

FROM THE EDITORS

BOUNDARY CONDITIONS OF FREEDOM

Due to the rapid advancements in empirical sciences in the recent decades, the issue of human freedom is nowadays discussed readily in the context of the natural sciences. Countless studies in genetics or neuroscience make it possible to uncover more and more secrets of human functioning. We are becoming increasingly aware of the many determinants of how we act and choose.¹ Even if we do not follow specialist literature, popular science publications and a massive amount of captivating online content make the question ‘are we really free?’ more legitimate than ever before. Thankfully, the issue of freedom, fundamental to human existence, is considered also in social, metaphysical, and religious contexts.²

Universal and enduring inspiration for reflection on freedom can be found in John Paul II’s speech concluding his visit to Germany on 23 June 1996. The speech related to the question of freedom and was of an extremely personal character. The Pope started his address thus: “Now is the time to say goodbye, and for me it is a deeply moving moment of meeting you in this evening hour at the Brandenburg Gate, in the heart of Berlin.”³ A few years before, on 22 December 1989—when the Berlin Wall had fallen—the ceremonial opening of the Gate took place, symbolising not only the reunification of East and West Germany, but also the regaining of freedom by people who had been oppressed by the communist regime for years.

¹ See, e.g., Daniel C. Dennett, Gregg D. Caruso, *Just Deserts: Debating Free Will* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021); Michael S. Gazzaniga, *Who’s in Charge?: Free Will and the Science of the Brain* (New York: Ecco/HarperCollins, 2011); Sam Harris, *Free Will* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012).

² See, e.g., Katrin Flickschuh, *Freedom: Contemporary Liberal Perspectives* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007); Dariusz Łukasiewicz, *Opatrzność Boża, wolność, przypadek: Studium z analitycznej filozofii religii* (Kraków and Poznań: Fundacja Dominikańskie Studium Filozofii i Teologii and Wydawnictwo W drodze, 2014); Józef Bremei, *Czy wolna wola jest wolna?* (Kraków: WAM, Kraków 2013).

³ John Paul II, Address at the Farewell Ceremony at the Brandenburg Gate, Berlin, June 23, 1996, Section 1. Translation mine. The German original text is available at https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/de/speeches/1996/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19960623_berlino.html.

The message given by John Paul II at the Brandenburg Gate is an enduring historic lesson on freedom and contains three key points. First, there is no freedom without the truth about man and the world in relation to God. If all creation vanishes without its Creator,⁴ no human freedom is possible without any reference to its giver. Therefore, it is worth recalling that man “does not owe himself to himself but is a creature of God; he is not the master of his life or the life of others.”⁵ Moreover, man can attain the fullness of his freedom and creative powers if he grounds them in truth. “Only then will he be able to find fulfilment.”⁶ The consequence of living in truth is to accept that freedom neither gives unlimited privileges nor warrants the right to act wilfully. A person who can accept self-imposed limitations is truly free. Not infrequently, it turns out that what at first seems a restriction can actually represent true freedom.

Second, “there is no freedom without solidarity.”⁷ The idea of freedom can be fostered in individual and social lives, provided that people share the conviction of man’s uniqueness and dignity, and his responsibility before God and his fellow human beings. The Pope underscored that only where people are joined by their love and fight for freedom can it prevail and survive. Individual freedom cannot be separated from the freedom of other people. Freedom lived in solidarity takes into account each person’s right to self-determination and is manifested in actions for social justice. When people narrow down their perspective to their own existence and are not willing to act selflessly for the sake of others, freedom is at peril.⁸

Third, John Paul II reminds us that “there is no freedom without sacrifice.”⁹ Man is called to freedom and should therefore be mindful of its unique value and willing to pay a high price for it. Since we accept the necessity of bearing costs in many lesser aspects of our life, we must not fight shy of such a commitment to freedom, as this calls for generosity, vigilance, sacrifice, and courage in the face of lurking threats. In order to stave off internal or external threats to freedom, it is worthwhile to risk one’s own health, or even life, accepting a possible loss, which can thus be spared to others.¹⁰

Finally, the Pope’s address evokes the Christian aspect of reflection on freedom, which is closely linked to the fate of Europe and its peoples. The opening

⁴ See Second Vatican Council, “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*,” Section 36, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

⁵ John Paul II, Address at the Farewell Ceremony at the Brandenburg Gate, Section 4.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ *Ibidem*, Section 5.

⁸ See *ibidem*.

⁹ *Ibidem*, Section 6.

¹⁰ See *ibidem*.

of the central gate that divided Berlin for years is as necessary and important as opening the hearts of people inhabiting the European home—so that the spirit of freedom, solidarity, love, and peace can blow with greater force. For that reason, Europe needs people who can open gates, especially Christians who can show how to attain the fullness of freedom in Christ. He is the gate through which people can reach freedom and life. He sets people truly free. He liberates them from sin and death. He shows solidarity with every human being through his salvific sacrifice of the Cross. He unveils his brotherly face in our fellow human beings.¹¹

Exactly one year after his visit to Germany, which abounded in symbolic themes, John Paul II visited Poland and alluded to the subject he had raised in Berlin. During a meeting with the participants of the International Eucharistic Congress in Wrocław, in a somewhat unorthodox way, the Pope applied the reflection on the motto of this event—“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free” (Galatians 5: 1)—to the social and political contexts. While emphasizing the importance of the Congress venue, John Paul II remarked that Poland was one of the Central and Eastern European countries that had regained freedom and sovereignty in the most fundamental sense after years of being enslaved by the totalitarian communist system. In this part of Europe, he underscored, the word ‘freedom’ acquires special significance. “We know the taste of captivity, war, and injustice. So do those countries which lived, like us, the tragic experiences of the lack of personal and social freedom. Today we rejoice at freedom regained, but ‘it is impossible merely to possess and enjoy freedom. It must be continually regained through the truth.’”¹²

Now, it might appear that after twenty-five years we will be returning to those words mainly from a historical vantage point, fully available only to those who were affected by totalitarian depravity on a daily basis. It turns out, however, that despite the stunning pace of social, cultural, and religious changes, the teaching of John Paul II has lost none of its relevance, particularly with the drama playing out beyond Poland’s eastern border. The Russian assault on Ukraine mobilizes us to diligently do a lesson with three important aspects: “There is no freedom without the truth,” “There is no freedom without solidarity,” and “There is no freedom without sacrifice.”

