

Excerpts from “The God of Contemporary Atheism” by
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Sartre’s God and the Christian’s God

Part Three

2. God Wills and Respects Man’s Freedom

God respects man’s freedom even when it is man’s desire to sever the relationship with God. God honors this liberty, given as a love gift, to the extent that He allows man to use it even against the giver. God respects man to the extent of allowing him to go to the utmost limits in his rebellion. This is the meaning of hell. Hell resides in God’s allowing man to refuse His love and reject Him forever should he desire to do so. However, it is impossible for God to reject man. Louis Evely writes, “It is possible for man to reject and forget God, but God cannot renounce or forget us. It is possible for man to relinquish sonship but it is impossible for God not to be father.” Hell is not dreadful retaliation administered by a sadistic God over man who had disobeyed his rules; but it is suffering resulting from having rejected God radically and completely; as it would be conflicting to the deep needs of man’s nature. Hell is the remotest sign of God’s respect of human freedom and negative reflection of His love.

God’s respect for man’s freedom means that freedom is not snatched from God purposefully or covetously as is depicted in the “The Flies”. Rather, it is a gift from God to man. Jupiter of “the Flies” contradicts himself because on one hand he gives man freedom but on the other hand he tries to blind him to its inherent existence within him and stifle it in his heart. However, God of the Holy Book of Revelation has none of these contradictions. He desires man free because He desires man to be like Him on His image. That is what the early church fathers teach. St. Gregory of Nyssa writes, “Freedom is the likeness to the One Who is the absolute Master with no master over Him, and this likeness was given to us, humans, by God from the beginning as is confirmed in the book of Acts, *“for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’”* (Acts 17:28).”

That is what contemporary thinkers believe. For example, Simon Neal writes, “God, because of His love for us, desired to put a kind of equality between us and Him... So, He gave us absolute freedom to either come to Him or to illusively deify ourselves and reject Him.”

God rejoices in man’s freedom and does not dread it like Jupiter of “The Flies”. He rejoices in it just as a father with genuine fatherhood who would rejoice at seeing his son has become a man; loving him not with the dependant love of a child but with the independency of a mature man. God says that the subservience of all slaves does not equal one beautiful glance from a free man, in other words, God abhors the submission of slaves but is ready to give everything for the sake of beautiful attention, obedience, love and fidelity coming forth from a free man.

Thus freedom is not only a right given to us but a duty demanded by God Who does not wish to form a relation except with free people. God accepts only free human beings; and Christianity is freedom in Christ. Insistent Salvation is impossible and useless.

What Sartre claims in his book, “Existentialism: a Human Philosophy” is not true. He allegedly claims that God’s relation to man is like the relation between a manufacturer and his manufactured paper scissors. However, to the God of the Holy Book of Revelation, man is not a “thing”; as God does not wish to make a thing out of man but God’s creation of man means providing him from His existence; that is to say making him participate in His existence and subsequently in His freedom. He who has experienced love from free men will not find meaning in slaves prostrations. For God has said, “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15).

God wishes that man comes willingly not forcibly to Him. Therefore, instead of enforcing His being on us, as scientific truths do, He withdraws in order for us to have a chance to come to Him in the freedom of love. Science differs from religion in that the former is persistent providing neither freedom of choice nor any need for it. But in faith there is freedom in which resides the courage of Christ Who is the subject of non compelling faith and love. Christ does not appear in a form that urges faith but in the form of a slave who dies an atrocious death. Therefore, free choice and courageous love are required in order for one to see in Christ’s image, the insulted slave, the sublime power that belongs to the Son of God.

3. God Puts Himself at the Disposition of Man’s Freedom

Not only does God respect man’s freedom but, somehow, puts Himself at the disposition of this freedom. The Omniscient willed to be, somehow, under the disposal of man. Louis Evely wrote, “God loves us.... This is not a mere statement... but that we have authority over Him.”

We have “authority over those who love us.... and children know that ...for in spite of their weakness shown in their anger and obstinacy to obtain their desires, they give us a perverted proof of their assurance in our love for them. In the same manner we are important in the sight of those who love us; and God loves us.”

“Because God willed to love us, He chose to grant us authority over Him.” Isn’t that the deep meaning in the incidence of Jacob’s wrestling with the angel? There, we see God, in the form of angel, making Himself available to the will of Jacob who said to Him, “I will not leave you until you bless me.” Henceforth Jacob acquired the name “Israel” which means “the powerful against God” (Genesis 32:28). Isn’t this power resulting from the fact that God wished to link His power to man’s demand? “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you” (John 15:16). That is why it is said that God “has no weaponry before people’s prayers.” Man can say “No” to God; but God has committed Himself to the extent that from now on He would never say “No” to man. That is what St. Paul confirms in saying “For all the promises of God in Him *are* Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us” (2 Corinthians 1:20). Presbyter George Khedr, in his talk about “God’s Destiny”, said that “God, by deviating from himself, made himself in need of the creations.... God bequeathed some of His

power when He had created us free; and agreed to have His picture on earth either revealed or concealed and to be seen or locked up.”

Since the foundation of this existence, God has made Himself part of the destiny and history of existence... and proved it clearly when He stripped Himself in a manger making Himself hostage to Mary. Consequently after having put Himself captive in the hands of man, He became susceptible to life and death. Therefore, God is neither covetous nor authoritarian unless granted consent. He does not consent except to whoever welcomes Him. God made Himself man's invitee, a guest of the free man who either welcomes or repels Him. God alienates Himself when we expel Him. God is man's refugee as well as his guest.

We are masters over God. Is not He the one who said, “I came not to be served but to serve and offer myself ransom for many?” Is not He the One on His knees at our feet ready to wash them as He had done with the disciples in the upper room? Isn't all of Christ in your hands to love or to kill Him?

God is infinitely rich with love and not possessiveness. Whoever is rich in love is akin to poverty. God is the limitlessness and infinite ability; but it is His limitless and infinitely able love that is capable of condescending to the extent of nothingness. How far is Jupiter of “The Flies”, and whom Sartre calls “God” in his various writings, from the One shown to us in the Holy Book of Revelation in the person of Jesus Christ Who seeks acceptance from man not for the sake of domineering over him but for making him partner of His life and bounties! “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20).