by our progress in the practice of asceticism, through a kind of self-denial that exists in all this – all these things serve to enhance the mastery or the freedom of our wills over the exercise of other acts that, if otherwise committed, would only take from the freedom that we have, diminishing it in many, different ways. In this context of law, precept, and obligation, we can accordingly understand why the choice to disobey the good of law and reason and so to do evil is itself less a use of freedom and more an abuse of the freedom which has been initially given to us where, in the end, we would be led, we would find that we are moving toward a kind of slavery of self which would exist for us as "the slavery of sin"⁶⁷ although, on the other hand, admittedly, *imputability* and *responsibility* for our actions is always diminished and, at times, it is nullified by adverse subjective conditions if we should refer to problems that would be caused by incidents of ignorance, inadvertence, duress, fear, habit, inordinate attachments, and other psychological or social factors that can be possibly identified. An action is indirectly voluntary if it results from negligence regarding something one should have known or done: for example, an accident arising from ignorance of traffic laws. A bad or unwelcome effect can be tolerated without its being willed by its agent; for instance, a mother's exhaustion from tending her sick child. A bad effect is not imputable if it was not willed either as an end or as a means of an action, e.g., a death a person incurs in aiding someone in danger. For a bad effect to be imputable in terms of responsibility, it must be foreseeable and the agent must have the possibility of avoiding it, as in the case of a manslaughter that is caused by an intoxicated driver.

Apart however from the kind of lessening which exists in the context of these aforementioned subjective conditions, it is to be noted thus that, normally, every act that is directly willed by a given agent or subject is imputable to its responsible actor. As the Lord had asked Eve after the committing of sin in the garden of Eden: "What is this that you have done?"⁶⁸ And similarly, later on, God had asked Cain: "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground."⁶⁹ The prophet Nathan, in his day too, had questioned David in the same way after he had committed adultery with the wife of Uriah and so had him murdered.⁷⁰

As long then as our freedom has not bound itself *definitively* to its ultimate good which is God and the being of divine things, there is the possibility of its always *choosing between good and evil*, and thus of its possibly growing in perfection as we act according to the findings of our reason and so according to ourselves or from ourselves or, on the other hand, possibly growing in our human failing and sinning as we act against ourselves in our reason in a way which violates ourselves and which points to why it can be said that always, in our sinning, our freedom lessens or it diminishes in some way. We begin to exist or we become the slaves and instruments of sin because we have come under the influence of powers and forces that are foreign to us and which do not belong to who or why we exist as human beings.⁷¹

⁶⁶Pope Leo XIII, *Libertas Praestantissimum* 11, http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_20061888_libertas.html (accessed October 15, 2019).

⁶⁷*Romans* 6:17.

⁶⁸*Genesis* 3:13.

⁶⁹*Genesis* 4:10, as cited by *The Companion to The Catechism of the Catholic Church: A Compendium of Texts Referred to in The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), p. 627, #1736.

⁷⁰*Samuel* 12:7-15.

⁷¹Pope Leo XIII, *Libertas Praestantissimum* 6, http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_20061888_libertas.html (accessed October 15, 2019).

The dialectic which is found to exist within this kind of freedom accordingly characterizes us in our freedom with respect to the shape or the configuration of our properly human acts and it is the basis of a consequent dialectic of praise or blame that follows our actions and any increases that can point to either the gaining of merit that can come to us or the incurring of any losses which can come to us through reproaches that lead us into experiences of shame and dread.

Since we exist essentially as social beings, because we need each other if we are to live fully human lives, our freedom is exercised among the relations which exist amongst us as human beings. Every human person, because he or she is created in the image of God, has the natural right to be recognized as a free and responsible being and, because this is so, all owe to each other this duty of mutual respect. One respects the other even if one is not being respected. Since no one can be forced to choose for the reality of truthful things within themselves, within the internal form of our private lives, this limitation points to why each of us has the *right to the exercise of freedom*, especially in the context of moral and religious matters (also within the order of economics and politics),⁷² and why, accordingly, this right belongs to us as an inalienable requirement of the dignity which we each all have as human persons.⁷³ So important is this right in fact that it must be recognized and protected by civil authority within the limits of the common good and the good of public order.⁷⁴ If, with St. Augustine, we admit that “Man

⁷²Within the economic order, “private ownership” of property “or some other kind of dominion over material goods...should be regarded as an extension of [our] human freedom.” Good, healthy forms of economic life require persons who are free to make their own judgments and decisions within the context of their life and work if, freely, they are to be able to work together with other persons within the context of an order which exists as a free society: “authority is the harmonized with freedom [and] personal initiative with consideration for the bonds uniting the whole social body.” Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 71; 68; 75, as cited by *Dictionary of the Council*, eds. Deretz and Nocent, pp. 178-179. In the political order, the freedom of human beings needs to be respected in a way which regards the freedom of persons as a species of fundamental building block if we are to have a form of government that is not despotic or bureaucratic (i.e., “mechanical”). Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 74, as cited by *Dictionary of the Council*, eds. Deretz and Nocent, pp. 178-179.

