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**HUMAN FREEDOM AND CHRIST IN ST. JOHN PAUL II AND ST.
THOMAS AQUINAS**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to gain an ordered synthesis of St. John Paul II's teaching on human freedom and apply it to St. Thomas Aquinas to identify how his ideas correspond to St. John Paul II. St. John Paul II focuses a great deal on the inherent relationality of freedom and its realization in the gift of self. He also emphasizes the place of Christ in revealing the full truth about freedom to man. St. John Paul II certainly taught with clarity regarding other aspects of freedom, like its proper use in accord with the proper end of man and the moral law; but the relational and self-gift aspects of freedom are rightly recognized as a powerfully transforming message of truth in his teaching. The question is whether these elements, so central to the teaching of St. John Paul II, have corresponding concepts in the anthropology and Christology of St. Thomas. This exploration discovers that when one engages St. Thomas on his own terms and faithfully reads his doctrine with an eye to detecting in it a corresponding notion of human freedom and the role of Christ as revealer and bestower, one can discern these elements in his teachings.

The first half of this study develops a synthesis of St. John Paul II's papal teaching on human freedom. This synthesis leads to two broad, interrelated areas of teaching on human freedom, characterized here as anthropological and Christological. The anthropological area can be further broken down into two subcategories: the first, a more objective treatment of freedom as the human power for action; and the second, a personal approach to freedom involving relationality and the gift of self. Regarding the first more objective characterization of freedom, St. John Paul II teaches that it is the constitutive capacity to govern self and to realize perfection inherent to human nature and personhood. The second anthropological area, the more personalist area, looks at St. John Paul II's teaching about the interpersonal quality of freedom as well as how freedom finds its most proper expression in the gift of self to God and others. St. John Paul II teaches that human perfection and the purpose of freedom is realized in a gift of self to God and others. In many ways this area is the most striking aspect of his teaching on freedom. With this teaching St. John Paul II moves freedom into the realm of relationship and donative love to call people to communion and generosity.

St. John Paul II applies this principle of *Gaudium et Spes*, which states that Christ reveals man to himself¹ to human freedom to explain how Christ is the revelation and source of the fullness of freedom. St. John Paul II's teaches that Jesus is the One who personally reveals the truth about human freedom in His life and also bestows grace to enlighten and elevate the human person to a higher expression of freedom. He emphasizes that this grace comes from a personal union between the Christian and Jesus.

Part Two of this study turns to St. Thomas's teaching on human freedom and Christ to discover correspondence between it and St. John Paul II's teaching. The notion of freedom as a constitutive capacity significantly influences this approach. The Thomistic notion of volition as the interdependent operations of intellect and will is asserted to correspond with St. John Paul II's teaching on freedom. The second part begins by seeking a Thomistic definition of volition that encompasses all genuine human action. The study then recounts variations in modes of operation of human action in the states of comprehensor and viator. It then addresses the harmony between St. Thomas's teaching on *liberum arbitrium* and necessity, examines its implications for understanding freedom, and concludes by identifying volition as the Thomistic equivalent of freedom understood as an inherent human capacity—that is, consistent with St. John Paul II's understanding of freedom. After completing this examination of St. Thomas's philosophical treatment of human freedom the study assesses the correspondences between St. Thomas's and St. John Paul II's teachings. In this process the thesis discusses the relational and self-giving aspects of freedom (the interpersonal characteristics) and the corresponding principles in St. Thomas's teaching on action.

The final section of the Thomistic treatment, looks at how St. Thomas's Christology concurs with St. John Paul II's principle that Jesus reveals and bestows a higher capacity for human freedom. A look at St. Thomas's view of freedom in Christ and how His acts bring about salvation uncovers correspondence with St. John Paul II's Christological principles of freedom. St. Thomas's theology implicitly shows Christ revealing and bestowing a higher capacity for freedom, thus corresponding to St. John Paul II's teaching on freedom.

¹ See VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, December 7, 1965, §22, *AAS* 58 (1966): 1042.

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