NECESSARY TRANSFORMATION?
THE REFORMATION AND
MODERNITY IN CONTROVERSY
OVER FREEDOM

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(Translated by Piotr J. Malysz)

1. POSING THE QUESTION1

The Lutheran Church understands itself as the "Church of Freedom." It does so, at any rate, according to the 2006 "Discussion Paper of the Council of the Evangelical Church of Germany," which bears the subtitle "Perspectives for the Lutheran Church in the 21st Century."2 The concept of freedom plays a decisive role in the self-understanding of Protestantism. Even if it is not the decisive role, the concept, like no other, seems to safeguard the identity and historical continuity of Protestant churches and their theology, and in particular to overcome the fracture between the old and new Protestantism. In his 1520 treatise, Luther made freedom into the foundation of "the whole of Christian

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1. For Edgar Thaidigsmann on his seventieth birthday. This paper was presented at the 2011 fall conference of the Lutherakademie Sondershausen-Ratzeburg.
life,” while Melanchthon, in his 1521 Loci, captured the reformational self-understanding in the pointed thesis that lets itself be heard as a clarion call: “libertas est christianismus [Christianity is freedom].” For many this call seems to harmonize well with the modern call to freedom, such as the one issued, for example, by the French Revolution (“Liberty!” together with “Equality!” and “Fraternity!”). According to Hegel, the political understanding of freedom in his own day was but an outcome of the religious understanding of freedom in the Reformation. In view of that, as the story goes, he would raise a glass twice a year in order to drink to freedom: on 31 October, and on 14 July, the day of the capturing of the Bastille. For Hegel, there exists no conflict between the reformational and modern understanding of freedom; there is rather complete harmony.

In evaluating the relation between the modern and reformational understanding of freedom, much depends on how one defines the relation between continuity and discontinuity and on whether, in this task, one allows oneself to be guided by the perspective of historical impact or that of reception history. Subject to evaluation is a historical process that does not develop in a linear fashion, above all not as a historical impact whose causality is understood to be mechanical. From the standpoint of reception history this process develops rather as challenge and response (Toynbee), so that what is given does in its own way demand, and is taken as, a challenge that finds a specific response. For this reason, this process is not subject to the fate of causal and irreversible determination. Rather, to each response there belongs a moment of freedom. Otherwise critique and metacritique would remain impossible.

This freedom receives no recognition in Emanuel Hirsch’s discussion of “destiny [Schicksal],” a perspective that informs his judgment on the

3. Bayer references here the German text in D. Martin Luthers Werke [hereafter, WA], 69 vols. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–1993), 7:11,8–10, where, in the dedicatory letter to Pope Leo X, Luther writes: “This is a small booklet, if one considers the paper; but captured in it is the whole of the Christian life in brief form, if one grasps the meaning” (my translation). Cf. Luther’s Works [hereafter, LW], 55 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955–1986), 31:343. It should be noted that the German text of Luther’s treatise, referenced by Bayer, is a free translation of the Latin version, rendered into English in LW 31. Please note that, throughout this article, if no English edition is cited for quotations, the translation is always mine.—Trans.


subject of the “transformation of Christian thought in modernity.” For Hirsch, the destiny that awaits the Christian faith in modernity is inexorable. “The gate to the Christian past has been slammed shut for all of us ever since this destiny has come upon us. Only in the mode of longing and self-deception can the person on whom the reflection of the past hundred years has done its work still have a relation to the old form of Christian faith and thought.”

It is correct to say that we do not choose the historical—social, political, cultural, and spiritual—situation in which we live. We cannot negate it in an abstract fashion and allow the reformational and modern understanding of freedom to break apart in a diastasis. The decisions made, for example, by Semler and Schleiermacher are events that have given rise to an epoch and work themselves out in a fate-like fashion insofar as no contemporary can escape them. Nevertheless, to each person belongs the freedom of—reasonable—opposition and metacritical reorientation. The decisions that define neo-Protestantism—the anthropological turn, above all—are no stoicheia tou kosmou (Gal 4:3, 9; Col 2:20), no elemental powers before which everyone must bow, as Hirsch would have it. What is commanded, in place of submission, is a standpoint and a response, which, if necessary, may consist in opposition. No one has to practice theology “under” the conditions of modernity, but rather—for the innermost theological reason, that is, for the sake of the universal validity of the Gospel—one can, as indicated, assume a critical stance toward them. Readiness for engagement makes the theologian stand in concrete opposition: as a contemporary in opposition, just like Johann Georg Hamann.

