



ST. GEORGE AND ST. ANTHONY'S
COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH
OTTAWA – CANADA

THE GREAT JUBILEE
OF THE SECOND THOUSAND YEAR
FOR
THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST
AND
THE CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

The Year of the Jubilee is called the Year of Liberty. In the Jubilee of the Second Thousand Year of the birth of Christ we remember the birth of the true Liberator of mankind. He, who has the absolute freedom, became a servant, and was betrayed by a price of a slave. Thus He share us our servitude although He is without sin, to bring us to the true freedom.

From the day Adam attained a promise of release from the servitude of sin all men were longing for the advent of the Messiah, as the Divine Liberator.

FREEDOM AND SLAVERY

Freedom is the absence of servitude or bondage and the ability to do and go as one desires. Hence, it is applicable to captives or slaves set free from oppression (Lev 25:10; Isa 61:1). The concept of freedom, both physical and spiritual, is expressed in several different ways in the Bible.

Slavery was common in biblical times. Many persons served others in bondage. The Law of Moses provided for the *Year of Jubilee*, when slaves were given the opportunity to gain their freedom (Leviticus 25; 27).

The Exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt is an example of God's bringing His people into freedom. When the apostle Paul spoke of a free man (Col. 3:11), he referred to rights of citizenship. Politically, in Paul's day, one might be either a citizen of Rome, a free person (Acts 22:28), or a non-citizen, one who was not free under the Roman law. In Christ, however, distinctions between citizens and non-citizens, "slave" and "free" disappear, for all **believers attain the citizenship of heaven itself, the true free country**. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). In Christ, all have the glorious freedom of the sons of God.

"If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage" (Gal 5:1).

"Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all" (Col 3:11).

In Jeremiah we acknowledge the eager of God for man's liberty:

"And you were now turned, and had done right in My sight, in proclaiming liberty every man to his neighbor; and you had made a covenant before Me in the house which is called by My name:

But you turned and polluted My name, and caused every man his servant, and every man his handmaid, whom you had set at liberty at their pleasure, to return, and brought them into subjection, to be unto you for servants and for handmaids.

Therefore thus says the Lord; You have not hearkened unto Me, in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother, and every man to his neighbor: behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, says the Lord, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth” (Jer 34:15-17).

Our Lord explained that when people know the truth, the truth will set them free (John 3:32). He Himself is the Truth (John 14:6). He also declared that if He, the Son of God, set persons free, they would be truly free (John 8:36). Sin enslaves; Christ sets free. By setting free from sin, the believer is able to choose service for God (Rom. 6:22).

FREEDOM AND MOSES' LAW

Every Israelite who had become a slave might not only be redeemed at any time by his relatives. But it was bound to receive his freedom without payment in the seventh year, with a present of cattle and fruits (Exod. 21:2; Deut. 15:12-15). All slaves of Hebrew descent, with their children, obtained freedom without ransom in the Jubilee Year (Lev. 25:39-41).

The release of slaves among **Greeks and Romans** was common. The Greeks had no special legal form for the process and consequently no legal differences in the legal status of freedom. At Athens they took the position of resident aliens and were under certain obligations to their liberators as patrons.

Among the Romans emancipation was either formal or informal. Informal emancipation took place in virtue of an oral declaration on the part of the master in the presence of friends, or by letter, or by inviting the slave to the master's table. Of formal emancipation there were three kinds:

(1) The *manumissio vindicta*, in which the owner appeared before the magistrate with the slave. A Roman citizen laid a staff upon the slave's head and declared him free, whereupon the master, who was holding the slave with his hand, let him go as a symbol of liberation.

(2) The *manumissio censu*, in which the master enrolled the slave's name in the list of citizens.

(3) The *manumissio testamento*, or manumission by will, in which the master declared his slave free or bound his heir to emancipate him¹.

After formal emancipation they at once became Roman citizens but, not being freeborn, were not eligible to office and were excluded from military service.

Usually those who were released from slavery set a kind of organization. We read in the Book of the Acts, "But some men from what is called the *Synagogue of the Freedmen*" (Acts 6:9). Some believe these men were released Roman slaves, who having embraced Judaism had their synagogue at Jerusalem. Others suppose that Jews dwelling in Liberatum, a city or region in proconsular Africa, are meant. Others appeal to Philo and understand the word, as denoting Jews who had been made captive by the Romans under Pompey but were afterward set free. Although they had fixed their abode at Rome, had built at their own expense a synagogue at Jerusalem, which they frequented when in that city².

THE THEOLOGY OF LIBERTY

1. Only God has absolute freedom. He is not controlled from the outside. Human beings, while not totally free, can experience a measure of freedom in different areas of life: social, economic,

Seyffert, Dictionary of Classical Antiquity, s.v. manumissio testamento.

New Unger's Bible Dictionary.

political, and spiritual. True freedom is realized by *sharing in God's freedom*. God is a self-determining agent, a free personal Being acting purely in accordance with His own perfections. This is declared by St. Paul, "Who works all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11). The reason of the divine purpose and act is to be found only in God Himself. Inasmuch as God is eternally and unchangeably what He is, we must recognize in God, in a proper sense, an absolute necessity. But it is a necessity that not only does not conflict but is identical with His perfect freedom. The creation, the existence of all things that are not God, must be referred to the divine freedom. God could be under no necessity to create. But if He creates, His creation, the order and the laws He establishes among them, must reflect His wisdom and goodness and holiness - in a word, Himself.

