PART THREE

CHRIST'S REDEMPTIVE ACT AND CHRISTIAN LIFE

Forsake not the work of your hands!

I will give thanks to you, O Lord, with all my heart,
I will sing your praise;
I will worship at your holy temple
and give thanks to your name,
Because of your kindness and your truth.

Forsake not the work of your hands!

When I called you answered me;
you built up strength within me,
The Lord is exalted,
yet the lowly he sees.

Forsake not the work of your hands!

Though I walk amid distress, you preserve me;
your right hand saves me.
The Lord will complete what he has done for me;
Your kindness, O Lord, endures forever;
forsake not the work of your hands.

Forsake not the work of your hands!

Psalm 138.1-3, 6-8

CHAPTER EIGHT: FREE CHOICE: THE HUMAN CAPACITY TO BE OF ONESELF

A. That human persons can make free choices

Throughout sacred Scripture the power of human persons to make free choices is taken for granted. God proposes, not imposes, His love. He offers the covenant; Jesus announces the kingdom. Those who hear must respond; they have no choice but to choose. Those who do not accept the offer of love reject it (cf. Mt 12.30). But how one responds depends upon oneself, and how one responds determines what one will be--now and forever.

God sets the alternatives before humankind: life and fulfillment, or death and a stunted existence: "I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the Lord, your God, heeding His voice, and holding fast to him" (Dt 30.19-20). Rejected by His own people whom He so loved and so yearned to save, Jesus weeps over Jerusalem: "How often have I yearned to gather your children, as a mother bird gathers her young under her wings, but you refused me" (Mt 23.37). "You refused"--and omnipotent love submits to rejection.

Faced with the influx of Greek culture and thought, a wise Jew who understood and valued the implicit philosophy of his people made explicit this belief in the human ability to make or break oneself by one's own choice. Writing about two centuries before Jesus, another man named "Jesus," son of Eleazar, son of Sirach, provided us with the classic Scriptural formulation of this sublime truth:

> Say not: "It was God's doing that I fell away"; for what he hates he does not do.
> Say not: "It was he who set me astray"; for he has no need of wicked man.
> Abominable wickedness the Lord hates, he does not let it befall those who fear him.
> When God, in the beginning, created man, he made him subject to his own free choice.
> If you choose you can keep the commandments; it is loyalty to do his will.
> There are set before you fire and water;
> to whichever you choose stretch forth your hand.
> Before man are life and death, whichever he chooses shall be given him.
> Immense is the wisdom of the Lord; he is mighty in power and all-seeing.
> The eyes of the Lord see all he has made; he understands man's every deed.
> No man does he command to sin, to none does he give strength for lies (Sr 15.11-20).

Human persons are not simply subject to fate, to natural necessity, or to their heredity and environment, as the Greeks believed. No, in what is most important, human persons are <u>of themselves</u>. In making humankind, God makes creatures who make themselves.

Human persons are like God in this: We are of ourselves. Made in the image of God, men and women have real causal power with respect to themselves; they are less creatures than lords of the rest of creation (cf. Sr 17.1-6; Gn 1.27-30). As God is wholly of Himself and creates all else by His completely free choice (cf. DS 3002, 3025/1783, 1805), we created persons share in our own creation and in the re-creation of the new heavens and new earth which is coming to completion in Christ.

At the time of the Reformation, Luther and others wished to stress the total dependence of sinful humankind upon God's grace. Mistakenly thinking that to credit salvation entirely to God required them to exclude the sinner's role in his or her own conversion and justification, these Protestants denied human free choice. The Council of Trent solemnly defined the truth that human persons, even after Adam's sin, can make free choices (cf. DS 1555/815).

Free choices are created entities; they would not be if God did not cause them. The free choice to believe in God and to keep His commandments is the work of God's grace; sinners can do nothing and saints can do nothing without God. If God's causality were like any causality we understand, then for something to be both created and a free choice would make as much sense as for something to be both square and not-square at the same time and in the same respect.

But we do not understand what God is in Himself and we do not know what it is for Him to cause. The existence of free choices in the world is part of the existence of the whole of creation which is accounted for by referring everything to God the creator. There is no contradiction in God creating <u>human-persons-making-free-choices</u>; we know there is no contradiction because the fact is there are free choices, and they could not exist if God did not cause them to be. Similarly, we do nothing without God's grace, but part of God's grace is our freely seeking Him, accepting Him, and living in His love. These points were considered in chapter one, section E, and chapter seven, section G.

Following the Reformation, some theologians who did not really accept the truth of faith concerning human free choice asserted that one is free, not in the sense that one could choose otherwise than one chooses, but only in the sense that one is not forced to choose. In other words, they said that grace or some other cause determines what one does, but one still acts spontaneously, like an animal which behaves spontaneously but without the human capacity to be of oneself. A formula for the heretical position that human persons are free only like animals that are "born free" is: "What comes about voluntarily, even if it comes about necessarily, still comes about freely." The Church condemned this error (cf. DS 1939/1039). Human persons are free in the sense that it is in our power to choose or not, to choose this way or that. What we are by our choices we are of ourselves.

B. Why free choice is important -- responsibility

Free choice is an essential principle of all morality. But the ability to make free choices is not a principle of morality and Christian life in the way that human goods and grace are principles. That we can make free choices is a fact about human nature. To say that a human person can make free choices is not to say what is good for the person, nor is it to say what choice a person ought to make. Rather, the ability to make free choices is our own power to fulfill ourselves or to stunt ourselves, to conform to moral standards or to violate them. The power of free choice puts us in the moral ballgame; it is not a rule of the game or a score in the game, but simply being in

the game, not a mere spectator of it.

The passage from Sirach quoted above makes clear one aspect of the importance of free choice for moral theology. Because we can make free choices, we are responsible for ourselves. Not God but we ourselves go astray. Empowered by God, the blessed make themselves sharers in His life; all by themselves, the damned make themselves what they are. Since this fact is so alien to the minds of all who do not enjoy the light of faith, the ancient Greeks and Romans had a very hard time grasping and accepting it. Hence, the Fathers of the Church constantly affirm it. Writing in the second century, St. Justin the Martyr states:

> We have learned from the Prophets and we hold it as true that punishments and chastisements and good rewards are distributed according to the merit of each man's actions. Were this not the case, and were all things to happen according to the decree of fate, there would be nothing at all in our power. If fate decrees that this man is to be good, and that one wicked, then neither is the former to be praised nor the latter to be blamed.
>
> Furthermore, if the human race does not have the power of a freely deliberated choice in fleeing evil and in choosing good, then men are not accountable for their actions. . . .
>
> Neither would man deserve reward or praise if he did not of himself choose the good; nor, if he acted wickedly, would he deserve punishment, since he would not be evil by choice, and could not be other than that which he was born (FEF 123).

Similarly, Tatian says that the wicked person is "depraved of himself" while the good person does God's will by "his free choice." Persons are "created free, not having the nature of good, which pertains only to God, and which is brought to perfection by men through their freedom of choice" (FEF 156). St. Theophilus of Antioch affirms that God made man neither mortal nor immortal, but capable of being either: "For God made man free and self-determining" (FEF 184).

Not only the earliest Fathers but the later ones as well continually reaffirm the same truth. St. John Chrysostom says that "everything depends, after grace from above, upon our own choice" (FEF 1151), and so we deserve the reward or punishment we receive. St. Cyril of Alexandria points out that Adam and Judas sinned by their own fault, since the Creator gave human persons the power of "choice and permitted them to follow whatever spontaneous inclinations each of them might wish" (FEF 2113). Inclinations are spontaneous; temptations are a given. But what one does is up to oneself.

C. Why free choice is important -- dignity

Not only is free choice a principle of morality in making us responsible, as the Fathers emphasize, it also is a principle of morality in making us able to be of ourselves, as Sirach also suggests. If one thinks only of the aspect of responsibility, one might prefer to be without free choice, to be like the animal or at least like the infant, who has the power of choice but does not exercise it for good or ill. But to be able to choose freely is to be one's own procreator, one's self-maker under God.

Moral norms are a guide for this work; they are the plan for building up the fullness of Christ. Moral norms indicate what one ought to do; what one ought to do, one neither does necessarily nor necessarily fails to do, but one does or does not do by one's own free choice; therefore, moral norms bear primarily upon free choice. From this point of view, free choice is a principle of morality inasmuch as free choice is what morality centrally is all about. And from this point of view, morality is not humankind's burden, but humankind's dignity--our natural similarity to God the creator and our natural power of sharing in the work of creation.

This fundamental aspect of the relevance of free choice to morality also is stressed by the Fathers. St. Irenaeus says:

> God made man free from the beginning, so that he possessed his own power just as his own soul, to follow God's will freely, not being compelled by God. For with God there is no coercion; but a good will is present with Him always. He, therefore, gives good counsel to all. In man as well as in angels--for angels are rational--He has placed a power of choice, so that those who obeyed might justly possess the good things which, indeed, God gives, but which they themselves must preserve (FEF 244).

