

Introductory Note

Freedom/Ἐλευθερία

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“You have been called to freedom” (Gal 5:13)

On the occasion of the bicentenary of the Revolution of 1821, the current issue of review *THEOLOGIA* inaugurates an extensive tribute to freedom. Included are articles by distinguished professors and scholars, whom we thank warmly for their contribution to the realization of this tribute.

Experts are well aware that the definition of freedom varies. The content of the term *freedom* is not understood in a one-dimensional and homogeneous way. Depending on the perspective –philosophical, historical, social, political, economic, psychological, etc. may that be–freedom takes on different meanings, either restrictive or broader. If we look in dictionaries or observe the use of the term in the expressions of human life from antiquity to the present day, we can see the variety of the conceptual content of freedom.

All dictionaries agree at least in the fact that freedom is for man the ability to act at will¹; freedom, in Greek (ἔλευθερία), etymologically

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1. See, *Χρηστικό Λεξικό τῆς Νεοελληνικῆς Γλώσσας*, ed. by Ch. Charalampakis, Athens: Academy of Athens 2014, relative entry.

comes from the term *ἐλεύθερος* (like the Latin *liber*), which is connected with the *ἔλευση* (root *ελευθ-) or the verb *ἐλάύνω* (root *ελ-)².

It is easy to see the variety of approaches, the variations, the different use of the term *freedom*, if one refers to the ancient world. The earliest appearance of the term *free* in ancient Greek literature is found in Homer («ἐλεύθερον ἦμαρ», in contrast to «δούλειον ἦμαρ»)³. At the social level, the term *free* is used in contradiction to the *slave*⁴, in the first written legal text of the European continent, the Epigraph or the Code of Gortys of the 5th century BC⁵.

At the political level, freedom is often presented in opposition to slavery; e.g. in Herodotus' *Historia*, where the freedom of the citizens of the Greek city-states is opposed to the slavery of the subjects of the Persian Empire. Indicatively, when Darius' envoy Hydarnes asked for the submission of the Greeks, i.e. to give land and water to the Great King, their reply was: "Your advice to us, Hydarnes, is not completely sound; one half of it rests on knowledge, but the other on ignorance. You know well how to be a slave, but you, who have never tasted freedom, do not know whether it is sweet or not. Were you to taste of it, not with spears you would counsel us to fight for it, no, but with axes"⁶.

Thucydides, more clearly, in the Epitaph of Pericles, gives the political-social dimension of the concept, when he points out that "esteeming courage to be freedom and freedom to be happiness, do not weigh too nicely the perils of war"⁷, indicating in this way that on a collective level the city's bliss is linked to freedom, which, in order to be acquired, the citizen is called upon to fight bravely.

2. For the etymology of the term freedom, see the comment by Y. Mpampiniotis in *Ετυμολογικό λεξικό της νέας ελληνικής γλώσσας*, Athens: Kentro Lexicologias 2009, pp. 430-1.

3. Homer, *Iliad*, Book 16, l. 831, Book 20, l. 193.

4. Gortys' inscription commences as following: "Gods! Whoever intends to try a free man or a slave, do not arrest him before the trial".

5. *Inscriptiones Creticae* IV 72 col. I 1: M. N. Tod, *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions* 12, nr. 36.

6. Herodotus, *Historiae* 7, 135, 3

7. Thucydides, *Historia*, 2, 43, 4

Plato, for his part, sought freedom in liberation from the bonds of matter and body, shifting the centre of gravity of man's being to the soul, which he identifies as immaterial, eternal and immortal⁸. With this position Plato introduces a philosophical and religious dimension to the content of the term *freedom*.

And when in the Hellenistic world the form of societies changes and the individual becomes the focus, replacing the collectivity of the city, the Stoic philosopher Epictetus urges us individually to "cancel the longing" of the domination of things that do not belong to us –that is, that are "alien" to us– in order to become truly free. Here freedom is sought in the inner world of man. And the cynical philosopher Diogenes goes further and considers that self-sufficiency, absolute austerity, and almost universal propertylessness are reduced to a precondition of true freedom⁹. This is another dimension of freedom; to be truly free, it is not enough to choose, but one must want to choose not to have things. We are led in this case to a self-limitation, a kind of ascetic dimension of freedom.

