



Freedom in Relationship: Joseph Ratzinger and Alexander Schmemmann in Dialogue

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Abstract

Joseph Ratzinger and Alexander Schmemmann, representing West and East respectively, share similar views of personhood and freedom. This similarity is evidenced both in their constructive construal of Christian freedom, and their destructive dismantling of secular freedom. According to both theologians, Christian freedom is grounded in a relational anthropology in which the human person images God's relational freedom as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In contrast, secular understandings of freedom place freedom in antinomic relationship with authority. In other words, Christian freedom is ontological, and secular freedom is 'external'. There are differences between Ratzinger and Schmemmann, yet the differences do not divide. This essay concludes that their various emphases are brought together via the three-fold office of Christ—prophet, priest, and king—to provide a robust and ecumenical expression of Christian freedom.

Keywords

Freedom, ecumenism, personhood, theological anthropology, Ratzinger, Schmemmann

Introduction

In the introduction to *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, a seminal work on theological anthropology, John Zizioulas clearly articulates his ecumenical hopes. He goes so far as to write that the text “provokes and invites contemporary theology to work with a view to a synthesis between the two theologies, Eastern and Western.”¹ Following Zizioulas' ecumenical direction and desire, I have brought Joseph Ratzinger and Alexander Schmemmann into dialogue, looking at questions of personhood and freedom. There is

¹ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, (Trowbridge, Wiltshire: The Cromwell Press, 1985), p. 26.

a remarkable convergence of thought on this matter beginning with their respective understandings and criticisms of modern conceptions of freedom, and ending with their own theologically constructed relationally based notions of freedom. According to both theologians, freedom, which is arguably conceived by St Paul in ‘ontological’ terms,² tends to be expressed in modernity as an ‘external’ good. For example, we speak of the woman’s right not to be restricted by another i.e., the dependent foetus. Here, according to Schmemmann and Ratzinger, is its shortcoming: freedom is not an external good. The problem is that as an external good freedom is placed in dichotomous relationship with authority (another external). In this article, for the sake of clarity and brevity, ‘secular freedom’ is used as the ‘umbrella term’ for various understandings of human freedom that Schmemmann and Ratzinger criticise, external perspectives of freedom that place freedom in a dichotomous relationship with authority. Before moving forward with this ecumenical endeavour we must take one step back. Secular freedom, so defined, is exactly what Schmemmann accuses not only the secular West of holding to but also Roman Catholicism.³ However, in the following deconstruction of secular freedom and the positive counter construals it should be clear that there is a convergence of thought. Both theologians insist that human freedom cannot consistently carry meaning nor be maintained without a theological understanding of personhood in which personhood is constituted through human participation with God, in Christ, and through the Holy Spirit. In other words, human freedom is ontologically grounded in the three persons of the Holy Trinity.

External Freedom

Following Socrates’ methodology in *The Republic* we will first look briefly at how the dichotomy of secular freedom is evidenced at the national level, and then from the national level we will move to the personal. The United States provides a good example of the dichotomous relationship between freedom and authority. In George W. Bush’s 2001 inaugural speech, he claimed that the United States of America must be a servant of freedom and its officials and citizens leaders in the cause of freedom.⁴ Of course the United States is a

² 2 Cor. 3:17–18. By ontological I mean internal, or what has to do with the core of one’s being.

³ Schmemmann argues that both Protestantism and Roman Catholicism have external notions of freedom. Alexander Schmemmann, “Freedom in the Church,” in *Church, World, Mission: Reflections on Orthodoxy in the West*, (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir’s Seminar Press, 1979), pp. 180–183.

⁴ “Bush Inaugural Speech,” <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/1129289.stm> (accessed February 22, 2013).

country that prides itself that it is a nation based on democracy and democratic values (as ambiguous as that is), a nation that insists on limited government and which abhors hierarchy. Internationally, the recent military deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan commenced under the aegis of freedom, aiming to remove terror and corrupt tyrannical rulers.⁵ We can see both in America's domestic politics and its international 'policing' that freedom is set against external authority: autocratic governments, hierarchy and terror/terrorists.