⁷³See Pope John XXIII, encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, April 11, 1963: AAS 55 (1963), pp. 260-261; Pope Pius XII, radio message, Dec. 24, 1942: AAS 35 (1943), p. 19; Pope Pius XI, encyclical *Mit Brennender Sorge*, March 14, 1937: AAS 29 (1937), p. 160; Pope Leo XIII, encyclical *Libertas Praestantissimum*, June 20, 1888: Acts of Leo XIII 8 (1888), pp. 237-238. This footnote is taken from how it is cited by the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, as this is rendered in *Dignitatis Humanae* 2. The context refers to the dignity or the status of the human person and how this dignity or status is to be understood because of a direct relation which exists between the status of our human dignity and the fact that we are all made in the image of God (in a way which reflects how, in us, an image of God exists). Hence, because we are all made in God's image and likeness, in some kind of way (however partially), we participate in the kind of freedom which alone belongs to God although as lesser, subordinate creatures (in a manner which is proper to us as human creatures since, between the kind of freedom which alone belongs to us as human beings and the kind of freedom which alone belongs to God, a greater difference exists than any points of similarity which would exist between ourselves as human beings and God who exists as our unrestricted cause and origin and who can never exist as some kind of effect).

⁷⁴Second Vatican Council, *Dignitatis Humanae* 2 § 7. See how both these texts are cited in *The Companion to The Catechism of the Catholic Church: A Compendium of Texts Referred to in The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), pp. 627-628. Citing these two

cannot believe otherwise than of his own free will,” then, necessarily, we have to admit that “no one shall be forced to embrace the Catholic faith against his will.”⁷⁵ In difficult cases, prudence is needed on the part of government officials in any given state. While “a Catholic state has the right to restrict the expression of heresy” for the sake of public order and the common good, at the same time, “a Catholic state is not obliged to invoke this right” if, by doing so, the good of public order and the common good is jeopardized.⁷⁶ A degree of relativity exists. While the Second Vatican Council speaks about everyone having a “right to express his religious opinion in public,” this right does not exist in any kind of unrestricted way since more harm than good can result in the good order which should exist within a given society.

texts as taken from http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html (accessed October 15, 2019), beginning with *Dignitatis Humanae* 2:

This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits. The council further declares that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself [footnote cited here referring to Pope John XXIII, encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, April 11, 1963: AAS 55 (1963), pp. 260-261; Pope Pius XII, radio message, Dec. 24, 1942: AAS 35 (1943), p. 19; Pope Pius XI, encyclical *Mit Brennender Sorge*, March 14, 1937: AAS 29 (1937), p. 160; Pope Leo XIII, encyclical *Libertas Praestantissimum*, June 20, 1888: Acts of Leo XIII 8 (1888), p. 237-238]. This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed and thus it is to become a civil right.

It is in accordance with their dignity as persons—that is, beings endowed with reason and free will and therefore privileged to bear personal responsibility—that all men should be at once impelled by nature and also bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth. They are also bound to adhere to the truth, once it is known, and to order their whole lives in accord with the demands of truth. However, men cannot discharge these obligations in a manner in keeping with their own nature unless they enjoy immunity from external coercion as well as psychological freedom. Therefore the right to religious freedom has its foundation not in the subjective disposition of the person, but in his very nature. In consequence, the right to this immunity continues to exist even in those who do not live up to their obligation of seeking the truth and adhering to it and the exercise of this right is not to be impeded, provided that just public order be observed.

III. HUMAN FREEDOM IN THE ECONOMY OF SALVATION

Freedom and sin. While, on the one hand, man's freedom is limited in its extent and fallible in the exercise of the judgments which it makes, it can be also said, to greater effect, in his history, man has failed to the extent that he has freely sinned in terms of the sin of Adam and in terms also of the actual sins that we can freely commit where in a way which resembles but which differs from Original Sin, actual sins, as offenses also undermine both the good and the sway of our human freedom. By refusing God's plan of love as this exists through Christ's offer of salvation, we deceive ourselves and we become slaves to the lure and sway of sin. The first alienation which has occurred in Adam serves to

Dignitatis Humanae 7:

The right to religious freedom is exercised in human society: hence its exercise is subject to certain regulatory norms.