The freedom of God is exercised and illustrated in His government of His moral creatures. It has pleased God to create intelligences possessed of moral freedom and to make their ultimate destiny contingent upon the right use of their freedom. This is a necessary feature of the government that God has established over the world of moral beings He has seen fit to create. God has manifested His perfect freedom in creating such a world and adapting His methods to the demanding situations that arise in its history.

The freedom of man, as that of other moral intelligences, has been assumed. By freedom of the will, in the proper sense, is meant the power of contrary choice, i.e., the power of the mind to choose in some other direction than that in which the choice is actually made.

2. Man was created in the image of God and accordingly was endowed with perfect moral freedom. Sin resulted from the abuse of freedom. In consequence of the sin of our first parents we inherited a depraved nature. While our natural freedom is not lost in respect to many things, yet with respect to meeting the requirements of the divine law, we are of ourselves in a state of complete moral inability (see Rom. 7:19-24).

The power which enslaves is sin (Jn 8:34). Liberty consists, not simply in external freedom, or in possession of the formal power of choice, but in deliverance from the darkening of the mind, the tyranny of sinful lusts and the enthrallment of the will, induced by a morally corrupt state. In a positive respect, it consists in the possession of holiness, with the will and ability to do what is right and good. Christ brings such liberty through redemption. In Him our souls are renewed, and cannot exist apart from godliness. Truly under the Old Testament godly men could boast of a measure of such liberty (Ps 119:45). But it is the gospel of Christ which bestows it in its fullness, in giving a full and clear knowledge of God, discovering the way of forgiveness, supplying the highest motives to holiness and giving the Holy Spirit to destroy the power of sin and to quicken to righteousness. In implanting a new life in the soul, the gospel lifts the believer out of the sphere of external law, and gives him a sense of freedom in his new filial relation to God. Hence, the New Testament expressions about "the glorious liberty" of God's children (Rom 8:21), about liberty as resulting from the possession of the Spirit (2 Cor 3:17), about "the perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25). The instrument through which this liberty is imparted is "the truth" (Jn 8:32).

Christians are earnestly warned not to abuse their liberty in Christ. "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (Gal 5:13).

THE CHRISTIAN AS A FREEDMAN

The term "*freedman*," or "*freeman*" as opposed to a slave, occurs in 1 Cor 7:22; Col 3:11, and Rev 6:15, and represents two slightly different words. In 1 Cor 7:22 the word is *apeleutheros*, "a freeman," one who was born a slave and has received freedom. In this case it refers to spiritual freedom. The Lord has presented him that was in bondage to sin with spiritual freedom. In Rev 6:15 the word is simply *eleutheros*, "a free man."

The apostle Paul felt that he became a free person, and not a slave. Therefore, he used the expression “*the Lord's freedman*” to describe a person who has been freed by Jesus Christ from bondage to sin. “For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave” (1 Cor 7:22). St. Paul emphasized the spiritual freedom, which belongs to believers. The spiritual freedom of other persons becomes the concern of St. Paul and all those who have been set free by Christ.

The expressions “*the Lord's freedman*,” and “*the evangelical liberty*,” cover several New Testament representations of the Christian life.

1. **Believers are liberated from the bondage of Satan**, the domination of sin, guilt, and the fear of death (see John 8:31-36; Acts 26:17-18; Rom. 7:24-25; 8:15; Heb. 2:14-15). Spiritual union with Christ, involving the service of Christ, is compatible with perfect freedom; inasmuch as we are thus restored to the right relationship to God and brought into harmony with His will (see Matt. 11:28-30; James 1:25).

2. Christians are not under obligation to observe the literal regulations of Moses' Law, such as the circumcision, and preserving Saturday as the Lord's day, the signs of the Old Covenant. These features of religion, once imposed by special revelation, were annulled by the incoming of the new dispensation. Through our freedom in Christ we preserve the Law in a spiritual way.

THE JUBILEE OF THE TRUE LIBERATOR

We said that He, who has the absolute freedom, became a servant, and His disciple sold him by a price of a slave.

- He shared us our servitude although He is without sin, to bring us to the true freedom.
- He united us as members of His Body, so that inner servitude can't find a place in us.
- He united us together in one Church, from all nations and peoples. Some slaves became Church leaders, such as bishops, priests, monks, deacons. The church glorifies the slaves and handmaids who were martyred in the name of Jesus Christ.
- Through the Cross, our Redeemer grants us true freedom and authority over sin, Satan, evil world and even over death.
- The Redeemer grants us His Holy Spirit, the Spirit of freedom, who creates in us the new man on the image of our Creator, destroying the works of the old man, who subjects to the servitude of sin.
- Our Lord subjected to the Law, to liberate us from its literal regulations, and set us free from its curse. For in Him we are not considered as breakers of the Law.
- Our Crucified Christ descended to the Hades, where all the true believers of the Old Testament, clergy and laity, men, ladies, youths, children and elders, Patriarchs and Prophets were exceedingly rejoicing on His arrival. He destroyed the solid gates of the Hades, carried them as if on His shoulders, and entered with them through the opened gated of the Paradise. For the first time men tasted the true and eternal freedom.
- The Unique Liberator penetrates our hearts so that He may dwell in us and we in Him. Outside Him we complain of the inner servitude, saying with St. Paul, “For what I will to do, that I do not practice, but what I hate, that I do... It is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me” (Rom.7:15, 17). In Him, we sing with the same apostle, saying, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13). St. Isaac the Syrian stated that in Christ he became a king has authority even on his thoughts. He used to say to a thought to go in or out, and the thoughts obeyed him.