The Fathers often emphasize how like God human persons are by virtue of the power of choice. Tertullian, for example, says:

> I find that man was constituted by God with a freedom of both his own will and his own power; for I observe in him the image and likeness of God by nothing so clearly as by this, the characteristic of his estate. . . . That such is his estate has been confirmed even by the law which was then imposed upon him by God. For a law would not be imposed upon one who did not have it in his power to render the obedience due to the law (FEF 335).

St. John Damascene affirms the same truth about humankind made in God's image (cf. FEF 2357), and St. Thomas Aquinas, continuing the teaching of the Fathers, cites Damascene in the Prologue to the moral division (the Second Part) of the Summa theologiae:

> Because, as Damscene says, man is said to be made in the image of God inasmuch as by "image" is meant one who has intellect, is free in choosing, and through himself able to act . . . it remains for us to consider this image--namely, man--insofar as he is the principle of his acts as one who has free will and control of his acts.

Vatican II continues to stress that the power of free choice "is an exceptional sign of the divine image within man" (GS 17).

The Council does not apply the word "dignity" in any loose and popular way to human persons. "Dignity" means inherent worth, the high status which belongs to those made in God's image and called to share His likeness as His adopted children:

> 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 (DH 2).

Dignity: the power to be of oneself, to live not in a limited world but in the truth of boundless reality, to bring oneself to exist not as stunted but as fulfilled. Morality is a privilege.

Not only is free choice a principle of Christian morality in making us responsible and able to be of ourselves, it also is a principle of the act of faith, by which we accept God's offer of love and become His adopted children. I have discussed this most important point in chapter six, section I, and chapter seven, section B. Vatican II insists upon the relevance of free choice to the act of faith:

> The act of faith is of its very nature a free act. Man, redeemed by Christ the Savior and through Christ Jesus called to be God's adopted son, cannot give his adherence to God revealing Himself unless the Father draw him to offer to God the reasonable and free submission of faith (DH 10).

The same point is made by many of the Fathers of the Church, including St. Irenaeus (cf. FEF 245), Arnobius (cf. FEF 622), and St. Augustine (cf. FEF 1821).

In sum, there are three important ways in which freedom of choice is a principle of Christian morality. It is a necessary condition for moral responsibility. It is the central subject matter which moral norms are about; in this respect, the power of free choice is the principle of human dignity, insofar as human persons are like God in being <u>of themselves</u> what they morally are. And, finally, free choice is that by which we accept God in faith, and so enjoy His love and can live as His children.

D. <u>Free choice affirmed only by those who have faith</u>

Apart from those who share in the truth of the divine revelation, virtually all of humankind either ignores or denies that there is a power of free choice. It is important to see briefly why this is so and what is put in the place of choice as a principle of morality; for we ourselves can easily be impressed and misled by the moral thought of those who do not accept free choice, if we do not understand how all their moral thinking is distorted by the omission or exclusion of this fundamental principle.

One reason why the reality of free choice is overlooked or denied is that it is unique. In general, everything that happens in the world of experience has a cause, and the precise way things happen is determined by definite features of their causes. One imagines that if one knew at a given moment the whole state of the universe--what everything is, where it is, what it is doing--then one could in principle predict the state of the universe at every future moment. This supposition is the theory of physical or natural determinism.

On the whole, this theory is sound: Most things can be accounted for by antecedent causal conditions. If this were not so, there could be no natural science, for the world would not have the order it has. But determinism does not hold true of everything. It is not true of God the creator, because nothing in any sense causes Him to create. Nor is determinism true of the miracles God does in the world to signal us, in order to initiate or to call attention to His revelation. Nor, of course, is determinism true of our own free choices.

People who hold a deterministic view are likely to look at human behavior as if it were the behavior of a subhuman animal or even as if it were the output of a complicated machine. Such entities do not have the God-like ability to be of themselves. They are what they are, and they become only what they are caused to become by their own internal programming and by external factors. If their behavior or output is abnormal, this "evil" has to be accounted for as sickness, malfunction, or breakdown of some kind.

Aristotle thought of human life in this way. What human persons ought to be is settled entirely by their nature. If one is brought up properly, lives in a good environment, and has a healthy disposition, one will naturally understand what is good. Understanding it, one will want it and act for it, thus to fulfill oneself. Choices--not free choices--come in only because there are diverse ways of attaining one's good, due to the complexity of the world. A god would not have this problem and would have no choices to make at all. For Aristotle, one's actions shape one's character, and one's character is one's personal identity. Whether this identity is good or not ultimately goes back to how lucky one was about one's parents--that is, whether one received from them good heredity and a good upbringing.

Many modern and contemporary thinkers accept essentially the same view. One finds it almost everywhere in psychology and the social sciences. Not only individual but also social moral difficulties are considered as if they were problems in the ways things "work," not results of wrong choices people make. So, just as individuals seek treatment to get rid of guilt, married couples want therapy for their broken-down relationships, and nations try to find ways to "tune up" their economies. Faithful love and social justice tend to be overlooked by family therapists and economic managers.

An obvious reason for the attractiveness of this view of human life is that it is a true picture of a great deal of human behavior, for not everything people do follows from free choice, and choices themselves can only be between options which occur to one and seem interesting and possible. To the extent that determinism is true, the individual and social human condition can be treated and tinkered with so that it is healthier and able to work more smoothly. When one is somewhat successful in improving matters on a deterministic approach, there is a natural tendency to become enthusiastic, and to suppose that one has the key to complete human liberation and progress. It is hard to admit that much human evil simply cannot be fixed. To recognize the reality of free choice is to admit this sad truth: Even omnipotent love must submit to persistent rejection, and hell is a real possibility.

Determinism also is attractive because it excludes real moral responsibility and denies real moral guilt. It therefore functions as a means of rationalizing, which allows one who holds it to act immorally while pretending not to be able to do otherwise.

Another reason why free choice is overlooked or denied is that it seems in one way

to be inconsistent with one's own experience of deliberating and choosing. One does not make a choice for no reason at all. One always chooses for the sake of some good. Thus one always can give a good reason (or at least a plausible reason) why one has chosen as one has. Moreover, after a choice is made, it often seems in retrospect that what one chose was obviously the better (or best) alternative. One could hardly have chosen otherwise! This impression will be especially strong if one has done something morally evil, because then it is comforting to feel that one did the only reasonable thing.

It is obvious that one can affect one's own choices and the choices of other persons by getting or providing information. One cannot choose unless one thinks of something, sees it as interesting, and considers it possible. In many cases, people who lack necessary knowledge make very poor choices, but begin to make better choices when they learn better. This situation suggests (falsely) that whenever bad choices are made, the problem is a lack of knowledge. So on this approach, moral evil is reduced to ignorance, and salvation is sought by education. If sin always is a matter of mistakes and ignorance, knowledge is virtue.

Plato seems to have held a view along these lines. Much Eastern religion seeks to overcome illusion and to help people to accept the way things are. A great deal of modern and contemporary Western thought--with its tremendous confidence in science and in education--is based upon a very similar view of human life.

The difference between Eastern mystical passivity and Western pragmatic activism is due to a difference in assumptions about reality and knowledge. The view of Eastern religion is that reality is one; knowledge reveals the impossibility of changing anything; and so knowing liberates one by eliminating useless desire and effort. The view of Western pragmatism is that reality is a struggle; knowledge reveals how things work and gives one power to obtain wanted results; and so knowing liberates one by showing one how to get what one wants and to succeed in one's efforts.

A naturalistic determinism and some sort of gnosticism ("gnosticism" is the general name for theories that sin is ignorance and that knowledge saves) often are mixed together in contemporary thought. Gnosticism is appealing for reasons analogous to the appeal of naturalistic determinism. Gnosticism is especially appealing to intellectuals, since it makes that in which they are superior (intellectual activity) a guarantee of their quality as persons--that is, of moral superiority. Among Christian theologians, gnosticism is a permanent temptation; one likes to imagine that one is saved by the autonomous exercise of one's academic freedom, not by the obedience of faith and the submissive use of one's mind in the service of an obscure truth proclaimed by nonscholarly (and sometimes not even very intelligent) popes and bishops.

Not everything in experience seems to follow from natural necessity, nor does every inclination seem to arise from some definite knowledge. Against both naturalistic determinism and gnosticism, many people today do notice and make much of the reality of the unpredictable. Evolution seems to mean that really new things somehow emerge; nature is not simply a big machine forever grinding on in the same way. Similarly, human creativity is real. The genius is "inspired"; human art and science constantly innovates, forever renews the face of the earth. When these facts are considered, one might suppose that the reality of free choice would be noticed and accepted, not ignored or denied.