Looking to define secular freedom at the personal level Ratzinger turns to Karl Marx. Ironically Marx's vision of freedom summarises the popular understanding that nations like the United States aim to achieve for its citizens: "The state of affairs in the future Communist society will make it possible 'to do one thing today, another tomorrow, to go shooting in the morning and fishing in the afternoon and in the evening look after the cattle, to indulge in criticism after dinner, just as the fancy takes me.'"⁶ Freedom, Ratzinger adumbrates, "would mean that our own will was the only criterion for our action . . ."⁷ Once again freedom is understood in relation to authority, or the lack thereof.

Even with more radical conceptions of freedom this fundamental antithesis remains. This can be seen with Sartre's construal of freedom, what Ratzinger calls "anarchistic freedom."⁸ Ratzinger contends that Sartre separates freedom from truth, freeing the human person from the responsibilities that truth imposes. Unbound from truth the 'free' person is without direction and measure; all choice is arbitrary.

⁵ See President Bush's speech to the nation October 7, 2001: "I'm speaking to you today from the Treaty Room of the White House, a place where American Presidents have worked for peace. We're a peaceful nation. Yet, as we have learned, so suddenly and so tragically, there can be no peace in a world of sudden terror. In the face of today's new threat, the only way to pursue peace is to pursue those who threaten it. We did not ask for this mission, but we will fulfill it. The name of today's military operation is Enduring Freedom. We defend not only our precious freedoms, but also the freedom of people everywhere to live and raise their children free from fear" ["Presidential Address to the Nation," <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/10/20011007-8.html> (accessed March 11, 2013)]. Ratzinger insightfully wrote that since freedom is seen as the highest good for contemporary man "political policy must show that it contributes to the advancement of freedom in order to be accepted" Joseph Ratzinger, "Truth and Freedom," *ICR* 23, no. Spring (1996), p. 16.

⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian and World Religions*, trans. Henry Taylor, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), p. 232.

⁷ *Ibid.* Of course, as Ratzinger clarifies, Marx's view of freedom is dependent upon equality, the whole of society being free; thus individual freedom is initially dependent upon a structure of the whole and the hope is that such structures will produce a new man. Whereas, the West tends to begin with staunch individualism which is the mark of freedom and that leads to a free society, a reversal of Marx's view.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

Hence, Sartre's anarchistic freedom "does not redeem man; rather, it makes him a faulty creation, living without meaning."⁹

In the context of a critique of abortion laws, Ratzinger implicitly argues that if this vision of freedom disconnected with concern for the truth becomes the primary right, it will inevitably lead to the primacy of the will. This brings together the sense of freedom given by Marx and Sartre, and demonstrates that freedom without truth results in the 'law of the jungle' in which the rights and freedoms of the weak may be violated by the strong. The will can only remain free and act as the sole criterion for action if it is uninhibited by others. Therefore, freedom only belongs to the strong, to those who are able to remove any structure or authority that gets in the way.¹⁰

Schmemmann's depiction of secular freedom follows the same logic as Ratzinger's, with the exception that Schmemmann takes the logic one step further, painting a far bleaker picture. With the general understanding that freedom and authority are "two necessary poles of an essential dichotomy"¹¹ freedom can never be achieved, not even by the strongest. Authority in relation to freedom is always a limit, and where there is a thirst for freedom the very principle of limits is problematic. The "inescapable logic of the whole 'freedom-authority' dichotomy is that when freedom, in order to fulfil itself, annihilates authority, it also annihilates itself. For not only does it become meaningless, an empty form, without its opposition to and its revolt against authority but also, in fact, it is not fulfilled as long as the last 'authority' remains, which is death."¹² In this regard, Schmemmann sees Dostoevsky's character Kirrilov in the novel *The Possessed* as the perfect example. Kirrilov desires to be God, to be absolutely free like God, and so he commits suicide in order not to be beholden to death. Secular freedom, Schmemmann argues, when taken to its logical conclusion is anti-life.