The Ukrainians were the first to rise to this challenge, and they are doing it with admirable heroism, which is demonstrated not only by the number of casualties on the front lines, but also the host of harmed civilians, including

¹¹ See *ibidem*, no. 7.

¹² J o h n P a u l I I, Address at the Meeting with the Delegations to the Eucharistic Congress, Wrocław, June 1, 1997, Section 4, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1997/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19970601_congresso-eucaristico.html.

many children, whose trauma may stay with them forever. The Pope's lesson is being done by all European countries, although the degree of solidarity and commitment varies. From the outbreak of the war on 24 February 2022, to the end of November 2022, Poland welcomed more than eight million Ukrainians. Granted, not all of them stayed on in our country, but the generosity of the Poles is an extraordinary example how to open the door to freedom and life.

The most valuable aspect of John Paul II's lesson taught in Berlin and Wrocław was showing a rock-solid foundation for such attitudes as heroism and solidarity. In a world that is often dominated by the pursuit of easy and enjoyable life, it is hard to muster the strength for an extreme ordeal. Lofty ideals, such as readiness to sacrifice one's life or to help those who were once strangers, must be grounded in a value system based on respect for the dignity of every human being, treated as a person, a unique part of one human family. Lofty declarations that supporting fellow human beings is commendable must go hand in hand with a deep confidence in the sense and source of interpersonal solidarity. In this context, being reminded of Christian underpinnings of our civilization is greatly relevant. Now we understand the weight of St Paul's teaching, of his words that are not cheap moralising; rather, they reveal a profound insight: "You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other" (Ga 5: 13–15).

With the war beyond Poland's eastern border, we have seen many instructive examples where words about the Christian ethos of freedom and solidarity were in harmony with actions for the welfare of our Ukrainian brothers and sisters in need. Evoking such attitudes has a universal and timeless significance—not only for emphasising the importance of reconciling theory with practice. In this context, I see as praiseworthy the attitude of a well-known priest from Lublin who always sees a concrete name and a life story behind the faces of our neighbours coming from across the eastern border. Recognising the face of a particular person is not at all easy given the vast numbers of people waiting for a good word, hot soup, or a warm place for the winter. I also have a great appreciation for a married couple whose help is not limited to donating a certain amount of money to a charitable cause. Instead, they engage in activities that deprive them of their leisure and of the comfort of being with their kin. I found out about the sheer scale of their concern for the plight of the refugees from Oksana, who excitedly told me about her wonderful experience of the Polish Christmas and the tremendous help she was given while raising funds for her daughter's studies.

Lublin, Chełm, Przemyśl, Rzeszów, but also Medyka or Dorohusk, are entry points which have recently channelled in many refugees. Being a gateway is

not easy. This realisation is now widespread among the Poles, after the sudden turnaround in the situation across the eastern border—as it was among the Germans when the Berlin Wall had come down. The Ukrainians have come to realise this fact in the most dramatic way—their country’s history, as John Paul II said during his visit in 2001, testifies to Ukraine’s special role as a frontier and gateway between East and West.¹³ The Pope was fully aware that being a gateway does not entail relativisation of values or abandoning the ideals underpinning freedom. Freedom is demanding and, in a sense, comes at a greater price than slavery does.¹⁴ His words spoken at the conclusion of his visit to Kiev on 27 June 2001 sound prophetic today: “Thank you, Ukraine, who defended Europe in your untiring and heroic struggle against invaders.”¹⁵

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John Paul II’s reflections on freedom are always worth recalling. Some of them can be found in the following pages of this volume, devoted to freedom, which will also be addressed in the next issue of *Ethos*, though from a slightly different perspective. As the new Editor-in-Chief of this prestigious quarterly and Director of the Center for Research on the Thought of John Paul II, The John Paul II Institute, I have taken over from professor Agnieszka Ewa Lekka-Kowalik, to whom I extend my sincere thanks for her passionate commitment over the past eight years. Our gratitude to all those who, at different stages of the Institute’s development, have helped to build the reputation of our academic milieu was expressed on 9 December 2022 during the commemorative session titled “On the Need for Philosophy of Man: The 40th Anniversary of the John Paul II Institute of the Catholic University of Lublin.” In our evangelical approach to history—rich and forward-looking—we ought to reach deeply into this repository to bring out things old and new (see Matthew 13: 52).

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¹³ See J o h n P a u l I I, Arrival Ceremony Address at Kyiv International Airport, Kyiv, June 23, 2001, Section 7, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2001/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20010623_ucraina-arrival.html; Marcin J a k i m o w i c z, “Nie liż, dyscu!” *Gosc.pl*, <https://www.gosc.pl/doc/7438515.Nie-liż-dyscu>.

¹⁴ See J o h n P a u l I I, Address at Meeting with Young People, Lviv, June 26, 2001, Section 7, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2001/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20010626_ucraina-youth.html.

¹⁵ See J o h n P a u l I I, Address during the Departure Ceremony at Lviv Airport, Lviv, June 27, 2001, Section 2, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2001/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20010627_ucraina-departure.html.