But the great emphasis upon evolution and creativity during the last century has not led to a reaffirmation of free choice. For the emergence of novelty in nature and in the work of genius essentially is a nonrational, nonaccountable process. If human moral action is thought about in one of the nondeterministic ways provided by theories of evolution and innovation, no antecedent standards can be admitted as valid for such moral action. Nietzsche developed a theory along these lines; many people today talk about evolving human nature, and for this very reason suppose that the old morality has to be replaced with a new morality.

While a free choice is not like a determined natural event nor like behavior which necessarily follows upon certain knowledge, neither is it like a stroke of genius or like something which emerges inexplicably in the course of evolution. Free choices are made by persons; they are in our own power--as emergents and strokes of genius are not. Free choices do introduce novelty into the world, but the person choosing introduces and controls this novelty (at least initially) and so is responsible for it.

By their free choices, human persons are of themselves. But what they are is not merely something <u>new</u> in reality. What human persons are by their own free choices either is more or less well-integrated, pure-hearted members of the human family which is being transformed into God's family, or loners who do not accept the invitation to the heavenly marriage-feast. There are antecedent standards for human free choices, <u>because the power of choice is a power to fulfill or to stunt oneself in respect to the possibilities of human and divine fulfillment</u>.

The consequence is that the great emphasis upon evolution and creativity in nineteenth and twentieth-century thought has not led to a reaffirmation of free choice. Instead, it has led to a denial both of moral standards and of the responsibile persons to whom such standards would provide relevant guidance. Contemporary philosophies of evolution and creativity deal with some real facts, of course, but they overgeneralize from these facts in order to erect a worldview. The worldview is one according to which novelty comes from <u>nothing</u>, not from the creative bounty of a good and wise God.

In sum, only those who accept the Judeo-Christian account of creation are likely to notice and admit the reality of free choice. Naturalistic determinists acknowledge prior reality, but conceive it in a way which excludes novelty. Gnostics acknowledge knowledge, but conceive it in a way which excludes love which surpasses understanding--including the love involved in free choices for which there never can be a sufficient reason. Contemporary theorists of evolution and creativity acknowledge novelty, but conceive it in a way which precludes its being a purposeful expression of an antecedent self to whom it <u>belcngs</u>.

Only in the case of the creator and of His pro-creators can novelties emerge from and in harmony with an antecedent, real principle, emerge shaped by wisdom and expressed by love--that is, emerge through <u>Logos</u> and <u>Agape</u>. Only the three divine Persons and

created persons can be authors (the Father; the human self as moral agent) of novelty (creation; the self-determined human person) by wisdom (the Son; the plan for human fulfillment we call "moral norms") and love (the Spirit; the very making of free choices). In making free choices, human persons display the image of God in which they are made.

E. The reality of free choice not a mystery of faith

From all that I have said up to this point, one might draw the conclusion that the fact that human persons can make free choices is a mystery of faith. But this is not so. It is one of those truths which faith insists upon because it is vital to our relationship to God, and is likely to be ignored or denied by anyone without faith. Still, this truth is knowable by reason and even, in a certain sense, evident in experience.

Everyone able to think about the question has had the experience of making choices. Even determinists, when they live their own lives, realize that they face an open future, that there are possibilities which they themselves can foster or prevent, that they will do nothing unless they choose, that nothing already given settles the choice, that not all choices are equally wise, that they have no choice but to choose (at least, to choose to put off choosing and acting), and that their own choice and its results is inescapably and uniquely theirs. And so if the choice is unwise, even a determinist knows in the very making of it that he or she is being unreasonable, being untrue to his or her own human dignity, being a fool--not being made a fool of, but making a fool of oneself.

This last experience is the genuine experience of moral guilt. It is quite different from feelings of anxiety, shame, depression, self-hatred, and so forth--all of which can arise quite apart from moral guilt as well as in its wake. For one can have these feelings about any real or imagined defect (evil) in oneself, whether in the moral or in one of the other domains of personal reality. For example, one can be anxious, ashamed, and so forth about oneself if one is physically disfigured through some disease or accident; all the more so if one does something without thinking, something about which one never deliberated and so had no choice. The experience of moral guilt is none of the negative emotions which do often accompany it; rather, the experience is one's awareness that by one's own choice one is making oneself be less a person than one could and ought to be.

If everyone has the experience of making free choices and also--when wrong choices are deliberately made--the experience of moral guilt, can determinists deny these facts? Sometimes, determinists do deny the facts. The facts of experience about free choice are not data of sensory experience which one can point to in the world; they are part of one's experience of oneself deliberating and acting. One can refuse to attend to this experience; also, one can reflect upon it only retrospectively, and misdescribe choice in view of the self already determined by choice, forgetting the openness which the choice itself, nothing else, settled.

Determinists also can admit the data of experience as data, yet maintain that in reality things are not as they seem. This position is more subtle. One who takes it says that the experience of free choice and moral responsibility is inescapable, but in reality choices always must be determined by some factor of which one is unaware--for example, some unconscious motive.

Since the denial of free choice runs counter to experience, those who make this denial bear the burden of proving their case. To attempt to do so, they must appeal to our reasonableness and try to show us that we ought to accept their position. The trouble is, this "ought" appeals to our free loyalty to the pursuit of truth--a commitment which is impossible if no one can make a free choice. Thus every attempt to exclude the experiences of choice and moral guilt as illusory becomes a self-defeating argument which gets nowhere. The conclusion is: It is impossible to undercut the experience we all have of making free choices and of being morally responsible for the selves we are by our own choices.[1]

The reality of free choice and the availability of this reality to experience is of great importance in pastoral work.

On the one hand, calling attention to free choice emphasizes something essential to faith and incompatible with practically every other worldview. A point of this sort is very valuable when one proclaims the faith, for it supports the credibility of faith and makes evident the unreasonableness of alternative worldviews.

On the other hand, free choice must be emphasized constantly or the faithful begin to misconceive their lives in some way incompatible with faith, often thus to rationalize sin without avoiding real moral guilt. When many Christians talk about their "problems" and "hang-ups," when some celebrants of the Mass begin it by suggesting that we call to mind our "mistakes" and "immaturities," when even conferences of bishops fall into sociological jargon about the "causes" of crime, and when the use of the sacrament of Penance has declined dramatically--when all these things are the case, it is time to talk often and clearly about free choice and personal responsibility.

F. Various meanings of the word "free"

To talk clearly about free choice one must distinguish carefully various uses of the word "free" which do not refer to free choice. Freedom is not a single kind of thing, nor is it a general sort of which there are different kinds. "Freedom" has a family of meanings which share certain common elements, but the elements themselves shift in sense in the diverse uses of the word. In reference to persons, the meaning of "freedom" includes as its elements someone who is or could be acting, the action, and something which somehow might be (but in fact is not) blocking the action. To distinguish uses of "free," one must specify these elements and indicate how they are organized in diverse ways.

In one sense, "freedom" means physical freedom. The obstacle to action would be some type of physical force or constraint; in the absence of such an obstacle, the possible action proceeds naturally. The animal in the wild is free in this sense; so is

the baby not in the playpen. One physically coerced is not free in this sense. Even inanimate objects are said to be "free" in the sense of physically free: We talk of "freely falling bodies."

Physical freedom is distinct from free choice. What acts with physical freedom also can be acting by natural, inner necessity. Physical freedom was the sort affirmed by post-Reformation dissenters from the Church's teaching that human persons can make free choices. The Church holds that physical freedom is not enough. One not only must be able to carry out one's plans of action; one also must be able to settle for oneself what plan of action one will adopt as one's own.

Some degree of physical freedom nearly always is given; one who is outwardly forced generally can still control to some extent his or her own mental processes. Physical freedom always is limited. So physical freedom is a matter of more and less; it is subject to degree. Physical freedom is important for moral life in this way: The more physical freedom one has, the more possible courses of action there are among which one might choose.

In a second sense, "freedom" means freedom to do as one pleases. The obstacle to action would be an order or demand of another person which would require one not to do as one pleases but as the other pleases. In the absence of such an obstacle, one follows one's own inclinations or choices without interference from anyone else. God the Father is free in this sense, and only He is absolutely free in this sense. Jesus did not come down from heaven to do His own will but to do the Father's will (cf. Jn 6.38), and the Spirit teaches only what He hears (cf. Jn 16.13). A slave, to the extent that he or she is a slave, has no freedom in this sense. Adolescents who demand their freedom are primarily interested in freedom to do as they please.

Freedom to do as one pleases is distinct from free choice. A disobedient three-year old does not make free choices, but already seeks some of this freedom. Vatican II points out that freedom to do as one pleases can be sought as a license to do evil (cf. GS 17). One needs room to act upon one's responsible judgment, but one should not "use the name of freedom as a pretext for refusing to submit to authority and for making light of the duty of obedience" (DH 8).

