

In the last few centuries, nothing has been more valued than freedom. At the same time, however, nothing has been more threatened. Together with an exaltation of personal liberty on the part of many, there have also appeared schools of thought which limit and even deny human freedom. Some thinkers thus understand personal decisions merely as side effects determined by one's culture, by economic factors, or even by physical processes. Others, by contrast, affirm freedom but understand it as a *completely undetermined* capacity. Freedom thus comes to mean being entirely unbound and all forms of personal commitment or determination consequently become viewed as hindrances and limitations of one's freedom.

Understanding the meaning of freedom takes on greater urgency during one's youth. For young people, moreover, this problem is not an abstract one but rather personal and concrete. Contemplating their future, various unavoidable and urgent questions arise: Can my current decisions already affect my entire future life, in spite of all of its unforeseeable events? Moreover, are such decisions an unfair limitation of my freedom? The question of freedom is also urgent with respect to one's present. Our small daily choices are a constant invitation to live coherently as well as a continual opportunity to improve our world. Living freely is not only a question of radical choices made in decisive moments. Each person must also choose one's path in life as a whole and then follow it with persistent determination.

Pope Benedict XVI has forcefully expressed his confidence in human freedom. He often points out that decisions which give rise to serious commitments "are the only ones that allow one to grow, to move forward and achieve something worthwhile in life. They are the only ones which do not destroy freedom, but rather teach it the right direction in which to go" (*Interview*, 16.7.2006). At the same time, the Pope has also affirmed that freedom is not an absolute reality: freedom can only be understood in relation to the truth. Thus the *value of one's decisions*—both those which affect one's entire life and those made each and every day—is judged by the *truth of the convictions* which underlie them. In the end, one's commitment to the truth is the only reliable basis upon which free decisions can be faithfully maintained over the course of time. *Living freedom decisively* is thus first of all *living the truth decisively*.

The 2011 UNIV Forum wants to contribute to the ongoing contemporary reflection on freedom, commitment, and the value of personal convictions, while doing so from a perspective which is both profound and practical. The following are possible fields of enquiry:

- **daily personal decisions:** their necessity and relevance, especially in fields like medicine, business, public opinion, etc.;
- **freedom's dimensions:** freedom *from* and freedom *for*; What role do personal convictions and the moral virtues play in making daily choices?;
- **business ethics:** responsible decision making, the value of loyalty;
- **university education** and the formation of convictions;
- **freedom and history:** big and small **decisions that have changed history**, concrete examples: the dedication of Petrarch or of Alexander Fleming; **work and inspiration:** their role in the great scientific, artistic, cultural and social revolutions;
- the **youth and serious decisions:** Can young people make important and lasting decisions?; concrete examples: George Washington, L. Braille, Thomas Edison, Alexander the Great, etc.;
- **freedom and service:** personal commitment and the "new narcissism."

The Theme of the 44th Annual International UNIV Forum is

Living Freedom Decisively

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For more information in the coming months, visit www.univforum.org