According to both theologians, secular conceptions of freedom taken to their necessary end are meaningless. For Ratzinger freedom literally is meaningless because there are no poles of choice, every choice—if made freely—is equal; there is no framework for a better or worse choice, all choice is arbitrary. Furthermore, freedom is simply transformed into something that only the strong can possess. According to Schmemmann, death is the final limit that impinges upon modern freedom, and either freedom fails because it cannot overcome death or it leads to suicide. In both cases, there is fundamental agreement that any construal of freedom primarily understood

⁹ Ibid., p. 232.

¹⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*, trans. Brian McNeil, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), p. 61–64.

¹¹ Schmemmann, "Freedom in the Church," p. 180.

¹² Ibid., pp. 181–182.

as an external good in antinomic relationship with authority is not conducive to human flourishing, and ends in nihilism.

Ratzinger and Schmemmann not only construe secular freedom similarly, but also they respond in like fashion. Both of their responses are based upon a theological anthropology in which, contrary to Sartre, essence precedes existence. In other words, there is such a thing as human nature and both theologians concur that ‘relationality’ lies at the very centre of our nature or essence. With this vision Schmemmann sees freedom as part of what he calls ‘a triunity’, and in order to bring greater clarity to the discussion I have followed Schmemmann’s example by placing Ratzinger’s thoughts on the subject in a similar triptych form.

Schmemmann: Thanksgiving, Knowledge and Freedom

Schmemmann posits that anthropological maximalism is inherent to Christianity. We have been made in the image of God: so how can we have anything other than an anthropological maximalism? Unfortunately, this high ontological status has been a great stumbling block, actually *the* great stumbling block, the root of the Fall. Schmemmann argues, “no, man is not enticed by ‘evil’ but by himself, by his own divine image, by the divine miracle of his *I*. He heard the serpent’s whisper ‘you will be like gods’ not from outside, but from within, in the blessed fullness of paradise, and wanted to have life in himself and for himself.”¹³ At the same time our divine image is the essential motivator for our Christian worship, our gratitude. Holding together the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* with *imago Dei*, Schmemmann maintains that contingent human creatures should be led to their proper end, namely thanksgiving. In other words, the realisation that we, in all our splendour (*imago Dei*), are contingent beings (*creatio ex nihilo*) should inspire a free response of thanksgiving. However, all too often we forget that our life is not our own but, rather, that it is gifted to us. Correspondingly, our amnesiac response, the response of Adam and Eve in the Garden, is one of ingratitude.

Thanksgiving bookends our beginning and our end, for thanksgiving is the experience of paradise. This is realised in the entire oblation—Eucharist means thanksgiving—in which the Christian participant ascends through the Holy Spirit to the heavenly table, to paradise. Schmemmann writes, “We were created in paradise and for paradise, we were exiled from paradise, and Christ ‘leads us again into paradise.’”¹⁴ Paradise, the state or place of thanksgiving is where we

¹³ Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom*, trans. Paul Kachur, (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1987), p. 188.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

belong. The key idea here is relationship: Adam and Eve communed in the garden with God and likewise in resurrection the faithful who are hid with Christ in God will appear with Christ in glory (Col. 3:3–4) when God will be all in all (1 Cor 15:28).

Relationship with God, and not simply “god” but God our Father, is only through the Son, for no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him (Matt 11:27). The Son is the ultimate gift of the Holy Spirit: “It is the possession of Christ and my being possessed by Christ, it is my love for Christ and His love for me, it is my faith in Christ and His faith in me, it is ‘Christ in me’ and ‘I in Christ.’ And Christ is obedience”¹⁵ The Spirit is both freedom and life and He is these for us because through the Spirit we are in Christ, and in and through Christ we are obedient. Christ’s obedience, like our own, is not the surrendering of His freedom to an external authority, but the expression “precisely of His total unity with His Father, of His divinity itself! For not only is His obedience free (for any freedom can freely surrender itself), but it is the very manifestation, the very essence of His freedom.”¹⁶ Therefore, in Christ we enter into divine obedience which is true freedom (the very essence of freedom) and which transcends the dichotomy of freedom and authority. Here is another way of construing it, extending Schmemann’s notion: the second person of the Trinity freely gave Himself to the world in love and we are invited through His obedience to offer ourselves freely and in love to the Father. In this participatory relationship there are, by extension, no longer poles of restriction (false antithesis), for those who are hid in Christ will be with and in God who is all in all. If God is all in all and we are in Him then we are inheritors of the “all in all,” and there is nothing left to limit; therefore, the dichotomous poles no longer apply to the freedom found in obedience.