Almost everyone has some scope for doing as he or she pleases. But this scope is limited in two ways: by one's own sense of duty and by the impositions from others which one regards as arbitrary. Correspondingly, there are two ways of increasing one's freedom to do as one pleases.

The more one pleases to do as one ought, the less one's sense of duty is an obstacle to doing as one pleases. In <u>this</u> sense, Jesus and the Spirit are just as free to do as They please as is the Father, for They do not desire anything apart from Him. Again, the more one can evade the force of alien wills which really are arbitrary, the more one is free to do as one pleases. Thus power to live a good life gives Christians freedom to do as they please, unimpeded by the arbitrary interference of Satan. And, on a more mundane level, the weaknesses of antireligious secularism allow Catholics in Poland and in the United States some scope to do as they please in practicing their faith.

Freedom to do as one pleases is morally ambiguous; it means rather different things to good and to bad persons, because what pleases them differs, and what they consider an imposition differs.

"Freedom" in a third sense has none of this ambiguity. In this third sense, "freedom" means the freedom of the children of God. The obstacle to action would be anything --such as Satan, sin, death, the law--which prevents persons from living as children of God. Christ eliminated all such obstacles and won freedom for us--in this sense of "freedom" (cf. Gal 4.26, 31; 5.1, 13; 1 Cor 7.22; 2 Cor 3.17; Rom 6.6; 7.24-25; 8.21; and so on). The whole of part two, especially chapter seven, section O, has shown the marvelous freedom of God's adopted children which will appear perfectly in heavenly fulfillment in Christ.

Freedom in heavenly fulfillment is distinct from free choice. The freedom of the children of God is unambiguously good; free choice is bad if one makes bad choices. Freedom in heavenly fulfillment <u>is fulfillment</u>; free choice is a setting of oneself toward or against one's true fulfillment. Free choice is the beginning of one's own action in Christian life; the freedom of the children of God is the end.

Even now we share in this end, although not as perfectly as we hope to enjoy it in heaven. The more we love God the less sin has a hold over us, the less death is fearful, the less we even notice that there is a moral <u>law</u>. Christians who truly love one another bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ (cf. Gal 6.2); the burden is light, for love and sharing with love makes it so (cf. Mt 11.30). Nothing is impossible for God, and so nothing is impossible for those who act out of the love--which is the power--of God.

In the New Testament Christian liberty is carefully and repeatedly distinguished from freedom to do as one pleases (cf. Gal 5.13; 1 Pt 2.16). Christian liberty is not willful license, because Christian liberty--like the freedom of the Son and the Spirit--operates out of love of God and so always in accord with this love. In our life in this world, our freedom as God's children should be expressed in self-sacrificing, constructive service (cf. 1 Cor 10.23; Gal 5.13).

In a fourth sense, "freedom" means the emergence of novelty. The obstacle here would be any factor which tends to maintain things just as they are, which tends to make action be mere repetition with nothing creative or original about it. In the absence of such an obstacle, one has a share in authorship, in originality, in making things new. In creating, God is free in this sense; to the extent that we share in His creative and redemptive work, we also share in this freedom. Goodness, as I explained in chapter five, section D, is in open and expanding realization of potentialities. The immoral life is unnecessarily self-limiting, and tends to be dull and repetitious.

As I explained in section D, the emergence of novelty is distinct from free choice, since the former can occur without the latter. But wherever there is free choice, there is <u>something</u> really new. In this respect, even the sinful act is somewhat creative. It tends not to be very creative, because one who sins merely follows <u>given</u> inclinations and desires, and because one who sins does not wish to admit free choice and responsibility,

and so shapes thought about goods and possibilities in such a way that sin will seem to be--and more and more will come to be--almost inevitable.

People whom we call "creative" and who seem to be immoral usually have very dull personal lives; the novelty is all in their products. Unlike the lives of sinners, the lives of saints always display the originality which they require to live in God's love with the unique abilities and opportunities, the temptations and obstacles, He provides.

Political freedom is not something distinct from the diverse forms of freedom already considered. "Freedom" for which revolutions are fought is the freedom of a group to be an independent society, doing as it pleases in the political, social, and economic domains. The "liberty" which is protected by law is the scope for individuals to do as they please even within an orderly society.

In talking about free choice and moral responsibility, it always is important to make clear that the two go together. So-called "freedom of conscience" usually means a claim to do as one pleases in disregard of moral norms. The freedom of God's children is not a license to ignore God's commandments, whose truth the Church explains and defends; rather, the freedom of God's children, received by the gift of the Spirit, liberates conscience by divine love. Thus the law of God is written on one's heart, and one can do just as one pleases, for nothing pleases one except what pleases God.

G. The experience of making a free choice -- beginnings

As I said in section D, the reality of free choice, though mysterious in a way, is not a mystery of faith. It is a fact of experience. To talk clearly about free choice, one must avoid confusing "freedom" in this sense with all the other uses of the word which I have distinguished. But one also needs to be clear about what free choice itself is. And the starting point for this clarification, which will occupy the remainder of this chapter, is an accurate description of the experience of making a choice.

The experience to be described also sometimes is called "deciding," "making up one's mind," "making a commitment," "agreeing to a proposal," "accepting one's vocation," and so forth. All of these expressions also refer at times to something other or more than the experience of making a choice. "Deciding" and "making up one's mind" sometimes refer to purely cognitional operations of making judgments and drawing conclusions. The other expressions often refer to some outward (or at least inward) behavior consequent upon a choice, and they apply only to certain special cases of choice.

One sometimes uses "make a choice" to mean the outward act of picking one item from a group--for instance, one apple from a basket. Such picking sometimes does carry out a free choice, but animals and small children also can pick an item from a group without making any free choice. Also, the experience of making a choice can occur in one's consciousness without any observable, outward expression at all.

Like animals and small children, adults who can make choices very often act spontaneously, out of natural need or out of habit, without making any choice. Such actions are part of a person's life, but they are morally significant only to the extent that they depend upon (or could and should have been shaped by) some prior free choice. If one sometimes does what is wrong without choosing to do so, one's moral obligation is to set things up so that one will not be able to act without reflection, to avoid the occasions, to alter the pattern which leads to habitual behavior, and so on.

It is worth noticing that small children begin to act in a distinctively human, intelligent way long before they make free choices. To some extent they understand goods such as truth and love, they care about these goods, and they spontaneously act for them when they see ways of doing so. In this respect, even a two-year old child already is behaving as a human person, not merely as a human animal.

In chapter five, sections E-H, and in chapter six, section C, I have considered basic human goods and love. One naturally and spontaneously is interested in and cares about all of the basic goods. No one who understands one of the basic human goods can fail to love it, since this basic love is the disposition of human nature toward its own fulfillment. This fundamental love, which St. Thomas calls "simple willing," does not by itself lead to any action, but it is the underlying thrust toward every possible human action.

As soon as a child begins to understand some possible way of acting for one of the goods, simple willing--the underlying interest in that good--generates a spontaneous desire to do the act for the sake of that good. If no other impulse or distraction intervenes, the child consciously, purposefully, and intelligently proceeds to act for the good and, if the act is successful, to enjoy it. Notice, for instance, the efforts of small children to satisfy their curiosity.

Older children and adults also continue to act in this spontaneous way. Such acts are human; animals do nothing like them, and they are directed to specifically human goods. But they are not initially and in themselves morally significant acts, since they are done without reflection and consent. However, if one finds that one has done something spontaneously which one ought not to do, then the awareness of the moral norm will alter a future situation in which one thinks of doing the same sort of thing. One now will confront the possibility with an offsetting awareness that proceeding to act would be wrong. One will hesitate. This situation is that of temptation.

Adults hesitate not only when they are tempted, but in many other cases, because they are aware of various aspects of possible courses of action and usually are aware of other possibilities. Nevertheless, even adults do many things voluntarily--that is, consciously, purposefully, and intelligently--not by free choice but by spontaneous willing. A student who thinks of a question and notices nothing which would make it inappropriate to ask the question, asks as spontaneously as the small child, simply to satisfy curiosity.

The beginning of the experience of choice is an experienced conflict of desires or interests, at least one of which would lead to spontaneous, voluntary action if there were no conflict. One finds oneself in a situation such that the various goods one is concerned about, the various wishes one has, cannot all simultaneously lead to action. The situation offers incompatible possibilities, with at least the two possibilities of

either acting or not acting. Each alternative is somehow appealing. But one cannot respond to both. The conflict causes hesitation; the continuous flow of behavior is blocked. One stops and thinks: What am I going to do?

The experience of choice is framed by definite alternatives, each of which is attractive in one or more ways. But each alternative also has its limitations; none is going to be completely satisfying. The first stage of the experience of choice is in being moved to consider alternatives, rather than being simply drawn by an unopposed motive to act without reflection, without deliberation.

