

THE RELATIONSHIP OF FREEDOM AND LIFE

1. Freedom really means to be free of my own being, of my own interests, of my fears. It is freedom for the other. The freedom we normally talk of in daily life, the freedom to do what we wish to do, is in fact unfreedom. Freedom is the freedom to do what we are called for, the freedom to obey the calling, coming to us from another person, another being from transcendence. In this freedom we meet truth, the truth. The truth about our life, who we really are, the truth of the world we live in.

2. Being free always means to be on the way to freedom. Optimally: The way from the biologically organized reality, the own being, who fights with all his powers for my own interests, to the other, the meeting of the other, in whose service I come, because of which I become free.

3. To put it in another way: Freedom in the cultural sense is to be able to do whatever you wish, eventually, even without acknowledging it, at the cost of everybody and everything. This so-called freedom is slavery without a future, slavery in the cultural sense. Forgetting ourselves, being with the other, letting the other, the Other, give to us our real being, is freedom.

3.1 The Other, because the Other is not just one person. The Other are all those around us who ask from us the freedom to be with them. And the Other is Jesus and God.

3.2 Paul quite often says that he is a slave of Christ and so, just so he is free. And (cf. Matth. 25, 31-46) in the other we recognise Him, Jesus. This is fact is the theme, coming from the Old, not from the New Testament, of the philosophy of Levinas.

4. This freedom is life. Unfreedom, only living for your own, is death. And, paradoxically, this freedom, this life, can only be received by dying. Only if my unfree cultural being dies, there is freedom and life.

4.1 Of course this is what baptism means.

5. So, freedom and life belong(ing) together, nevertheless there is no freedom without dying. In fact, because we always go to the and fro between freedom and unfreedom (or the reverse), there is a continual dying because of which we find (or are found by) freedom, life.

5.1 We are here in the neighbourhood of the continual conversion, about which much is spoken in theology and in preaching.

6. So clearly there is no freedom and no possibility of freedom, if we are not prepared to die. And this, certainly, in all senses: The dying of our "old ego", with all its hopes, expectations, anger, desires etc., but too, if necessary, if we are called, physical death. Without this preparedness there only is eternal death.

7. This becomes much more concrete if there is, as a consequence of serving the other, of the service in freedom, the risk of dying physically, of death. It is clear: It belongs to freedom to be prepared to die. This is not the way we understand freedom

today, in our so-called modern culture. Now, all “values” having gone, all transcendence passing away, naked life becomes the last and only value, for which we betray all character and humanity, both politically and in personal life. And nevertheless: Without the preparedness to die there is no freedom. Without this preparedness no freedom can be given on to others. This again means: Without this our work, together with and amidst of people, especially if there are or might be real risks, loses its real centre and sense.

8. What does this mean for our life and our work? There are several aspects. Some of them:

8.1 In our daily life we never, or hardly ever reckon with the fact that death belongs to life and that death is the ever-present possibility. Generally speaking: for the sake of life we deny death. We are partaking in the traffic and we do or fail to do, risking our lives without thinking about it. We all have the mentality of the soldier at the front, being sure that only his comrades will be killed. Freedom gives the possibility to give space to the question what we are doing with our own life and with the life of others.

8.2 If we come to the conclusion, or if we discover, that we are, by our doing, endangering the life of others and/or of ourselves, there again are many questions, eg:

8.2.1 Are we really doing our work, as a teacher, a police officer, a soldier out of a commission, the task to serve those around us, the “neighbour”? Or are we in fact, in the end, doing it out of self interest, whichever it might be, the wish to earn money, to become known, to have an interesting life, to make oneself useful or, or... Self-investigation is the more necessary if we, by the work we are doing, too endanger, or only endanger, the life of others, participants in our work or their relatives. In that case the freedom to do this work, so fulfilling the task given, is a strict condition.

8.2.2 Are we free in relation to them who belong to us, who are dependent on us? They don't have the right that we give up our task, which means our freedom, on behalf of them. And, just because of our responsibility towards them, we have to know very well, with a great freedom, that it really is a task, which we have to do, because otherwise we become unfree. And those who are, in which manner ever, dependent on us, have the right that they partake in the freedom in which we do our work, a freedom which only can be given by ours. If we enforce upon them we simply have to do, we endanger everybody's freedom, we endanger the work we are doing, the risks are growing and the fears in all hearts rising.

8.2.3 Although it might already be very clear, freedom is not the same as the love for a dangerous life. The love for a dangerous life is fascination in which in the end all responsibility is given up. Freedom never seeks danger, although it might bring into it.

8.2.4 Just because of the risks it is very important that the work, whichever work it might be, when it is done, stays as free as possible. Some aspects of this are.

8.2.4.1 It is very important that from the onset it is clear that the work is done under a transcendence, which is as far as possible is known and acknowledged by all

participants and to which we, who are in charge, are responsible. In Northern Ireland, Corrymeela is or might be such a transcendence, which protects in many senses.

8.2.4.2 It is (nearly) equally important that it is made, from the beginning and repeated when necessary, very clear that the work we are doing is never about seeking people who are guilty (and who are present or are not present), that the work never is about scapegoating anybody. That, if we are speaking about difficulties in a country, in a town, in work, in a family wherever, that all who partake are both guilty and victims. That our work in fact is not about origins of the difficulties, to find out the culprits, that our work is about finding ways together into the future. That if we are talking together about guilt and about victims that we then (amidst of all sadness, grief, despair, about which hopefully we tell each other) only are talking about guilt, if it is about our own (possible) guilt. Even culturally it does not belong to our competence to declare other people guilty. In freedom we know that to find the guilty ones outside of ourselves is, seen the complicatedness of everything, a hopeless undertaking. In our freedom we can come for ourselves to the conclusion that we, whatever others may conclude about themselves, are guilty. In unfreedom we always are fighting against guilt and finding explanations.

8.2.4.3 It might be wise to being every course with some sentences that we are together seeking freedom in the situations we live in and that seeking freedom entails risks, because it can be misunderstood. Maybe it is useful, or even necessary, to find some ritual sentences for this.

9. Seeing the character of the work we are doing it is necessary to prepare ourselves for every piece of work we are doing with people. The most important aspect is that we find the possibility that we go to the group, being free for it, not encumbered by whichever cares. That there are no fears in us when we go, neither when we think about the people we meet, nor when we think about the work, the theme. All further preparation can be very important, but stands in the service of this freedom.

10. If something happens with a member of one of our groups, or with a relative of such a member and if there is only the possibility that our work is (some) factory, which lead to the happening, then we are responsible. This means that we, if possible, visit her, him those involved and, eventually their relatives and offer ourselves (in freedom, otherwise we make things worse..) to do what we are able to in order to cope with what happened and with the consequences of it. Of course, it might be that just that brings real risks. Then in fact this whole paper is again about the then arising situation.

11. This paper is written out of the consciousness of risks, which endanger both students and teachers in universities in Northern Ireland because of the possible infiltration of terrorists, members of terrorists movements, in course, group work and the rest of university life.

Of course the theme is as important or more important for all whom the threat of life is at least more clear, for police officers, prison officers, for members of the army. It is truer again for those who are straightaway threatened, out of which reason ever and again it is true for those who leave the paramilitaries and are threatened because of that.

The bigger the risks, the more it is necessary to live out of freedom as described in this paper. Without freedom, the bigger the risks, the more life is like hell, and not only that unfreedom, fears, attract risks. Those who are endangering our lives are, just because of that, very much in the mimesis with us. The more fearful we are, the more they are. Most of the violence, the risks, comes out of fears.

12. It might be very important to work further on these themes.

7.11.28.12.90