Schmemann posits, “just as it is impossible to know God and not give thanks, so it is impossible to give him thanks without knowing him. Knowing God transforms our life into thanksgiving, and thanksgiving transforms eternity into life everlasting.”¹⁷ Through thanksgiving we come to know God and knowing God is integral to knowledge of the world. Such knowledge—we could label it eucharistic knowledge—takes one beyond Kant’s divide in which one can know not simply *about* but *of* the world. Kant asserts that human knowledge is external, knowledge of appearances, and is closed off from what lies behind, the things in and of themselves. Schmemann concurs that this is the limit of human knowledge, but through gratitude we have intimate personal knowledge of the very ground of our

¹⁵ Schmemann, “Freedom in the Church,” p. 190.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Schmemann, *The Eucharist*, p. 176.

being and thus see truly, see with an eschatological lens. What this discloses is that everything can be possessed as life in Him. In return gratitude and worship are freely given and in so doing one fulfils his or her priestly ontology. In praise—that is, in communion with God—humans become that for which God called them into being with the result that we become truly free: beings in communion.

“Thanksgiving transforms eternity into life everlasting”¹⁸ and death, the final impediment that Kirrilov seeks to overcome via suicide, is no longer an obstacle in the way of freedom. The tyranny of death has been transformed by Christ’s death and resurrection. Death tried to swallow up life Himself, but He who is life could not be overcome. Life was and is victorious over death. Death, that is death as separation, does not sit at the end of human existence and is no longer our human *telos*. Christ is our end; love is our *telos*. Only a few months prior to his own death Schmemmann preached: “Everyone capable of thanksgiving is capable of salvation and eternal joy.”¹⁹ A thankful heart is evidence that life is recognised as gift; this is the first step in acknowledging that Christ not only gave us the gift of life but He is the gift of life that we enter into through death.²⁰

To summarise, when we in gratitude grasp true knowledge of God and participate in His life through Christ the seemingly “necessary poles of an essential dichotomy” are broken apart. Schmemmann’s triunity of thanksgiving, knowledge, and freedom achieves this in four ways. First, the grateful recognition that life as a gift leads to obedience and to an ‘internal’ relationship with God. Obedience is only an act because first it is ontological (internal). There is no external impediment since obedience is ontological, and therefore external authority never enters the scene. Second, death which was intended to separate and push apart, externalise, and distance all relationships has been transformed by Christ into the exact opposite. In fact, death has become the passage that draws us even further into the divine relationship.²¹ Third, death has been ‘replaced’ with Christ and thus our *telos*, the end of human existence, is Christ; in Him, our *telos*, we ‘inherit’ (or participate in) the “all in all.” In this divine relationship God gives us everything as life in Him—the world is opened up before us. Fourth, Christ has transformed our contingent nature. The contingency of existence (I do not need to

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Alexander Schmemmann, “Final Words,” *The Orthodox Church* 20, no. 2 (February 1984).

²⁰ The Eucharist is the highest expression of thanksgiving. In fact, Schmemmann would say that the Eucharist is thanksgiving itself/Himself.