At this point it is important to notice the role which physical freedom and knowledge have in relation to free choice. No one ever chooses anything without having considered it as a possibility. For something to be considered as a possibility, it must be or seem to be a possibility, and one must think of it. Moreover, one never chooses anything unless one finds it appealing. That something is appealing--that it is a live possibility worth thinking about--always depends upon one's knowledge and past experience.

Consequently, the factors which determinists notice really do limit the range in which one can make free choices. Alterations in circumstances and knowledge can enlarge the range very greatly. For example, one who proclaims the Gospel cannot cause those who hear it to make an act of faith, but no one can choose to believe what he or she never hears effectively proclaimed (cf. Rom 10.14). It follows that while people are morally responsible for the free choices they do make, they often are not morally responsible for the good choices they do not make--because conditions beyond their control prevent them from considering (and so from choosing) as ideally they should. Moreover, the moral significance of a bad choice partly depends upon the alternatives one actually confronted, as I will explain more fully in part six.

Another important point is that moral conflicts are not the only cases in which choices are called for. Situations in which one is tempted to violate one's moral standards can lead to deliberation and choice. But in many cases, one hesitates before possibilities which seem morally acceptable. This will happen whenever one is unsettled about what to do, because one finds different interesting possibilities, open to oneself, and cannot follow out all of them. Notice that one does not deliberate about the past, nor about what others will do, except to the extent that one can oneself do something about the past or about the actions of others. One deliberates and feels the need to choose because one cannot do and be everything at once.

H. The experience of making a free choice -- its unfolding

To one who is faced with the need to make a choice, the prospect has a certain negative aspect. No matter what one chooses, one must give up what one does not choose, at least for the time being. To face the need to choose is to confront one's own finitude. If one does not make the choice, then one will not be fulfilled in any of the possible, appealing ways which one is considering. But it would be preferable if one could be fulfilled in all the possible ways. As it is, one's choice will open the way to fulfillment, but also will set aside the way or ways to alternative fulfillment.

In this respect, human free choice is very different from God's choice. Since His action is not self-fulfilling--He being perfect in goodness whether or not He causes anything--God in choosing only need accept the limitedness of creatures, not limit Himself.

This negative aspect of human choice is one reason why people naturally try to avoid making choices when they consider alternatives in deliberation. Normally, the first thing one does is to examine the situation to see whether one cannot have both (or all) of the apparently incompatible possibilities, or whether some of these apparent possibilities are not in fact already excluded by some factor which is given. In other words, one tries to obviate the need for choice, by looking in the facts for a solution to the hesitation by a finding that there are not real alternatives to hesitate about.

Often one discovers with some relief: I couldn't possibly do this anyway. Again, one finds: No problem, because I can do this now and still have the opportunity (the time, the money, or whatever) to do that later. An especially interesting case of the resolution of deliberation without choice is that in which one compares the alternatives initially presented and discovers that one of them definitely promises more good (or less bad) than any of the others. In this case, one's interests will so clearly be better satisfied by the superior alternative than by any of the others that the others lose their appeal. In a case of this sort, the apparent openness of the situation which caused hesitation and stimulated reflection is found to be foreclosed by one's own previously settled wishes and interests.

An example of an apparent choice-situation which is resolved without the need for free choice might be a certain family's selection of a new residence. Initially, they look at many places. But some of them are too expensive; they are not real possibilities. Others are taken off the market by sale to someone else. The family has a checklist of "musts," and many of the seeming possibilities do not meet one or another requirement on the list. They drop out. Finally, only a few possibilities remain.

If each of them has its own diverse appeal, which cannot be measured and weighed off against the appeal of the others, then a choice finally must be made. For example, if one house is located better and the other will more satisfactorily hold the family's possessions and activities, then one must be chosen and the other given up. But sometimes as one reaches the last few possibilities, a family happily finds that one prospective property has all the good features that the others have. In that case, the others lose the appeal they initially had. The family closes the deal and need not later think: "It would have been nice if we could have had x but this house does have y which we also wanted, and you just can't have everything."

When investigation eliminates apparent alternatives or shows that one can enjoy them all, then no free choice is needed. In a sense, of course, one can say that the fortunate family "chose" their new residence. But a well-programed computer could have done the same thing. Given their assumptions and the actual conditions, there was only one thing to do, although initially there seemed to be many live options. Notice also

that people who find they do not have to make a choice proceed with a sense of freedom--meaning physical freedom and freedom to do as they please. Indeed, in a case of this kind one feels free in a sense in which one does not when one must choose--must set aside some possibility in order to realize some other possibility.

In cases in which one finds choice unnecessary, the factors which eliminate some of the initial options can themselves have been established by one's prior choices. A person who lives up to his or her commitments often is able to reduce a range of possibilities to one: Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. The moral significance of such acts arises from the prior and continuing commitments which they express. As people get older and settle into a regular life, they often find themselves deliberating and choosing much less frequently than they did in late adolescence and early adulthood, when many important decisions had to be made.

When investigation does not eliminate the apparent alternatives, one concludes that they are real and incompatible possibilities. One says: "I can make this choice, and then again I can make that one." The "can" here does not express mere contingency. It is not as if one were expecting one or another thing to happen, regardless of or even despite oneself. Rather, the possible choices appear to be within one's own power. "It really is up to me what I'm going to do," expresses this experience. One also thinks: "I've got to make up my mind. I simply cannot have it <u>both</u> ways."

When one sees an animal or an infant vacillate between courses of action, one realizes that it <u>can</u> do this or that. But this "can" merely expresses physical freedom: Nothing is compelling or constraining behavior. One need not suppose that the animal or infant is considering possibilities and is about to choose between them. Rather, one supposes that inclinations will settle the issue one way or another.

By providing appropriate sensory stimulation, we can control the behavior of animals and infants. In doing this, what we do is to arouse an impulse strong enough to prevail over any other inclination which might otherwise be operative. Human adults, however, cannot so easily be controlled. As long as they are able to choose, they can resist every stimulation one can apply. And even when behavior is elicited--for example, by torture--without choice, it is alien to the person. Only when we are about to choose do we have the awareness that we are making up our own minds, that our chosen action will be our <u>doing</u>, our <u>life</u>, our <u>self</u>.

The act of choosing itself involves focusing attention on one possibility--the alternative chosen. But there is more to choice than a focusing of attention. Even in the very act of choosing, one is aware of what one is setting aside. Moreover, after choice, one's choice does not come unmade when one turns attention to other matters.

As I have explained, a person deliberates with an awareness of possibilities and a belief that he or she can and must settle among them. One does not experience anything <u>happening</u> which one can identify as the choice itself. One does not encounter choices; one makes them. The experience of choice is the experience of proceeding to do something, not an experience of undergoing anything.

In sum, the experience of choice has three aspects. First, one is aware of a situation in which one's desires or interests are aroused by alternative possibilities, and one cannot find any way of eliminating the incompatibility or limiting the possibilities to one: "I could do this or that, but I cannot do both; these are real and incompatible possibilities."

Second, one is aware that it is within one's own power to take one or the other alternative, and that nothing but the exercise of this power will realize one possibility and set aside the other (or others): "It's up to me what I'm going to do; nothing and nobody else is going to settle this for me."

Third, one is aware of making the choice, and aware of nothing making one make it: "I made up my own mind; the limitation I've accepted by choosing is my own self-limitation." One who has this experience has a sense of freedom and of being responsible for his or her own life. If one is honest, one looks for excuses only in factors beyond one's control which limited the possibilities one was able to consider and choose from.

I. <u>A definition of free choice</u>

One makes a choice when one faces practical alternatives for one's own action, sees that one could do this or that but not both, and selects one or the other. One's choice is free when one's own choosing itself determines which of the alternatives one accepts. In other words, everything in the universe being as it is up to the moment of one's choosing, at that moment one still is able to do this or that, and only one's very choosing at that moment determines one's setting aside of other possibilities and proceeding to act toward some limited fulfillment. Nothing but oneself was sufficient to determine what one would do and be; one chooses, acts, becomes by one's own choice--one is of oneself.

It is possible to make a choice and then not do anything about it. In this sense, a free choice is not outwardly observable; it is a setting of one's course within one's own heart. For this reason, moral good and evil, which is centered in choice, is characteristic not of what a person takes in or undergoes, but of what a person does, and only of what a person does to the extent that it comes from and carries out what is in his or her heart (cf. Lk 6.45; Mk 7.18-21).

Still, free choice must not be considered as if it were separated from one's action. One chooses <u>to do</u> something. In most choices, one has in view a possible and appealing realization of some capacity--whether of a mental power such as the ability to pray and to think, or of a bodily power such as the ability to speak and move one's bodily parts. Generally, having chosen, one proceeds to do as one has chosen. The blockage of conflicting possibilities and desires having been cleared by one's self, one proceeds to carry on the flow of behavior which is the living on of this (now newly determined) self.