This said, I propose that freedom be taken as a “critical concept for conveying a principle [Vermittlungsbe griff].” The concept of freedom, given its history as well as its semantic field, is suited like no other to produce a fruitful struggle for the truth of the Christian faith and life in relation to the respective historical context. If this truth should be compromised through indiscriminate adjustment to contemporary life, or to the same extent, through fundamental and abstract antagonism toward it, if it should in contrast to both these extremes be perceived as timely in that

it does not quite fit the times, then the theology that serves it dare not shy away from controversies. As a theology that does not avoid controversy and a science that does not avoid conflict, it moves beyond wholesale adoption and wholesale rejection of the understanding of freedom offered by philosophy and the human sciences. It neither calms nor immunizes itself with a diastasis of reformational and modern understanding of freedom, nor does it assert a fundamental identity or the possibility of a smooth appropriation. Rather than denying controversy, as is done by the thesis of the necessary transformation, it attempts far more to articulate itself, by means of direct confrontation, within the controversy itself.\footnote{For a concrete implementation of this program, I can refer the reader to my book, \textit{Leibliches Wort: Reformation und Neuzeit im Konflikt} (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), especially the dispute with Marcuse, Descartes, and Feuerbach.}

If, in controversy-laden exchange, theology should use the concept of freedom in this way, as a critical concept for conveying a principle, then the concept as such does not necessitate a theory of convergence between the reformational and modern understandings of freedom.\footnote{For a metacritical treatment of the theory of one such convergence, see Bayer, "Law and Freedom: A Metacritique of Kant," in \textit{Freedom in Response}, 152.} It makes it possible, rather, to deal with the difference between the intentions of the reformational and modern understandings of freedom. This difference corresponds to the manner in which faith remains foreign within thought. When so approached, the Reformation and modernity do not break apart with no relation whatsoever but, without eclipsing their mutual difference, remain related to each other.

Now that the question is posed in this manner, it is certain to be so wide-ranging and multidimensional that it cannot be comprehensively addressed in the framework given here. What follows (3) can bring into view only some of the focal points of the conversation between the reformational and modern understanding of freedom, a conversation that, historically, has now gone on for centuries. First of all, however, we wish to focus on the heart of Luther's understanding of freedom in order to acquire the necessary orientation (2).

2. LUTHER'S UNDERSTANDING OF FREEDOM IN BRIEF

Luther's interest in human freedom, to be sure, has a \textit{universally} anthropological character because it concerns what pertains to every human being. However, it is, as such, a thoroughlygoingly soteriological interest: it is oriented toward salvation or perdition, toward life or death. The human being is regarded as a \textit{sinner}—as a creature that, in misusing his original freedom, has always contradicted this freedom and has of his own accord...
forfeited and lost it together with his image of God (Rom 3:23). The human faculty of the will is in this radical sense unfree, a *servum arbitrium*. The human being regains the forfeited freedom only through Jesus Christ, who again grants and imparts freedom to the person; it is a new, definitive freedom, that “Christ has gained for him and given to him.” It is Christ-freedom. For this reason human freedom is concretely the freedom of a Christian. Where the faculty of the will at the root of one’s existence is concerned, one who is not a Christian is unfree; such a person remains suspended, and entangles himself further in contradicting his destiny.

What reveals this contradiction to the person is God’s demanding will: God’s Law. It uncovers this contradiction; it uncovers sin. The Law convicts me of sin as a misuse of my original freedom and judges and condemns me.

Without reference to the accusing and judging Law, it is impossible to understand the freedom that Christ has newly brought, which has newly come through, with, and in him. Without such reference, this freedom is meaningless and pointless. In the Law, you hear

God speak to you, how all your life and your works are nothing before God, but you would have to perish eternally with all that is in you. If you believe this rightly, how you are guilty, then you must despair of yourself and confess the truth of Hosea’s words: “I will destroy you, O Israel; who can help you?” [13:9]. In order that you may come out of and from yourself, God places you before his beloved Son Jesus Christ and through his living and comforting Word has this said to you: You ought to surrender yourself to him with a steadfast faith and trust in him anew. On account of this very faith, all of your sins shall be forgiven you and all your perishing vanquished, and you shall be justified, truthful, freed, godly, and all the commandments shall be fulfilled, and you shall be free from all things, as St. Paul says (Rom 1:17): “A righteous Christian lives only by his faith,” and (Rom 10:4), “Christ is the end and the fullness of all the commandments for those who believe in him.”