²¹ It is important to note that Schmemmann emphatically rejects death as an escape from this life. Paradoxically biological death is both tragic and joyful in the sense that the cross precedes the resurrection.

exist or subsist) is retroactively transformed as we are, in baptism, united in relationship with life, Christ. We become adopted sons and daughters of God participating in the everlasting relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Contingency moves from ontological dependency to a loving family relationship; we no longer stand upon the tree of life, for we are grafted into the tree of life. As these four points demonstrate, Schmemmann's theological vision of freedom circumvents the antithesis between freedom and authority, and preserves the anthropological maximalism of our divine image by rooting freedom ontologically (internally) in 'relationality' and obedience.

Ratzinger: Truth, Worship and Freedom

The heart of anthropology for Ratzinger is summed up by the following: "If there is no truth about man, then he has no freedom. Only the truth makes us free."²² What is the truth about 'man'? Simply put, 'man' is created in the image of God and "can only rightly be understood from the viewpoint of God."²³ There is one human nature that each person carries within herself, and this is expressed by God in the Decalogue and realised in Christ. Freedom is found in recognising this truth and living by it. In contradistinction, the radical modern desire for freedom is the desire to be god, and not the God of Christianity. In fact, the god in this image turns out to be the Christian anti-God, the devil. The image is of a "divinity that is conceived as purely egotistical."²⁴ With this purely monotheistic-egoistic divinity, there is no bi-directional 'relationality'. Whereas, the true God, the Christian God is "of his own nature, being-for (Father), being from (Son), and being-with (Holy Spirit)."²⁵ This trinitarian relationship, the divine persons in perfect communion, is the image of God in which we are made. To be human is to be a person; that is, we are created to co-exist in relationship with others. The trinitarian relationship "the being 'from', 'for' and 'with' constitute the basic anthropological shape."²⁶ Human freedom can only be understood as that which is in co-existence with the freedom of other persons. In moving away from this relational ontology one becomes less free and at the same time less human; freedom without truth, truth of what it means to be human, is meaningless. While the modern desire to be god backfires and makes one less human (less of a person),

²² Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, p. 258.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

the Christian trinitarian recognition makes one truly human. Quite ironically this means that through the Christian life, exemplified in the living out of the Decalogue (in which God depicts himself and at the same time reveals who we are),²⁷ one lives out precisely the divinity of man, “and exactly that is freedom: the fusing of our being with the Divine Being and the resulting harmony of all with all.”²⁸ What modern pride seeks to attain itself, the Christian receives as gift from God.

Naturally this moves one to worship. In connection with Christian liturgy and the feast of the resurrection, Ratzinger claims: “In worship death is overcome and love is made possible. Worship is truth.”²⁹ Let us first look at love and worship as truth in light of prayer—an approach akin to Schmemmann’s liturgical perspective. In Christian prayer there are two basic components that fit under the concept of dialogue: revelation and response. In revelation we have a God who enters time and as *Logos*, word or speech, speaks to man. As a triune God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in which the Son is also *Logos*), God’s communication is part of His essence, and “since there is relationship within God himself, there can also be a participation in this relationship. Thus we can relate to God in a way that does not contradict his nature.”³⁰ As humans we are brought up into this relationship because of the Incarnation of the *Logos*. The Incarnation brings humanity into dialogue with God; God has entered into human speech and through the Spirit we can share, our response, in the human nature of Jesus Christ by sharing in His dialogue with God. Christ’s dialogue with God is centred upon God as *Abba*. The very use of this familial noun expresses Christ’s whole being. First, it highlights what Ratzinger calls an act of consent, which could also be called obedience, Christ’s ‘Yes’. The basic tenor of obedience, the ‘Yes’, is affirmative.³¹ In the Spirit and through the Son we echo this obedience and affirmation as we pray “Our Father.” Second, its affirmative tenor springs out of the knowledge that the ground of all being, *Abba*, is good. Therefore, all that He has made, even being itself, is good—I am loved. Third, prayer affirms God’s goodness and purifies human perception; whoever prays affirms the ground of his or her being, of all being, and therefore sees reality as it truly is. Correct vision reveals that the underlying structure of

²⁷ Tracey Rowland points out that for Ratzinger the Decalogue is not a set of laws but is divine gift. Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith: the Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 70.