In the use of all freedoms the moral principle of personal and social responsibility is to be observed. In the exercise of their rights, individual men and social groups are bound by the moral law to have respect both for the rights of others and for their own duties toward others and for the common welfare of all. Men are to deal with their fellows in justice and civility.

Furthermore, society has the right to defend itself against possible abuses committed on the pretext of freedom of religion. It is the special duty of government to provide this protection. However, government is not to act in an arbitrary fashion or in an unfair spirit of partisanship. Its action is to be controlled by juridical norms which are in conformity with the objective moral order. These norms arise out of the need for the effective safeguard of the rights of all citizens and for the peaceful settlement of conflicts of rights, also out of the need for an adequate care of genuine public peace, which comes about when men live together in good order and in true justice, and finally out of the need for a proper guardianship of public morality.

These matters constitute the basic component of the common welfare: they are what is meant by public order. For the rest, the usages of society are to be the usages of freedom in their full range: that is, the freedom of man is to be respected as far as possible and is not to be curtailed except when and insofar as necessary.

⁷⁵Michael Davies, "Pope Leo XIII on True Liberty: A Great Pontiff Condemns a Modern Error," citing Pope Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei*, <http://www.catholictradition.org/Tradition/true-liberty.htm> (accessed October 23, 2019).

⁷⁶Michael Davies, "Pope Leo XIII on True Liberty: A Great Pontiff Condemns a Modern Error," citing Pope Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei*, <http://www.catholictradition.org/Tradition/true-liberty.htm> (accessed October 23, 2019).

engender a multitude of many other sins and so, from the onset, in the wake of our first fall (since we have all sinned in Adam), as an effect, we have had a human history which points to the wretchedness of our condition and lot and a form of oppression that is born from within us from within our human hearts in a way which has led us to abuse our God given human freedom whenever we use our freedom to turn away from the good that we ought to seek, preferring instead to pursue that which exists as the “empty semblance of good” in a way which accordingly disturbs the “rightful order” of things and which also causes us to “fall headlong into the destruction which...[we have] voluntarily chosen” for ourselves.⁷⁷

Threats to freedom. The exercise of our freedom does not imply, however, a right to say or do everything or to do what one wants since it is false to maintain or to claim that man, “the subject of this freedom,” is “an individual who is fully self-sufficient and whose finality is the satisfaction of his own interests in the enjoyment of earthly goods.”⁷⁸ It is not right to believe in matters of thinking and doing that “every man is a law unto himself,”⁷⁹ living in a condition of “splendid isolation.”⁸⁰ In addition and unfortunately, the economic, social, political, and cultural conditions that are needed by us for a just exercise of our freedom are too often disregarded or violated in situations of blindness and injustice that injure us in our moral life and which also involve the strong as well as the weak in temptations to sins that want to act against the good of charity. By deviating from the moral law and from how this moral law is grounded in God's eternal law, as human beings, we accordingly violate our own freedom, we become imprisoned within ourselves, we disrupt our neighborly fellowship with others, and we rebel against divine truth as this comes to us from God as their ultimate source through the mediation which exists in the good of God's creation and the good which belongs to an order of redemption that has been freely established by God as a means which best fits how we have been made and how we exist as human beings within our world. To summarize the gist of the Pope's teaching and so the teaching of the Church about the nature of our human freedom and how it is to be properly understood and applied in the light of certain distinctions:

A crucial distinction must be made here in discussing the nature of free will [our human freedom]. This is the distinction between being physically and psychologically able (free) to choose evil, and having a natural right to choose evil [“a right to say or do everything”]. In the language of liberalism, to say that a man is free to do something means that he has a right to do it, subject to the requirements of public order... But papal teaching distinguishes between [the good of] mere public order and the [good of the] common or public good [of all]. An obscene or blasphemous play might not provoke a riot, and hence [it] would not disturb public order; but it could hardly be supposed that permitting it would promote the public [or common] good... [As the Pope teaches in his encyclical, citing his own words]: “Nothing more foolish can be uttered or conceived than the notion that because man is free by nature, he is therefore exempt from [the requirements of adhering to the precepts and the proscriptions of any] law” [where, by law, we refer to obligations, norms, and requirements which exist in a

⁷⁷Pope Leo XIII, *Libertas Praestantissimum* 1, http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_20061888_libertas.html (accessed October 15, 2019).

⁷⁸Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, instruction, *Libertatis conscientia* 13.

⁷⁹Translation adapted from Pope Leo XIII, *Libertas On the Nature of Human Liberty* 15 (s.l.: St. Athanasius Press, 2016), p. 26.