The most obvious cases of choice are those in which one's doing is a positive fulfillment. However, one also can choose <u>not to do something</u>, to omit doing something one

might have done. Omission can be chosen as a way of avoiding an evil or as a way of allowing factors apart from oneself to have their own effect, which one sees as somehow desirable.

Choice need not always be energetic and executive. One can choose to accept a proposal of another, to put up with a situation, or to remain aloof from some problem. Moreover, one can choose indirectly, by choosing to put off a choice (sometimes until it is too late), by making many little choices which one knows will bring one to a certain end (yet never fully facing up to what one is doing), and so on. I will discuss indirect choice in part six when I treat sin of weakness.

J. Some important characteristics of free choice

Although I have described the experience of choice with some care, I must point out that the word "experience" can be misleading here. Choice is not a datum of consciousness. There is nothing experienced passively at the moment of choosing, as there is when one sees or hears, feels pain or dizziness, dreams or remembers, and so forth. Choosing is like reasoning; one is aware of doing it and of the outcome, but is not aware of any thing before one's mind which is this doing. Of course, as soon as one has made a choice, one is aware that one has made it; and the choosing is a past fact of one's biography.

One is clearly aware of having proceeded from indecision to the state of having made up one's mind; one realizes that choice divided the two. Thus one's knowledge of one's own choices is immediate, not inferential. In this sense, one has an experience of choice, but in choosing, one simply chooses. One does not choose and also perceive something which is a choosing. The reason is that choice is not something which happens to oneself; choice is one's settling of one's self.

The conflicting possibilities which make one hesitate, deliberate, and choose initially present themselves as particular possibilities: to do this or that particular thing this evening. However, one does not choose except insofar as one judges the possibilities to be intelligibly good in various respects. From one point of view, the need to choose arises simply because of factual limitations--for example, one cannot be in two places at once. But from another point of view, the need to choose more truly arises from the multiplicity and incommensurability of human possibilities. One wants to be in both places because possible aspects of one's fulfillment can be found in each, and the fulfillment possible in either leaves out something of the fulfillment possible in the other.

The real issue which is settled in choice, then, is whether one will fulfill oneself in one way and forgo the fulfillment promised by the other possible way of acting, or vice versa. Whichever one chooses, one has some reason--the promised fulfillment--for one's choice. But prior to choice, one also would have had an adequate reason for choosing the other way. Once the choice is made, a certain aspect of one's self is involved in the good one has chosen which is not involved in the alternative. One is as one has chosen to be. If the very same alternatives were to present themselves again--everything one understands as good or bad being the same--one could have no reason for choosing otherwise. And so no new choice would be necessary. This is the reason why previous choices provide fixed points of reference to resolve further situations without new choices, and thus why people usually make fewer choices as they settle down in life.

From this point of view, one must distinguish between one's choices and the particular acts one chooses to do. The particular acts are singular events or processes of behavior in the world. But one's choices are not limited to the particular acts which required them to be made. One's choices begin at the time one makes them, but once begun they last unless one makes another, incompatible choice. A deliberate choice to commit a sin puts one in a state of sin. The state is not something other than the choice; it simply is the choice as a settling of oneself with respect to moral good and the other good in which one seeks fulfillment in the sinful act. This way of being, which one accepts, persists unless one repents--has a change of heart--by making a different and incompatible choice. Sin will be considered at length in part six and repentance (conversion) in part seven.

Since choices really are concerned with intelligible goods, they are acts of the will, not emotions of sentient appetite. Choices are spiritual realities, not physical entities. This is the reason why choices are not essentially singular events or particular processes in the world. Spiritual realities as such are not directly conditioned by space and time. They are not changes or bodies, not things having mass and energy.

Human spirituality, of course, is conditioned in many ways by human bodiliness, for the human person is not two realities, but one complex reality. Nevertheless, as spiritual realities, free choices in themselves are not directly subject to space and time, or to other physical conditions. If they were subject to such conditions, they simply could not be what they are: free choices, acts by which persons are of themselves. For in the material world, nothing like a free choice is to be found. Materiality either is endlessly recurrent flux or it is a process of emergence and extinction; spirituality is openly original self-identity.

K. Levels of choice and relationships among choices

Everyone knows that there are big choices and small choices, major decisions and minor decisions. It is one thing to decide whether to get married, or whether to be a priest, or whether to go into politics; it is quite another thing to choose a way of celebrating one's wedding anniversary, or a set of elements for a particular liturgy, or a topic for a speech on a certain occasion. Big choices and small choices are related in interesting and complicated ways. It is important to understand to some extent how big and small choices differ, how they are alike, and how they are related.

The most obvious difference between big and small choices is that the latter bear immediately on particular possible courses of action. Big choices are of actions too, but the acts involve one in accepting a status, entering a relationship, or even

undertaking a whole way of life. One naturally thinks of small choices as choices to do this or that, and of big choices as choices to be this or that. Yet doing and being are not really distinct; one's doing is the fulfillment of one's being, and one's being, which includes what one has done so far, is the basis for further doing.

Another difference between big and small choices is that the latter often can be carried out without any further deliberation and choice. One makes up one's mind to do this tonight, and simply does it. Big choices put one into a position such that there arise whole sets of problems one would not otherwise have, and so further deliberation and choice are required to begin and to continue to carry out one's original choice. If one's big choices are to be maintained and carried out, subsequent choices must be made consistently with them.

Still, one should notice that even choices which are small in terms of their original issue often have far-reaching consequences, because in making the small choice one has established oneself in a certain relationship toward various human goods. For example, a young woman who does not want a baby but does want to engage in sexual intercourse with a friend might choose to use a contraceptive to prevent pregnancy. Should the contraceptive fail and she find herself pregnant, she will face another choice she would not otherwise have had to make: Abortion or not? She might decide not to have the abortion, but she is predisposed to accept it, since the baby is unwanted, an accident.

Some big choices are much bigger than others. The choice to accept Christian faith is as big a choice as one can make, since this acceptance will open up many possibilities, exclude certain others, and affect the way that every possible course of action is evaluated. Faith will have a direct role to play in choices such as one's state in life, one's job, one's friends, and so on. By way of these choices, it eventually colors the whole of one's life.

Moreover, there is no sharp distinction between big choices and small ones. Between the choice to get married and the choice to celebrate a particular anniversary in a certain way, a married couple usually must choose how to regulate the size of their family. Between the choice to be a priest and the choice of the elements for a particular liturgy, a priest can choose a specific plan for his own life and ministry. Between the choice to enter politics and the choice of a topic for a speech on a certain occasion, a politician must decide whether to run for a certain office at a particular time.

L. Choice as self-constitution

In part two--especially chapter four, section M; chapter five, section D; and chapter seven, sections J-M--I stressed the point that human acts in which goods are participated are fulfillments of human persons. Since the person is destined to last, so is the act by which and the good in which one is fulfilled. In the present chapter, I have been indicating that free choice is a power to be of oneself. These statements no doubt are somewhat opaque. On the basis of the analysis carried out in the present chapter, I now attempt to clear away some of this opacity.

Perhaps the clearest approach is by thinking of someone else--for example, Pope John Paul II. If one were to try to know this man well, what would one have to find out? One would begin with his childhood. He was born in 1920, his mother died when he was nine, and so on. From this one would learn something about his abilities and inherited dispositions, about the factors which were simply givens for him. These facts will help one to understand how the young Karol saw things, why certain options occurred to him, why others never appealed to him at all. Then one would go on to examine some of the important decisions he made as a young man, to see what obstacles he encountered and how he undertook to overcome them, to notice what relationships he entered into with others and which ones he avoided, and so on. After the Nazi invasion in 1939, he acted in an underground theater group, read St. John of the Cross, worked in a chemical factory, became a seminarian in 1942, and so forth. All of this information would help one to understand the man Cardinal Wojtyla was when he became pope. Finally, one would study the problems he confronted when he became pope, would consider what he has tried to do, how the effort is working or failing, and what his responses are.

What this example shows is that to know someone centers upon knowing his or her choices. The given factors of the person's heredity and environment are interesting just to the extent that they at once open up and limit a certain range of possible choices. Outward behavior, its consequences, the reactions of others, and so on are interesting in knowing the person just insofar as all these factors relate to previous choices or call for additional ones--either ones involving a change of heart or ones consistently unfolding the self-identity laid down by the basic choices.

The implication is that in making choices and carrying them out, a person constitutes his or her identity. To know a person is to know the life of the person, the self-unfolding identity which is an enduring system of choices. The choices endure because, as I have explained, they are spiritual realities, not natural events or processes. They form a system, because each choice both realizes and limits the self, and so settles the orientation of the self toward further possibilities. The personal identity is self-unfolding, because it originates in one's own choices.