²⁸ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, p. 254.

²⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Feast of Faith: Approaches to a Theology of the Liturgy*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), p. 66.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

the world is a personal God rather than material causal determinism. The rational foundation of the world is *logos* and the *Logos* is Christ, a person; thus “the belief that the original thought, whose being-thought is represented by the world, is not an anonymous, neutral consciousness but rather freedom, creative love, a person.”³² Ratzinger asserts that “to pray is to put oneself on the side of this love-causality, this causality of freedom, in opposition to the power of necessity.”³³ The truth about the world is that it is founded on love and thus freedom reigns. Prayer sets us free by enabling us to see the truth and make decisions accordingly, and consequently meaningfully.

In worship death is overcome and this is experienced in the Eucharist, the feast of the resurrection. Here one can truly use the term ‘feast’, for feast connotes celebration and freedom; even on a sociological level we celebrate and feast because in feasting we are set free from the concerns of everyday life. This is radically true for the feast of the resurrection because the freedom offered is “the liberation of the world and ourselves from death.”³⁴ In uniting ourselves with Christ through the Spirit we are joined in Christ’s resurrection and death is overcome. In other words, we participate in God’s ‘Yes’ to life and in this, death the final limiter of modern freedom, is no more.

Truth about what it means to be human leads to worship and both are integral to a conception of freedom that contrasts with arbitrary freedom and its logical end: the law of the jungle. There are four key movements to Ratzinger’s vision of freedom. First, by resting the truth about humans in God’s vision of humanity human life is given an innate unchanging essence. Human choice cannot be arbitrary for there is, so to speak, a grain to the universe, and choice is shaped by obligations. Our obligations are not external. They consist of what it means to be human; in fact, our internal obligations do not imprison but rather just the opposite, for “he who can merely choose between arbitrary options is not yet free. Only he who takes the measure of his action from within and who need obey no external constraint is free. Therefore, he is free who has become one with his essence, one with the truth itself. For he who is one with the truth no longer acts according to external necessities and constraints; essence, willing, and acting have coincided in him.”³⁵ This closely relates to the second point: God is fully person and this is expressed

³² Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J. R. Foster, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), p. 158.

³³ Ratzinger, *The Feast of Faith*, p. 32.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

³⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, “Freedom and Liberation: the Anthropological Vision of the Instruction *Libertatis Conscientia*,” in *Anthropology and Culture*, ed. David L Schindler and

in the community of the holy Trinity. God desires us to be like Him, a process the Church Fathers called *theosis*. The human desire to be free like God is a proper desire, but such freedom is revealed to us in the Trinity as freedom in relationship, not as radical independence. Third, by experiencing and affirming in worship that God is our Father we come to understand and know the heart of reality. The filial relationship between the Father and the Son demonstrates that the underlying structure of reality is love. Corporeal determinism and the physical laws of nature rest upon love, and thus creative freedom (love is always free) is the basis of all reality.³⁶ Freedom reigns because of love and love is relational. Co-existence is freedom, and the law of love, the essential structuring principle of reality, will overcome the law of the jungle. Fourth, the eucharistic hope of resurrection frees us from the fear of death. With the fear of death alleviated the final impediment has been removed, and life can be celebrated. In summary, Ratzinger's theological anthropology offers a profound vision of freedom that is impregnated with meaning and responsibility. This radically counters secular freedom and its external antithesis.