⁸⁰Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 31, as cited by *Dictionary of the Council*, eds. Deretz and Nocent, p. 178.

way which transcends both our being and our desires in terms respectively of our individual, human existence and of the subjectivity which we each have as individual human persons].⁸¹

Liberation and salvation. The “doctrine of freedom has roots in divine revelation [as this comes to us from God as He reveals Himself to us].”⁸² Through his glorious Cross, Christ has won salvation for all of us as human beings since, by means of the Cross that He carries, He has redeemed us from the burdens of sin that have held us in a condition of bondage. “For freedom Christ has set us free.”⁸³ In him and through him, we are now in touch; we commune with the “truth that makes us free.”⁸⁴ As a kind of capstone, the Holy Spirit has been given to us and, as the Apostle Paul teaches us, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”⁸⁵ Already, in an anticipatory way, through the coming into our World of God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, we participate and we glory in the “liberty of the children of God.”⁸⁶ Nothing better than the gospel of Christ is able to guard and to protect the good which exists as our human liberty and freedom,⁸⁷ leading men and women toward an interior form of freedom which they must have if they are not to live purely in the wake or as a function of the many stresses and strains that come to us from exterior conditions over which they have no real control.⁸⁸

Freedom and grace. The grace of Christ is not in the slightest way a rival of our freedom when this freedom accords with the sense of the true and the good that God has put in the human heart. On the contrary, as Christian experience attests especially in the practice of prayer, the more docile we are to the promptings of grace, the more we grow in our inner freedom and confidence during trials and difficulties, such as those we face among the pressures and the constraints which exist for us in the external world. By the working of grace, the Holy Spirit educates us in the spiritual freedom that we are meant to have in order to make us free collaborators and cooperators in the work of the Holy Spirit

⁸¹Michael Davies, “Pope Leo XIII on True Liberty: A Great Pontiff Condemns a Modern Error,” <http://www.catholictradition.org/Tradition/true-liberty.htm> (accessed October 23, 2019). Our human freedom flourishes in the context of the obedience that it properly owes to the being and the intelligibility of larger things and so it differs from the possible caprice of our human willfulness since the goodness or the integrity of our freedom only really and truly exists to the degree that it is grounded in the condition, the extent, and the depth of our understanding and discernment of many different things (whether we should refer to the extent of our self-understanding or our knowledge of the being of other things). The intelligibility of a thing always points to some kind of inner law, inner principle, or inner rule or norm which exists within it, indicating the reason or the truth of a given thing: indicating what a given thing is in terms of its identity, meaning, and significance, or why it exists in the way that it does and not as some other kind of existing thing (having the qualities or the features which typically belong to it and which do not belong to some other kind of existing thing).

⁸²Second Vatican Council, *Dignitatis humanae*, as cited by *Dictionary of the Council*, eds. Deretz and Nocent, p. 178.

⁸³*Galatians* 5:1.

⁸⁴*John* 8:32: “...and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free,” as quoted from the *Companion to The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, p. 628, #1741.

⁸⁵*Corinthians* 17.

⁸⁶*Romans* 8:21.

⁸⁷Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 41, as cited by *Dictionary of the Council*, eds. Deretz and Nocent, p. 178.

⁸⁸Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 58, as cited by *Dictionary of the Council*, eds. Deretz and Nocent, p. 181.

both in the Church and in the world. In a prayer that we have in the context of the Church liturgical observance:

Almighty and merciful God, in your goodness take away from us all that is harmful, so that, made ready both in mind and body, we may freely accomplish your will.⁸⁹

IN BRIEF

"God willed that man should be left in the hand of his own counsel (cf. *Sirach* 15:14), so that he might of his own accord seek his creator and freely attain his full and blessed perfection by cleaving to him" (*GS* 17 § 1).

Freedom is the power to act or not to act, and so to perform deliberate acts of one's own. Freedom attains perfection in its acts when directed toward God, the sovereign Good.

Freedom characterizes properly human acts. It makes the human being responsible for acts of which he is the voluntary agent. His deliberate acts properly belong to him.

The imputability or responsibility for an action can be diminished or nullified by ignorance, duress, fear, and other psychological or social factors.

The right to the exercise of freedom, especially in religious and moral matters, is an inalienable requirement of the dignity of man. But the exercise of freedom does not entail the putative right to say or do anything.

"For freedom Christ has set us free" (*Galatians* 5:1).

⁸⁹*Roman Missal*, 32nd Sunday, Opening Prayer: *Omnipotens et misericors Deus, universa nobis adversantia propitiatus exclude, ut, mente et corpore pariter expediti, quæ tua sunt liberis mentibus exsequamur.*