The freedom of a Christian, the newly created freedom of a human being, the restitution of his corrupted and forfeited original freedom is, as Christ-freedom, *freedom from the Law*. This is its first characteristic. Christ has ended and abolished the Decalogue, including the Sermon on the Mount, which radicalizes it: “Christ is the end of the Law” (Rom 10:4). However, this *abrogatio legis*, this radical abrogation of the Law does not in any way imply that God’s Law is no longer in force, for it is and remains “holy, just and good” (Rom 7:12). One ought to continue to do the works of the Law; for the Law no longer condemns me if I do not fulfill...
The abrogation of the Law (*abrogatio legis*) indicates precisely that only the Law's condemnation, which I have earned, no longer applies to me: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1). Freedom from the Law is as such *freedom in Christ*. This is the second characteristic of the freedom of a Christian.

The condemnation of the Law thus no longer applies to me, because God himself took it upon himself in his Son, dealt with it in his self, removed us from it and into himself, into his holy fellowship. Consequently, the most important affirmation of Luther's doctrine of freedom centers on 2 Cor 5:21 and Gal 3:13. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). And Gal 3:13, "the key to the Pauline understanding of Jesus' death": "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree' [Deut 21:22f]" (Gal 3:13).

God himself has in his Son taken upon himself our unfreedom, or to put it better, our ruinous and lethally willful misuse of our original freedom, so that we might be ransomed, saved, and free. This ransom, this acquittal is something completely different, for example, from an idea of reason in Kant's sense. Freedom in a theological sense has nothing to do with an intelligible determination of the person but is rather constitutionally tied up with that concrete historical event in which Jesus Christ on the cross "purchased" for us freedom. At the same time freedom is constitutionally tied up with that concrete historical event in which Jesus Christ as the living Lord "distributes" it to us as the "external Word" of the sacramental sermon: he promises, administers, and gives his very self in, with, and under the "external Word"; takes us up into himself, into the space of his being; and gives us a share in his priestly and royal freedom. In short, we have our freedom from the Law in Jesus Christ.

In this Christ-space of freedom that is created and sustained through the "external Word" (*das leibliche Wort*, *verbum externum*), there takes place the "happy exchange and struggle." This space is a concrete, physical space of history, bound up with the water of baptism and the bread and

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15. "Therefore, the law has been abrogated, not that it not be kept, but in order that, even though not kept, it not condemn" (Melanchthon, *Loci communes*, 125).
16. "Our freedom consists in this, that every right of accusing and condemning us has been taken away from the law" (Melanchthon, *Loci communes*, 121).
20. WA 7: 25,34.
wine of the Lord’s Supper—the substitutionary space where Jesus Christ, “true God, begotten of the Father in eternity, and also a true human being, born of the Virgin Mary,” takes away from me the Law’s condemnation, pulls me out of this condemnation, and takes my sin upon himself, so that in its place he might give me his own righteousness, his life, his brightness, and the fullness of his grace.

Liberation from condemnation through the Law is—we are now focusing on the third characteristic—as new freedom at the same time freedom for the fulfillment of the Law, because Christ is not only the end of the Law but also its “fullness.”

The new freedom is freedom for the Law’s fulfillment “in free love”; freedom not only from but also for. It is a freedom marked by a new perception of the self, the world, and God. In this perception the fulfillment of the Law is no longer a soteriological burden; it is no longer a question of salvation or self-constitution. And I—no longer locked up in myself under the tyranny and compulsion of the Law, insofar as sin turns to the Law and makes use of it—am again brought into the unconstrained and the open. With heart, mouth, and hands, I am brought to an astonishing and active awareness of God. This awareness takes place in the return of the received gift to God through thanksgiving and praise, as well as in passing it on, in that in love, I “give myself as a Christ to my neighbor.”

I let Christ first become a “sacramentum” or rather “donum,” to me, but then, on account of the freedom guaranteed to me through the “sacramentum,” I take him as exemplum.