Comparing the Triunities

It is appropriate that Schmemmann places freedom in a triune relationship. In this way the form matches the content: freedom is in relationship. Although Ratzinger does not explicitly write of freedom in this manner it fits well with his approach, and by highlighting truth and worship it consolidates his numerous formulations of freedom. Ecumenically this exercise helps bring these two theologians, East and West, into dialogue, revealing the similarities. Broadly speaking, both theologians hold to some form of personalism in which 'relationality' is the core of personhood. This is seen in Ratzinger's Trinitarian divine prepositions 'for', 'from', and 'with' and in Schmemmann's filial understanding of obedience as Christ's essence. More specifically, the two triunities line up nicely. Thanksgiving and worship are integrally related if not arguably the same thing. Knowledge, specifically what Schmemmann calls knowledge *of*, carries the same meaning as truth does for Ratzinger. In *Of Water and the Spirit* Schmemmann asserts that 'objective knowledge' is 'nonprophetic' knowledge. What he means by 'objective knowledge' is the type of knowledge that sets fact over value, often called the fact-value distinction. With such knowledge only that

Nicholas J Healy, Joseph Ratzinger in *Communio* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), p. 69.

³⁶ Ratzinger, *The Feast of Faith*, p. 32.

which can be ‘objectively’ established is real and unchanging. Goodness, justice and all moral language, according to the fact-value paradigm, are simply relative values that are constantly subject to change. Ratzinger summarises the fact-value distinction citing the physicist Werner Heisenberg’s book *Physics and Beyond: Encounters and Conversations*: “‘Natural science is to some extent the way we approach the objective aspect of reality Religious faith, on the contrary, is the expression of a subjective decision, by means of which we determine for ourselves the values by which we direct ourselves in life.’”³⁷ In line with Ratzinger and Schmemmann, the Canadian political philosopher George Grant incisively and pithily describes the outcome of such an outlook, and writes that “the fact-value distinction led generally to the conclusion that there was no rational way of knowing that one way of life was nobler than another.”³⁸ Contrary to ‘objective knowledge,’ prophetic knowledge is knowledge of the world through God, a knowledge that goes beyond knowledge *about* to knowledge *of*. It is a type of sobriety in which there is harmony between soul and body, heart and reason. Prophetic knowledge is not against reason for “the gift of prophecy is not above and outside of true human nature restored by Christ, but rather the essential, the vertical dimension of all its components, of all human gifts and vocations. In Christ the essential knowledge has been given to us: the knowledge of Truth—about God and man, about the world and its ultimate destiny. And it is this Truth that makes us truly free”³⁹ And finally, freedom looks remarkably alike for both theologians. Freedom is found internally within our God-imagined ontology, and is witnessed and experienced in obedient relationship. In this relationship we become what we are truly meant to be; this takes place in one’s life in Christ in which one participates in His obedience and through it is transformed into a son or daughter of God. In worship and thanksgiving, which establishes the proper human and divine relationship, we encounter truth Himself. This encounter, best experienced in the Eucharist, reveals and gives knowledge of what is and consequently transforms us and the world into life.

³⁷ Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, pp. 138–139.

³⁸ George Grant, “The University Curriculum,” in *The George Grant Reader*, ed. William Christian and Sheila Grant, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), pp. 194–195.

³⁹ Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit: a Liturgical Study of Baptism*, (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), p. 103.

Conclusion: The Prophetic and the Royal Priesthood

Ratzinger and Schmemmann share a reverence and love for liturgy. This leads them to place great emphasis on conceiving of the relationship between form and content. Ratzinger expresses this well by referring to Christian worship as the right way to relate to God, which is essential for proper human existence and “gives our present life its proper measure.”⁴⁰ With this in mind, freedom should be presented in a form that fits with the Christian faith, the liturgical life, and it is fair to say that both theologians match their form well, yet there are differences in what is emphasised. Contrary to Schmemmann’s assumption, however, the differences do not divide. Ratzinger’s criticism of secular freedom and his positing of freedom as relational and ontological, rather than external, place him side by side with Schmemmann. Differing in emphasis, Schmemmann accentuates thanksgiving and Ratzinger truth. Thanksgiving is Schmemmann’s starting point for a theological anthropology, while truth is Ratzinger’s starting point. Nonetheless, as demonstrated above, their triunities line up, Schmemmann’s ‘thanksgiving’ parallels Ratzinger’s interpretation of ‘worship’ and Ratzinger’s ‘truth’ meshes with Schmemmann’s ‘knowledge’. Certainly this difference of emphasis does not justify Schmemmann’s distancing of the Orthodox view from the Roman Catholic.⁴¹ But still we must ask why there is a difference of emphasis? This difference may best be explained as a reflection of their different methodologies.

