

Seminar exploring human freedom 11/17/19

Initial discussion questions:

1. What is free will?
2. How does free will relate to our relationship with ourselves (human nature, psychology) with God, with family, community, work, or with the law?
3. What does scripture, church teaching, science or philosophy tell us about free will?
4. If natural law is written on the hearts of men and women, how does that relate to free will?

The group read through a white paper: "Our Human Freedom in its Meaning and Being as taught by the Catholic Church." Discussion questions:

1. What does it tell us about God's nature, that God created us with the gift of free will, rather than creating us as robotic automatons?
2. Do we recognize our freedom as radical? Or do we take it for granted?
3. What did pre-Christian people believe about the nature of free will? Was there a radical shift in thinking due to the influence of Christianity?
4. How does free will relate to circumstances that are outside of our control? Or the idea of pre-determinism?
5. What about when people are not rational? Whether they are acting out of immaturity or brokenness, as a mob, or, have a psychological or emotional handicap?
6. What are threats to free will and human freedom? If mob behavior, or corrupt government actions violate human freedom or cause duress making temptation more likely, what is our responsibility as Christians to ensure just government and institutions?
7. In our current political environment, there appears to be a rise in authoritarianism. What are authoritarians thinking about free will?
8. How do we know when free will has been violated?
9. Do people who tend toward authoritarian beliefs violate the free will of others? And if so, do we have a responsibility as Christians to admonish them? What about religious authoritarians? How prevalent or how many people are authoritarian?
10. How does free will relate to the current culture wars and the push-pull of diverse people living together in peace, yet disagreeing strongly about certain issues?
11. Many people may not realize their true identity, made in the image and likeness of God, or recognize their human dignity, or the dignity of others. How does that ignorance affect free will?

The group read chapter 1, "The Origins of Totalitarianism" by Hannah Arendt. The first section is about antisemitism as an ideology.

- "The Origins of Totalitarianism does more than examine politics. Arendt optimistically pictures a type of government that can guarantee that human dignity will be supported."
- "A key concept arising from this book, was the application of Kant's phrase "Radical Evil", [10] which she applied to the men who created and carried out such tyranny and their depiction of their victims as "Superfluous People."

The group watched an 8 minute clip of a lecture (see minutes 9-17), by Director Roger Berkowitz for the Hannah Arendt Center for Politics and Humanities at Bard College:

http://youtu.be/G_3nUstGXxU

Discussion questions:

- How has antisemitism changed over time?
- How did antisemitism relate to nationalism?
- What do we think about Arendt's arguments? Do we agree?

Planned Lonergan Institute field trips:

- Friday Dec 20 evening, we will meet at E Street Landmark theater to watch the Terrence Malick movie, *A Hidden Life*
- Saturday Feb 22: We will visit to the Holocaust Museum and then have a lunch or dinner discussion
- TBD: Watch and discuss the Hannah Arendt movie

The next seminar will be facilitated by Amy on January 12, 2020 2 pm; she will select a chapter from section 2 of *Origins of Totalitarianism* to lead a discussion.

Other resources:

See Trinity Forum's discussion notes on *Origins of Totalitarianism*, available for purchase for \$8 from this site:

<https://www.ttf.org/product/originsoftotalitarianism/>