This new—threefold—freedom to which we are liberated through Christ is characterized by a self-forgetfulness, understood as a thoroughly relational and excentric constitution of the self. Luther gives a classic

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22. *WA* 7: 23,5. That the fulfillment of the Law is the reverse side of its abrogation is also emphasized by Melanchthon in his 1521 *Loci communes*.
23. *WA* 7: 30,22.
25. The fundamental distinction between faith and love, which manifests itself in the two-part division of Luther’s freedom treatise, is underscored with particular clarity in *A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels*, the opening piece of the Wartburgpostille (1522). Luther writes: “The chief article and foundation of the gospel is that before you take Christ as an example, you accept and recognize him as a gift, as a present that God has given you and that is your own” (*LW* 35:119; *WA* 10:1, 11,12–18), and therefore “that you do not make Christ into a Moses, as if Christ did nothing more than teach and provide examples as the other saints do, as if the gospel were simply a textbook of teachings or laws” (*LW* 35:119; *WA* 10:1, 10,20—11,1). Christ as a gift creates faith, Christ as an example provides a model for works of love: “Christ as a gift nourishes your faith and makes you a Christian. But Christ as an example exercises your works. These do not make you a Christian. Actually they come forth from you because you have already been made a Christian. As widely as a gift differs from an example, so widely does faith differ from works, for faith possesses nothing of its own, only the deeds and life of Christ. Works have something of your own in them, yet they should not belong to you but to your neighbor” (*LW* 35:120; *WA* 10:1, 12,17—13,2).
expression to this in the concluding thesis of his freedom tractate: "A Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor: in Christ through faith, in the neighbor through love."26

"See, this is the true, spiritual, Christian freedom, which makes the heart free from all sins, laws and commandments; it excels all other freedoms just as heaven does the earth."27 Luther can thus distinguish between "other freedoms"—"all other liberty, which is external"28—and specifically Christian freedom. He distinguishes the spiritual (Christ-) freedom (which, to be sure, is imparted through the "external Word," and thus in a worldly fashion) from worldly freedom, which belongs in the realm of iustitia civilis. We must come back to this point, but we must first attend to the significance that Luther ascribes to the conscience in connection with his understanding of freedom.

3. FOCAL POINTS IN THE CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE REFORMATIONAL AND MODERN UNDERSTANDING OF FREEDOM

3.1 Pure Interiority of Conscience?

It goes without saying that the conscience plays an important role for Luther. It is the anthropological locale where the Law and the Gospel come into conflict, where they wrestle with each other, as Luther captured dramatically in his exposition of Gal 3:13 in the later Lectures on Galatians.29 What is of decisive importance, however, is not conscience as such, but what takes place in this locale. To put it differently, what is at stake is how and by what the conscience is determined, formed, and established: through the condemning pronouncement of the Law, or through the freedom-proclaiming and thus liberating address of the Gospel. The conscience is either an enslaved and unfree conscience, or a liberated and confident one.30

It is in this light that Luther's appearance before the emperor and the Reich in Worms in 1521 is to be understood. The scene has etched itself

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26. WA 7: 38,6–8.
27. WA 7: 38,12–14.
28. LW 31:371; WA 7: 69:21f ("alias libertates externas").
30. Alongside of the freedom treatise, Luther's understanding of the freedom of conscience as a determinate liberation of conscience is documented in a particularly noteworthy manner in his writing The Judgment of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows (1521). See esp. Luther's defining statement on the nature of Christian freedom: "Christian or evangelical freedom, then, is a freedom of conscience [libertas conscientiae] which liberates the conscience from works. Not that no works are done, but no faith is put in them" (LW 44:298; WA 8: 606,30–32).
powerfully into the collective cultural consciousness. It often serves to legitimate the neo-Protestant postulate of the immediacy of God for an individual believer who, in his conscience, "is alone with himself and God, who stands over against him." If we fail to take notice that such appeals to this very scene make the relation to God abstract, indeterminate, and lacking in externality, then it is quite legitimate to speak of one's obligation only to one's own, individual conscience, which does not let itself be questioned in regard to concrete decisions and, correspondingly, can hardly provide an argumentative explanation of itself. However, at Worms Luther by no means appeals to a conscience that is unconstrained—free-floating, as it were—or related only to itself, responsible only to itself, and in the end beyond having to give an account of itself. Rather, the verdict of his conscience is determined authoritatively through Scripture and tradition. For Luther's confession at Worms literally goes as follows: "capta conscientia in verbis dei," "[my] conscience is captive to the Word of God," it is determined by the Law and the Gospel. Luther orients himself to the following hierarchy of authorities:

1. Holy Scripture
2. the confessions of the Church
3. the decisions of the Councils
4. the voices of the Church Fathers
5. the rational character of the approach to Scripture; here he lets himself be persuaded only by "rationes evidentiores."