Persons by their choices make themselves be the persons they are. It is in this sense that by choice we are of ourselves. Choices are unnecessary when one already is so settled in one's interests that only one possibility meets one's requirements. Choices are necessary to settle one's interests when one could still find various goods fulfilling. Thus choices are self-determining; in them, one makes some possible goods rather than others be the sort of goods which will be fulfilling for oneself.

Very often, people think of actions as if they were mere pieces of passing behavior, related to persons much as clothing is related to them. To the extent that human actions most centrally are from the heart--are choices and their carrying out--it is clear that actions are not passing behavior, are not able to be taken off, set aside, or replaced as clothing is. Karl Barth, probably the most important Protestant theologian of the twentieth century, very clearly states and rejects the common but erroneous account of actions:

> It is for the whole man, man in his unity of being and activity, for whom He [Christ] has died--in the ordered integrated unity in which he does what he is and is what he does. This disposes of the idea that actions are merely external and accidental and isolated. They are not, as it were, derailments. A man is what he does. Their wickedness and folly counts. They are his wicked works and by them he is judged. As the one who does them, who produces these wicked thoughts and words and works, he is the man of sin who would perish if Jesus Christ had not taken his place. Nothing that he does or leaves undone is neutral or indifferent or irresponsible or outside the sphere of his accountability. He is inwardly the one who expresses himself in this way outwardly. And this disposes of the idea of an Ego which is untouched by the evil character of its actions, an Ego in which a man can remain neutral because he, too, is not touched or touched only remotely by the evil character of his actions.[2]

Without doubt, Barth here very effectively expresses a fundamental Christian insight.

There are many reasons why people do not realize the extent to which they are what they do. Particular performances do come and go, and they are objects present in sense experience. The choices, which endure, are less tangible, and so seem less real to common sense. Again, children learn to think about and talk about action in infancy before they make choices, and hence they continue to think and talk about action in patterns which do not really fit the reality of fully personal action. Then too, one's constituted self, not being a process or event, seems like a stable reality which always was there. So one tends to forget how unformed one once was, and how one's choices shaped one's present self. Moreover, as Barth suggests, to the extent one acts immorally, one prefers to think of one's action as something other than oneself--as something one can do and enjoy, but also leave behind or cast off, like a set of soiled underwear.

Classical moral theology tended to confuse the analysis of action by assuming that actions and choices as such are essentially events or processes which are done and left behind. Yet the moralists, reflecting upon revelation and carefully attending to the facts of Christian life--particularly insofar as these facts concern the conscientious confessor--constructed many categories to take account of the reality of choice, including its self-constituting aspects. So the older manuals talk about a "state" of sin, about "habitual intentions," and about "states of life." All of these expressions articulate perfectly valid ideas, and all of these ideas are reducible to an adequately articulated conception of choice.

M. Habits, virtues, and vices

Most important, many moral theologians, including St. Thomas, have placed a great deal of emphasis upon virtues and vices.[3] To talk about virtues and vices is to make clear that one's moral self is permanent and structured, that it is not simply a series of acts juxtaposed like pearls on a string. Moral virtues and vices are considered to be both the residue of one's acts and a disposition to acts similar in relevant ways to those which led to them. In a special sense, virtues and vices were thought of as "habits." But they were not considered to be habits shaping routines of behavior--the usual meaning of "habit" in English. Rather, virtues and vices were understood to be aspects of character.

I by no means deny the reality and importance of virtues and vices. But I think that one can understand such dispositions more clearly if one considers that the core of one's character is the set of choices one has made, the choices which structure one's continuing and unfolding moral identity. The execution of these choices, together with the extensive influence they have upon subsequent interests, affects one's experience, one's feelings, and every other part of oneself.

One who acts consistently according to a well-organized set of fundamental choices becomes a very tightly integrated, stable person. Such a person need not respond in stereotyped ways, since the same concerns and personal evaluations will entail very different responses if new opportunities and obstacles arise. Thus, one can understand in terms of choice both the stability and the flexibility rightly emphasized by the theory of "habit" one finds in St. Thomas.

A morally good person participates by his or her choices and actions in the human goods of the existential domain, described in chapter five, section G. A morally bad person can share in some aspects of some of these goods, but often settles for a very limited share or only the feeling of sharing, while the morally good person shares more truly and fully in these forms of harmony, of unity, of love. I explained how the goods of the existential domain are interrelated. This interrelationship accounts for the traditional unity of the virtues.

Because good character is both very complex and well integrated, one can distinguish virtues and their opposed vices in many different ways, depending upon the principle of distinction one uses to divide up the whole. In part five, I shall describe the human character of our Lord Jesus, thus to provide the model for Christian hearts united with His sacred heart.

N. Choices and communities -- the social dimension of free choice

Human persons are naturally social. We need each other to begin to exist and to survive; we need each other to become moral and religious persons. One can act for and enjoy hardly any human good without at least relying upon what others have done, and so in some way cooperating with them. Yet natural sociality does not guarantee genuine community. As I explained in chapter six, section C, love can be selfish as well as unselfish. People can treat each other as mere instruments of their own selfish purposes. To a great extent, every actual society consists precisely in such exploitative relationships. Genuine community exists only to the extent that people really co-operate, and thus share together as persons acting for their common fulfillment.

The analysis of free choice provided in the present chapter has focused thus far on the individual. But even this analysis reveals one respect in which persons

desperately need one another in genuine community. For it has become clear that every choice means self-limitation just as much as it means self-fulfillment. One must set aside some possibilities to pursue other ones. In choosing, one is acutely aware of one's own finitude and the necessity of submitting to it as a condition for being as fully as one can be.

Yet one who is really honest with himself or herself fully recognizes the goodness which he or she individually never will realize. Genuine community alone compensates for this limitation. For in genuine community, one identifies with others by love, and so finds oneself fulfilled in their fulfillment in many ways in which one individually has had to forego fulfillment. A genuine community is one body with many members, united by love, rejoicing in one another's fulfillment, each working not only for himself or herself but for the whole (cf. 1 Cor 12.12-13.13).

The point I am making about community--that in it one finds compensation for one's own limitedness--is an obvious fact of daily experience. Members of a family are pleased when one of their number does well. A whole nation experiences fulfillment when its representatives in some international competition win gold medals. Persons who are generous applaud the accomplishments of someone who does what they could not do themselves: "More power to you!" Every Christian who truly believes in and loves the Lord Jesus rejoices: "We've won!" His victory truly is our own; in Him we have made up for our sins and we <u>deserve</u> the love God lavishes upon us.

Modern individualism has rendered this sense of community very obscure. Modern thinkers who talk about choice and moral responsibility tend to think of these realities in purely individual terms. Social choices are imagined to be nothing more than constructs of individual choices, very like machines are constructs of individual parts. But this picture is most inadequate.

A good example of a communal choice is the choice which constitutes marriage. No one person can make this choice. Both man and woman must choose to be one another's husband and wife. Each does choose; each is responsible. But neither choice is possible without the other; both choices exist only within the common, mutual commitment which is the "bond" of marriage. Just as individual choices are lasting, spiritual entities, so is this common choice. Just as individual choices constitute a self, so this choice constitutes the common self of the married couple. Just as individual choices organize into a life and character, so this choice shapes a common life and character.

The treatment of marriage and its properties belongs to a different course. However, by way of example it is worth noticing here that the real unity of the common act which constitutes marriage is the underlying cause of its indissolubility.

Because the marital commitment is a unified act--of which the husband's and wife's consent are only parts--everyone realizes that neither party can dissolve the relationship unilaterally. To act to do so is infidelity. Moreover, there are parties to marriage other than the husband and wife themselves. Societies are concerned about the interests of their members, and so no society permits divorce without some protection for the interests of its members other than the husband and wife. If these interests are protected, then divorce becomes <u>legally</u> permissible. However, there are children and potential children who are nonconsenting but real participants in the marital community. Their interests cannot be satisfied if the marriage is broken up. And so, even according to nature, marriage is <u>morally</u> nondissoluble: No mere human authority can act on behalf of the unborn, who are as yet only ideas in the mind of God. Man and woman cannot put asunder what the Lord of creation has constituted as a unified, procreative community.

Christian marriage, like every act in Christian life, is a communal act in which our Lord Jesus Himself is a participant. In marrying, a couple not only commune in their own human love, but also in Christ's love which includes the divine love which by way of their faith shapes their whole Christian lives. Because Jesus <u>cannot</u> withdraw His commitment to this communion of love, the couple's attempt--even by mutual, free consent--to dissolve their relationship simply cannot be effective. The sacramental quality of Christian marriage transforms its natural, moral nondissolubility into absolute indissolubility. Tribunals which give easy "annulments" do not alter the reality of marital bonds by pretending they do not exist, and pastors who encourage people in "internal forum solutions" are responsible for adultery against Christ. Even God cannot dissolve the fully constituted, sacramental marriage, for His commitment to each particular marriage is nothing other than His commitment to the everlasting marriage which is completion in Christ.