To summarize, we could say that the variety of responses indicates the difficulty to satisfy people with one or the other approach to the content of the term *freedom*, but also the broadness and polysemy of such a term. A common characteristic of all these approaches in the ancient world is that they are set in a naturalistic framework. They are all limited by the concept of *εἰμαρμένη*, fate, necessity¹⁰, to which even the gods are subjected. The approach of the world is deterministic and the course of the world is cyclical and not straight. There is no possibility of any surprise. In this context, it is understandable that man would suffocate and seek a more global and integral view of freedom, which would provide solutions to man's most basic commitments, which are related to the fact that man himself does not decide to be born or to die.

8. Plato's theory on the immortality of the soul is thoroughly developed in his dialogues *Phaedo* and *Politeia*.

9. See, Ἐπίκτητος, *Ἡ Ἐλευθερία καὶ ἄλλα κείμενα*, trans. by Thanos Samartzis, Athens: Doma 2017, p. 52.

10. See, e.g. Pindar, *Pythian* 12:30: "What is fated cannot be escaped".

Christianity with its emergence gives from its own side a new dimension to freedom, aspects of which are clarified through the contributions of this tribute.

The debate on freedom continued uninterrupted in the Middle Ages and in modern times. It is hoped that through the articles its course and adventure will become apparent in these periods as well.

It is obvious that even in our days, in the era of postmodernity, the era of self-determination par excellence, the question not only remains open, but is often raised with urgency and provocativeness, since for some people freedom is to do “what they like” – a choice that is severely challenged by the presence of the other person, who experiences the restriction of his own freedom, resulting in the reproduction of a vicious circle.

On the basis of the above, it follows that the issue is so complex and complicated that the many questions about freedom are constantly being raised and reiterated for research and reflection.

What is freedom after all? What is its place in today’s world? What prevails in the constantly and rapidly changing world of postmodernity, characterised by technological explosion? To what extent do human beings and societies have freedom and what kind of freedom (of individual, of social groups, political, national, moral, spiritual, psychological, internal, etc.)? How free are we in a world where everything is recorded and monitored by cameras and computers? How one can define the freedom of expression, of speech/ideas, of thought, of spirit, of conscience? Is there a limit to freedom? How free are we in nature? Is freedom related to knowledge? How free are our choices, when e.g. psychology points out that many of them are dictated by the unconscious?

What is the relationship between religion and freedom? To what extent do religions have a generally restrictive or liberating influence on human life?

The above questions and other related ones are a challenge – a challenge for how Orthodox theology is positioned in these issues. Orthodox theology response presupposes the updating of its own conception of freedom, a conception which is revealed through the answers to the

following questions: What is freedom for Orthodox theology? What is the relationship between the Triune God and freedom? Is there freedom in the created world? Is man free or bound by his creatureliness? To what extent is man free, since his existence is not dependent on himself but on God, as opposed to God, who wills and exists? How can we understand the fall and redemption without freedom? Is autonomy identical with freedom? Does freedom have salvific dimensions? Is freedom related to the events of the divine economy, to the person of the Son and Word of God, the God-Man? Does the freedom of the human person exist today? What is the relationship between freedom and love? How is the freedom of the human person related to truth, reason, knowledge, morality, politics, and the everyday life?

We should keep in mind that the answers to the above questions have the significance of signposts, since the basic Orthodox position is that the world, after original sin, is in a constant tension and struggle, as it moves towards the Kingdom of the Triune God. The entrance of the Son and Word of God into history has clearly shifted the focus to His person. But this in no way means the abolition, bypassing or limitation of human freedom, to which everything is and will be subject. Because of human freedom itself, which is perhaps a mystery, these questions, even if they have been answered, can be challenged, perceived as unanswerable, recurring and repeating.