What completely belies the claim that makes Luther a proponent of a freedom given with the immediacy of God for an individual believer is Luther's understanding of the "external Word" and of the presence of Christ in the pastoral office. Briefly to speak to Luther's understanding of the sacramental Word, he vigorously upheld the "ex opere operato," the objective validity of the performed sacrament in the sense of "ex verbo

32. "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason [ratione evidente] (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience" (Luther at the Diet of Worms [1521], LW 32:112; WA 7: 838,4-8). See also Kurt-Victor Selge, "Capta conscientia in verbis dei. Luthers Widerrufsverweigerung in Worms," in Der Reichstag zu Worms von 1521. Reichspolitik und Luthersache, ed. Fritz Reuter (Worms: Stadtarchiv, 1971), 180-207.
33. See, for example, the "Declaration" preceding Luther's Explanation of the Ninety-Five Theses (1518), LW 31:83; WA 1: 529–30; as well as as Ad dialogum Silvestri Prieratis de potestate papae responsio (1518), WA 1, 647.
dicto," as had been the case before him.35 By no means does Luther advocate a pure interiority or immediacy of God. For him the question is not whether human, creaturely, and institutional mediation is in general necessary, but how and where it happens. He insists that God does not wish to speak to humans or to impart himself to them—thus creating faith—without the creaturely water of Baptism, or without the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper, fruit of the earth and of human work. We shall have to clarify later how precarious it is for the constitution of faith when the modern Narcissus takes possession of himself; we shall then have to correct the neo-Protestant praise of pure interiority through “praise of exteriority.”36

3.2 Limiting the Authority of the Temporal Government for the Sake of Freedom of Conscience

According to Luther’s understanding, the freedom of conscience, which is identical with faith, comes from the physical, oral, external, and in this sense “public” Word of Christ, accompanied by the Holy Spirit, who freely works through this Word. Insofar as this is where freedom of conscience originates, faith can hardly be established though governmental, and in this sense “public,” coercion. It rests, after all, on the free—Spirit-wrought—assent of the heart. No one can compel anyone to faith. In the second part of his treatise on temporal authority, Luther writes: “How he believes or disbelieves is a matter for the conscience of each individual, and since this takes nothing away from the temporal authority the latter should be content to attend to its own affairs and let men believe this or that as they are able and willing, and constrain no one by force. For faith is a free act, to which no one can be forced.”37

Faith is, therefore, no longer a private thing, which is what, for understandable reasons, it became in modernity.38 Because faith comes from the external Word, the public sphere established by the government must give space to this Word, and together with it to faith, and must protect it. If the government, as totalitarian governments do, encroaches on this Word- and faith-wrought sphere, on God’s “spiritual” authority, it must meet with (passive) resistance. The competence and powers of the gov-


37. Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed (1525); LW 45:108; WA 11: 264, 16–20. That “one cannot force anyone into Christianity” (LW 45:102; WA 11: 260, 8f) and may not do so had already been asserted by Augustine (Epistolae, libr. II, ep. XCIII). Unfortunately, neither Augustine nor Luther was consistent in following this insight.

government are clearly delimited; hence it must be asked "to what extent" one owes it obedience. In this way Luther's brilliant distinction between God's "spiritual" and "temporal" authority (Regiment) functions as an antidote for the later absolutism, as well as for totalitarian systems of the twentieth century; it became one of the roots of modernity's basic right of the freedom of religion and conscience.\(^{39}\) That in our present social and political situation this freedom may also be determined differently than through the Word of Christ and faith in him raises a question that lies beyond Luther's own horizon. In our own time we have to handle this question in the category of a religious right, as a human right to freedom of religion, without thereby being able directly to appeal to Luther—without having thereby to appeal to him directly. Likewise, the modern distinction between religion and politics, as well as between morality and law, a cultural achievement that is hard to overestimate, is unthinkable without Luther's distinction between God's spiritual and temporal authority. It is unthinkable without, on the one hand, the limitation of governmental power for the sake of the freedom of faith, and on the other, the limitation of ecclesiastical-clerical claims to power and publicness for the sake of a rational secularity that underlies the actions of the civil society and government. This heritage receives a clear emphasis in the fifth thesis of the Barmen Declaration (1934).\(^{40}\)

3.3 Free Will. External Freedom within the Limits of \textit{iustitia civilis} alone

As things stand, we encounter the same distinction, as we now pursue the allusion at the end of Luther's freedom treatise and differentiate between "spiritual" freedom and "other freedoms," \textit{"libertates externales."} What Luther has in mind is the freedom of choice, decision, and action in the province of \textit{iustitia civilis}. The Augsburg Confession devotes a separate article to it, Article XVIII, "Of the Free Will": "Concerning free will it is taught that a human being has some measure of free will, so as to live an externally honorable life and to choose among the things reason