Political societies, although often in many ways not genuine communities at all, nevertheless follow the form of common choice. The Preamble of the United States Constitution, for example, expresses the common commitment to a certain set of common goods which constitutes the people as a political unit. In every deliberative assembly, one can observe the processes of deliberation. Possible lines of action are proposed by motions. Discussion is deliberation. A decision is necessary, and procedural motions often press for it. Finally the vote is taken--this is the social act of choice. Such acts very commonly are decisions or laws which stand, or they are the adoption of certain policies which are likely to be followed in similar cases in the future, unless the make-up of the deliberative body changes.

When a person wishes to join an already-existing community, he or she must engage in some sort of official act together with the community itself. For example, to become a citizen, an alien must take an oath before a judge and the judge must officially accept the person as a citizen. When a person becomes a Christian, he or she makes an act of faith and the Church administers baptism. The two acts are parts of one common act. It is in fact the communal act of God adopting and the new Christian accepting adoptive childhood in God's family. The Church simply serves as God's adoption agency.

In any community, various members can act in a way which constitutes the act of the community as a whole. Provided that those who act officially for the community do what is within their authority, members of the community are involved willy-nilly. Of course, every individual generally has it in his or her power either to support the community's action, merely to acquiesce in it, or even to resist it. But resistance to a

legitimate act of a community to which one belongs either partly or wholly nullifies one's identity as a member of the community. Moreover, sometimes resistance is impossible or useless. When Congress declares war, all Americans are at war whether they like it or not.

Not only for their fulfillment but even for their moral uprightness, members of communities often depend very heavily upon their fellows. Imagine, for instance, the situation of a young man who wishes to be a priest, but who goes to a bad seminary, where he is badly instructed and badly formed. If the young man is not sufficiently sophisticated and energetic to withdraw and seek a better seminary or to carry on a difficult effort of resistance, he is likely to suffer a weakening of faith, a lowering of standards, a cooling of the love which brought him to the seminary in the first place. If he is ordained and begins to carry out his priestly ministry, he is likely to act in a way which scandalizes rather than edifies. His life might well have been entirely different had he come to a good seminary.

0. Corporate personality

Scripture scholars have noticed that throughout both the Old and the New Testaments, human persons and communities are not regarded individualistically as they are in the modern, Western world. A single individual gathers up and acts for the whole of a group; but then too, the whole group is regarded as if it were the extension of one individual. This nonindividualistic conception of the relationship between an individual and a group is called "corporate personality" by the scholars who have commented on it.[4]

In the Old Testament, for example, a living family includes its ancestors. When Abraham dies, he is "taken to his kinsmen" (Gn 25.8). Similarly, one's children extend a person into the future; to die without heirs is to be annihilated. Again, many generations after the exodus, Amos still talks to the people as if they were the same ones who were brought out of Egypt (cf. Am 3.1-2).

The unity of persons in community is not simply a literary device, nor is it the expression of some sort of fiction. The unity is conceived realistically. For this very reason, the life story of one faithless woman can serve as an epitome of the history of Israel (cf. Ez 16). It is useless to ask whether the mysterious son of man (cf. Dn 7.13) is a single individual or the whole of Israel; this person is both at once (cf. Dn 7.27).

Part of the explanation of this nonindividualistic conception of a real unity of persons in community is that the Hebrews never separated the personal thinking and choosing subject from the bodily self. Rachel, herself long dead, mourns her children and refuses to be consoled (cf. Jr 31.15); her own life is in them, and she suffers death once more in their dying.

The covenant which God offers never is between Himself and individuals, who might enlist if they wish one by one. The covenant is made with Abraham, with Moses, with David acting on behalf of the clan, the people, the nation; the people as a group are bound by the act of their head, and every member has a personal obligation to fulfill the terms of the common bond. The realistic conception of the unity of God's people is not a mere primitive conception. The prophets emphasize individual responsibility (cf. Ez 18), but still look to a communal redemption (cf. Ez 37 and 40-47).

Because the sense of community is strong, single persons do not act in a merely individualistic way. In the Psalms, personal prayer and prayer by and on behalf of a whole community are virtually indistinguishable. An outstanding individual or the whole covenant people interchangeably are Yahweh's "son," and such a son can act toward Yahweh on behalf of the whole people (cf. 2 Sm 7.14; Hos 11.1; Zec 3.1-10; Neh 1.6). A prophet is the nation, pleading with God not simply for himself but for the whole (cf. Am 7.2, 5). The suffering Servant of Yahweh is both identified with Israel and distinct enough from the people as a whole to be dissatisfied with them (cf. Is 42.1-4; 49.1-6; 50.4-10; 52.13-53.12).

One who notices corporate personality in Scripture or who reads the studies on it is likely to wonder to what extent this notion is simply an archaic, near-Eastern idea which belongs to mythic consciousness, and to what extent the notion represents reality with some accuracy.

In my view, what is called "corporate personality" is a far more adequate view of the relationship of human persons in communities than is modern, Western individualism. The individualistic view tends to ignore the communal aspects of choice which I have described. But more than this, it involves the dualism I argued against in chapter five, section J--a dualism which makes us think we are not our own bodies, and so gives us an illusion of insulation from the persons of others--since personal union always is accomplished in bodily contact of some sort. Further, individualism typically fails to understand what love really is, and it assumes that unity and multiplicity are contraries.

If the analyses I have presented are correct, then as a matter of fact human persons in their very distinctness really are united in human communities. A single individual often does gather up and act for the group, and the whole group acts in that one individual's action. In many ways, groups of persons share bodily communion. Persons do complete one another. Thus, the Scriptural conception of corporate personality is not a mere archaic idea, nor is it even a mystery of faith. It is part of the simple truth about human reality which modern secular humanism has obscured. As is so often the case, modern "knowledge" about the individual and society is erroneous; Christian wisdom knows better.

Notes and questions for study and review will be found on p. 8-15.

Notes to chapter eight

1. See Joseph M. Boyle, Jr., Germain Grisez, and Olaf Tollefsen, Free Choice: A Self-Referential Argument (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), pp. 122-177.

2. Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, vol. 4, The Doctrine of Reconciliation, part 1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), p. 405.

3. An extensive treatise on habits and virtues in the Thomistic tradition, with many references to other secondary literature and to modern psychology, is George P. Klubertanz, S.J., Habits and Virtues (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1965). Klubertanz follows Thomas in defining habit (pp. 97-101). Like Thomas, Klubertanz nowhere recognizes that choices per se last, and that the disposition established by an act done by choice is nothing else than the persistent choice and the modifications in the personality which it integrates. The result is that virtues and vices become mysterious entities hovering between potentiality and actuality. On my account, the choice always remains actual unless one repents of it; the only thing which ceases at times to be actual is one's conscious awareness of one's choices. Thus, for example, a person who has faith but does not live up to it is forgetful of his or her own identity "like a man who looks in a mirror at the face he was born with; he looks at himself, then goes off and promptly forgets what he looked like" (Jas 1.23-24).

4. See Jean de Fraine, S.J., Adam and the Family of Man (Staten Island, New York: Alba House, 1965), for an extensive study and references to many earlier works on the subject; note (p. 285) the references to H. Wheeler Robinson, who was one of the pioneers in the clarification of this conception.

Questions for study and review

1. Summarize the witnesses of faith which show that we must believe that human persons can make free choices.

2. In what three ways is the reality of free choice important in moral theology?

3. Summarize the alternatives to our belief in free choice and explain why these alternatives have some plausibility.

4. What are the pastoral implications of the fact that the reality of free choice is a matter of experience, not a mystery?

5. Distinguish the various meanings of the word "free" and be prepared to provide your own examples of the use of the word in each of these distinct meanings. Explain carefully how confusion between freedom to do as one pleases, freedom of choice, and the freedom of the children of God causes difficulties. Be prepared to write a few paragraphs, such as you might include in a homily, making clear this distinction and the importance of maintaining it.

6. What initiates deliberation? Why does deliberation sometimes terminate without choice? How is freedom of choice limited by determining conditions of various sorts?

7. Define free choice. Describe its most important properties, especially its spirituality and the implications of this characteristic.

8. Explain how choices always are self-determining. Why are some choices more obviously self-determining than others? Why do people tend not to notice that choices are lasting aspects of oneself?

9. Describe various instances of communal choice. Explain the connection between human free choice as inherently self-limiting and as communal.

10. Why do modern thinkers tend to overlook the reality of communal choices? Explain the concept of "corporate personality."

11. Keeping in mind what is said here about corporate personality, and reviewing what has been said in earlier places here referred to, be prepared to write a few paragraphs, such as you might include in a homily, to make the point that when we talk about the Body of Christ and our membership in it, this language is not a mere metaphor.