

July 31, 2016

Joseph of Arimathea

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

The Analogy of Freedoms

Human freedom is an experience before it is a concept. Indeed, even as concept, freedom is extremely elusive. It is hardly surprising that modern science, concerned with precision and objectivity, is distinctly uncomfortable with it. The “scientific method,” with its emphasis on measurement and predictability, finds it much easier to deny the existence of freedom than to account for it.

If we search for the *reason* for this experience of freedom, we find ourselves stymied; we know, first, that freedom is a *given*. We cannot explain it without running into an intractable psychological—and, perhaps, logical—puzzle. Whatever freedom is, it *is* simply because it *is*. Freedom exists for the sake of free, intelligent choice; freedom is, in its origin, self-referential. A free choice is its own cause.

In this respect freedom bears the character of a tautology: We human beings choose *because* we choose. Indeed, if our act is compelled, it is not really a choice. We have motives, of course, but free choice is, as such, *self-caused*. The *why* of a free choice is simply the freedom of the choice. The determination of a free choice is not reducible to a psychological motive. If it were, that would be the end of what we call the “justice system.”

It further occurs to us to reflect that if freedom is a *given*, it must also be a *gift*. And if freedom is a gift, then surely there must be a giver. And that giver must, in turn, be free. To put the matter in theological terms, only *Someone* supremely free can *give* freedom to those outside Himself.

When man goes on to examine the created Cosmos, he reaches the further conclusion that *he*—the human being—must be very special in this world, inasmuch as he detects no evidence that anything else in existence is endowed this self-conscious experience of freedom. Every other creature in existence is reducible to the causes brought to bear upon it. Only in the case of human choice, then, do we speak of “responsibility.” Only the human being has the capacity to *respond* in freedom.

Everything else that takes place in the Universe takes place as an inevitable effect of some external cause. Everything else in the Universe is *driven*; whatever every other creature *does* is the result of the determining influences brought to bear upon it. Planets move because something, a very long time ago, set them moving. Plants grow because of an inherent dynamism over which they have no control. Man, *alone* within the Universe, has the capacity for *self-determination*.

Consequently, when the human being declares that God made the Universe in *freedom*, he is basing this declaration on an analogy; he is saying that in God there is something very much *like* man's own experience of freedom. And, since God is the creating source of man's freedom, freedom must start with God, not with man. Any "analogy of freedom" in man's thought must confess that the radical origin of freedom is the infinite and wise freedom of God. Man, in his own freedom, bears some *likeness* to God.

When we recite the Creed we begin by speaking of God in His eternal being ("the Father almighty"), and then we go on to declare what God does *outside* of His eternal being ("Creator of heaven and earth"). Two things are affirmed here: With respect to eternity, God is the Father almighty. With respect to time, He is the Creator of heaven and earth.

The first affirmation is a metaphysical *given*; God cannot *not* be the Father Almighty. This is what He *must* be. The second affirmation, however, involves God's free decision: "let Us make . . ." What God does *outside* of Himself—His Creation—He is *not* obliged to do. It is His *free* act.

Moreover, these reflections shine an important light, not only on the Creator, but also on the creature. When we declare that God created the Cosmos in freedom, we mean that nothing outside of God *had* to be, no more than God *had* to create it. Things outside of God are contingent on His election.

Yet, the things *outside of God* certainly exist. *Why* is there *something* instead of *nothing*? This sober and sensible question springs from the plain insight that nothing we see in the Universe really *has* to be.

The biblical doctrine of Creation, to which the Church is committed by Tradition and Creed, finds the root of all created things in the *intelligent* freedom of the Creator. Things *are*, because God caused them—thoughtfully!—to *be*. He creatively conceived them. All created things are the embodiments of His

*thought*. Outside of the being of God, *to be* is to be *creatively thought*. Thus, all created things embody intelligibility at their root. The freedom of God is not detachable from His *Logos*.