\(^{39}\) In \textit{Die Erklärung der Menschen- und Bürgerrechte} (1895), Georg Jellinek put forth the thesis that religious freedom is to be attributed directly and conclusively to the English branch of the Reformation. This thesis has met with a convincing counterargument in Martin Heckel, "Die Menschenrechte im Spiegel der reformatorischen Theologie" (1987), in \textit{Gesammelte Schriften}, vol. 2., ed. Klaus Schlaich (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989), 1122-1193. Heckel demonstrates that the present-day distinction between religion and politics goes back to Luther.

\(^{40}\) "We reject the false doctrine that beyond its special commission the State should and could become the sole and total order of human life and so fulfil the vocation of the Church as well. We reject the false doctrine that beyond its special commission the Church should and could take on the nature, tasks and dignity which belong to the State and thus become itself an organ of the State." "The Barmen Theological Declaration: A New Translation," in Eberhard Jüngel, \textit{Christ, Justice, and Peace: Towards a Theology of the State in Dialogue with the Barmen Declaration} (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), xxvii.
comprehends"—among "things subject to reason." The province of iustitia civilis embraces marriage, family, economy, the upbringing and education of children, law, and temporal government.

In this province of iustitia civilis, Luther's regard for freedom of choice, decision, and action, given together with reason, cannot be high enough. As "the inventor and mentor of all the arts, medicines, laws, and of whatever wisdom, power, virtue, and glory men possess in this life," reason is a "divinum quiddam," "something downright divine," as Luther points out in The Disputation Concerning Man (1536). It is not destroyed or lost through the misuse of the original freedom, through sin—unlike the image of God in the sense of one's relation to God. Instead, God himself "after the fall of Adam" did not "take away the majesty of reason," its "maiestas," its dominion mandate (Gen 1:28), and together with it the freedom of choice, decision, and action, "but rather confirmed it," affirmed it ("sed potius confirmavit"). Reason and freedom are within the limits of iustitia civilis alone, because reason is conscious of its limits as well as its capacity for achievement; and not least is it conscious of the danger it poses for itself. It is relieved of absolutisms and thus liberated for a sober-minded view of possibilities and necessities that lie within the world and within history. It is free to endure contradictions and differences and, relieved of existential worry, to deal with them in vocational care for law and peace, "as if there were no God," as Luther writes provocatively in his exposition of Psalm 127 for the Christians in Riga.

However, this self-denial is possible within the limits of iustitia civilis alone only if the use of worldly freedom is critical, that is, when it is able to distinguish its liberum arbitrium from servum arbitrium, its libertas externa of works from the libertas interna of faith. If this distinction, or its functional equivalent, such as the Delphic "Know yourself!" (as a mortal

41. Book of Concord, 50.
42. This is how the Latin text of Article XVIII puts it ("De libero arbitrio [ecclesiae apud nos] docent, quod humana voluntas habeat aliquam libertatem ad efficiendam civilem justitiam, et deligendas res rationi subjectas").
43. Book of Concord, 50-53 [the remainder of Article XVIII].
44. Disputation Concerning Man (1536), LW 34:137; WA 39:175,11-13 [Thesis 5].
45. LW 34:137; WA 39:175,10 [Thesis 4].
46. LW 34:137; WA 39:175,20f [Thesis 9].
47. "God wishes that reason should remain within its limits and rule within the world. But as soon as it oversteps its sphere and flies up to God, the wisest reason is before God the most foolish and merits eternal damnation" ("Deus vult manere rationem in suo circulo et vult eam regere in mundo. Sed quam primum transgreditur suum orbem et ad Deum transvola, illic sapientissima ratio est stultissima coram Deo aeterna damnatione digna" ["S. 5. Dominica post Trinitatis. 1 Petri 5," (1539), WA 47: 842,37-40]).
48. Exposition of Psalm 127, For the Christians at Riga in Livonia (1524), LW 45:331; WA 15:373.3. To the distinction between "existential worry [Existenzsorge]" and "vocational care [Amtssorge]," see Luther's exposition of Matt 6:34 in Wochenpredigten über Mt 5–7 (1530/32), WA 32: 472,2-6, and Oswald Bayer, Schöpfung als Anrede. Zu einer Hermeneutik der Schöpfung, 2nd enlarged ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990), 149f.
faced with the immortal), 49 disappears from view, then worldly reason loses its worldliness and overburdens itself with promises of luck and salvation. It becomes a substitute for religion that, to put it philosophically, has its source in a “confusion of the world and God, the contingent and the absolute.” 50 In modernity this happens where a scientific, naturalistic, and, above all, economic single-dimensionality wishes to reign supreme.