As a liturgical theologian Schmemmann naturally gravitates to and emphasises the royal priesthood, hence the language of thanksgiving: the priest, in Christ and through the Spirit, offers everything up to God in gratitude. The first chapter in *For the Life of the World*⁴² is an excellent example of this priestly emphasis, a recurring theme in Schmemmann’s books and articles. Schmemmann accentuates the ‘royal priesthood’, amalgamating the priestly and the kingly, rather than simply ‘priesthood’ because the kingly and priestly ontology belong together: “If the property of the king is to have power and dominion, that of the priest is to offer sacrifice, i.e. to be mediator between God and creation, the ‘sanctifier’ of life through its inclusion into the

⁴⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), p. 21.

⁴¹ Certainly there is much to be discussed and thought through in regard to how freedom should be implemented in the Church. Does Ratzinger’s view of freedom reflect his understanding of the Church’s hierarchy and its role, or is he inconsistent? The same question can be asked of Schmemmann. This is an important and interesting question, but must be left for another article.

⁴² Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, 2 ed., (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1973).

divine will and order”.⁴³ Interestingly, the ontological union between the priestly and kingly accentuates freedom. The king has power and dominion so that he can, as priest, give everything back to God, and in this priestly act he is truly a king rather than a slave to the world.

Ratzinger emphasises the prophetic, hence the accentuation of truth, a theme repeated again and again not least in his monograph *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*. This emphasis seems to fit well with the fact that Ratzinger is a systematic theologian. Furthermore, it corresponds with his character not to mention his role as prefect of the CDF and, more recently, as Pope. In an interview with Ratzinger, Peter Seewald alluded to Ratzinger’s prophetic voice, claiming that it has been validated over time. Ratzinger deflected the attention and responded in a prophetic manner highlighting that the Church must always avoid capitulating to the *Zeitgeist*.⁴⁴

A fruitful way of bringing these two theologians and their respective emphases together is by perceiving them in light of the threefold-office (*munus triplex*). Schmemmann, in *Of Water and the Spirit*, unequivocally posits the three-fold office. For Ratzinger, writing as Pope Benedict XVI, the three-fold office is implicitly expressed, or at least a parallel can be seen, in *Deus Caritas Est*. In this encyclical he asserts that the Church’s dedication to service (the kingly office) is intimately linked to her prophetic utterance of the Word and to the celebration of the sacraments (the priestly office).⁴⁵ Although the threefold office is not explicitly found in Ratzinger’s writings, it is consistent with Catholic teaching: *Lumen Gentium* (chapter 4) explicitly makes use of the threefold office of Christ and our Christian participation in this office.⁴⁶ With this in mind, perhaps it is not too naively optimistic to claim that Ratzinger’s and Schmemmann’s different approaches to freedom are complementary, integrating the

⁴³ Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, p. 95.

⁴⁴ Joseph Ratzinger and Peter Seewald, *Salt of the Earth: Christianity and the Catholic Church At the End of the Millennium*, trans. Adrian Walker, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), p. 82.

⁴⁵ Thomas D Williams, “Deus Caritas Est and Catholic Social Thought,” *Alpha Omega* no. 1 (2009), p. 48. Williams points out that for Pope Benedict XVI the *munus regale* becomes an office of service. However, it is interesting that Ratzinger makes little use of the threefold office. See Maximilian Heinrich Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology: Fundamentals of Ecclesiology With Reference to Lumen Gentium*, trans. Michael J. Miller, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), p. 504.

⁴⁶ See also *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., 1241.

threefold office and constituting, to use Pope John Paul II's metaphor, the 'two lungs of the Church'.⁴⁷

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⁴⁷ John Paul II. *Ut Unum Sint* (On Commitment to Ecumenism). Vatican Web site. May 25, 1995, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint_en.html, sec. 54. (accessed November 5, 2013).