Thus our conflict-conscious dialogue must consider critically not only transformations, where, as the following section (3.4) will show, the demonstration of the limits of human freedom at least preserves traces of Luther’s distinctions. We must rather direct our attention polemically to powers that—in their assertion of a scientific, naturalistic, and above all economic single-dimensionality of reality—may be characterized as having failed to recognize and having forgotten the difference between inner and outer freedom and together with it the difference between Creator and creature. 51

3.4 The Modern Narcissus, or the Displacement of the Relation to God into the Reflexivity of Self-Relation

The anthropological turn, underway since the middle of the eighteenth century, spurred a reconstruction of the reformational understanding of freedom. This reconstruction, undertaken from the perspective of subjectivity theory, has become increasingly expansive in contemporary systematic theology. To be sure, it does not lose sight of the difference between Creator and creature. This difference appears in the demonstration of the limits of human freedom, which, as self-determination, must already assume and act on the fact that it does not determine itself for self-determination but rather is determined for it. 52 As a human being, one has not, in one’s finite freedom, decreed oneself, has not made oneself, but instead discovers oneself in freedom: as given to oneself—just as, according to Kant, the Law, which demands, postulates, and comprehends freedom, is simply given, a “fact” of pure reason. 53


51. As a philosophical objection to this, see Wolfgang Janke, Kritik der präzisierten Welt (Freiburg/München: Alber, 1999).


Once we disregard that, in this reconstruction of the reformational understanding of freedom, the question about the concrete mode of being given fades away, that "God" is cloaked in a completely formal *passivum divinum*, and that his external creative Word is for this reason reduced to the hieroglyphic assertion that I am determined for self-determination—but then also "condemned" to it—if we disregard this, then we must, when faced with the titanism of a Fichte, Marx, or Sartre, acknowledge and admire Schleiermacher's demonstration of the limits of human freedom and his insistence on "the feeling of absolute dependence" as the basic human disposition. One must see in it the historical achievement, in philosophical and theological terms, of a contemporary who chose to differ.

Schleiermacher certainly paid a tribute to his age and its anthropological turn in that he considered "God," as the Whence of the feeling of absolute dependence, to be already "implied [mitgesetzt]" in this feeling, "enclosed" in it. Drastic and cruel is Franz Overbeck's remark that such theology presumes "to have God daily in the pocket with it." If the consciousness of God is always already included in the self-consciousness, we say sharply and polemically: if it is so locked up in it, then one can only speak of God's immanence. Schleiermacher can no longer say that God addresses me and in this way approaches me. Because God is implied in my direct religious self-consciousness, is already there, he cannot come to me.

Theology is always anthropology. Thus the anthropological turn of modernity was not the first to discover subjectivity and individuality. Hegel's "infinitely important determination that, for a content to be accepted and held to be true, man must himself be actively involved with..."
it” has been the case at least since the Psalms, such as Ps 51, have been used in prayer. And Luther, in the tradition not least of such Psalms, emphasized like none other the individuality of the human being. What is at stake, therefore, in the critical determination of the relation between the Reformation and modernity, is not the question whether but how theology is anthropology. Given that, in consequence of the anthropological turn, since the mid-eighteenth century “the relation to God” has been “increasingly displaced into the reflexivity of the self-relation,” we are to accept this fact as a necessary transformation of the reformational understanding of the Word and of faith and thereby as an irreversible and inexorable destiny, as it not rarely happens in contemporary systematic theology.

Or must we oppose this transformation and assert over against it the externality of the freedom-creating Word and the excentricity of faith, and hence its qualified self-forgetfulness, which does not render it “transparent to itself”? In my theological judgment, this is a rhetorical question. For a Lutheran theologian, the answer can also today be a decisive yes and will express itself in a “praise of exteriority.” What must be opposed is the modern Narcissus: his incurvatio in seipsum, his being turned in on himself, his self-reflexivity—all that characterizes modern subjectivity’s normative forms in their tendency to take into oneself its precepts or to discover them as already present within oneself, perhaps in the feeling of absolute dependence.

3.5 Law and Gospel in Modernity: The Problem of Secularized Freedom

The problem of transforming the reformational understanding of freedom into a modern one shows itself to be particularly illuminating when one considers it from the standpoint of the reformational distinction between the Law and the Gospel and, in doing so, makes use of this distinction not as something to be interpreted but as that which interprets. This should take place in the elucidation of the following thesis: Though, in its

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60. G. W. F. Hegel, The Encyclopaedia Logic, 3rd ed. (1830), trans. T. F. Geraets et al. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1991), 31 ([§7]).
61. Danz, Gott und die menschliche Freiheit, 5.
62. Von Lüpke in an exemplary fashion shows this to be the case on the basis of texts by Christian Danz and Notger Slenczka (“Zur Aufgabe einer evangelischen Dogmatik heute,” 63–72).
64. See n. 36.
65. Oswald Bayer, “Der neuzeitliche Narziß,” in Gott als Autor. Zu einer poietologischen Theologie (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 73–85. It is regrettable that a critical response to this challenge, as far as I know, is still outstanding.
generalization of the Gospel, modernity is antinomian, it becomes at the same time increasingly legalistic.

Already in its designation, through which it summarizes its self-understanding, modernity professes itself to be gospel-oriented. It conceptualizes itself as an unquestionably new time that stands under the banner of freedom. The concrete Christological determination of the gospel is quietly—in a backhanded way, as it were—generalized, but in such enthusiastic generalization the gospel becomes abstract. The Christological "It is finished!" morphs into an already accomplished liberation to freedom, which is accorded to the human being by nature; all humans are by nature "emancipated," "mature" (Kant: "naturaliter maiorennes"). Here the vanquishing of the Law is assumed fundamentally to have already taken place: humans are free, good, and spontaneous. In this sense modernity is antinomian.

However, what the new modern humanity already is, humans must also always first become; "humanity must make itself what it is." The universally affirmed gospel of freedom places humans at the same time under the compulsion to deliver on and to make a reality of that which is innately their very own. However, if freedom is not attributed and imparted, but from the outset is proper unto myself, and I am not really determined for it, but rather determine myself for it, then I am, both as individual and collective subjectivity, burdened with the fulfillment of that of which I am assured—not liberated for freedom, but "condemned to it." I am not allowed to be free but must free myself. So the reverse side of antinomianism is a legalism.

66. Wannenwetsch rightly criticizes, with reference to Lévinas, the hermeneutic of "a human being lost in his own interiority," a hermeneutic that makes it possible to "devour all... in a monomaniacal ritual of incurvation. Nothing is able to remain outside of its explanatory activity" ("Lob der Äußerlichkeit," 392). Cf. the equally insightful critique found in Michael Welker, "Subjektivistischer Glaube als religiöse Falle," Evangelische Theologie 64 (2004): 239-48. As emphasized above (2. Luther's Understanding of Freedom in Brief), the Christian's freedom-in-faith is characterized by relationality and excentricity and is grounded in the Christ event, whose essence is the communicatio idiomatum. All this preempts an interpretation in the categories of a theory of subjectivity that remains under the spell of modern subject metaphysics, trapped in self-referentiality. This said, it would be foolhardy, above all else, theologically to proscribe self-relation, as such, because it is viewed as equivalent to sin in the sense of the incurvatio in seipsum. The gospel does allow one, in a right relation to God, to have also a free relation to oneself: outside of myself, in faith and in love, to be myself.


68. G. W. F. Hegel, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: The Lectures of 1827, ed. P. C. Hodgson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 445 ("der Mensch sich zu dem machen muß, was er ist").

69. According to Hegel, "This is the essential content of the Reformation; human beings are by nature [durch sich selbst] destined to be free" (Lectures on the Philosophy of History [extract], in Hegel: Political Writings, ed. L. Dickey and H. B. Nisbet [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999], 202).

70. See n. 54 above.
4. CONCLUDING REMARK

As we can see, the central question is: Which freedom? The freedom of a Christian does not let itself be surreptitiously generalized. It concerns every human being, insofar as all humans are guilty of forfeiting their original freedom and depend on the newly created freedom that Christ has purchased for them and bestows upon them. But this freedom, available to each individual, is not a universal freedom that could be brought to mind or found in reference to oneself and one’s own self-assurance. It comes instead as concrete faith through the concrete external Word. Nonetheless, the task of theology and proclamation is to relate this external Word to its transformations, formalizations, generalizations—not least in the form of that secularized freedom in which one must see the post-Christian version of the relation of the Law and the Gospel.