

# CONFESSIONAL LUTHERANISM'S ANSWERS TO TODAY'S PROBLEMS: "Authority and Freedom" (The First and Fourth Commandments)

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In 1936 Herbert Marcuse wrote his famous sketch: *Studie Über Autorität Und Familie* ("Essay on Authority and Family"). This essay is still authoritative today for the non-authoritative thinking of a new generation. Here we have the program for revolution and anarchy developed where modern evolution distinctly sets its goal. Here for the first time freedom is set up against authority, against any authority, and therewith outdoing the French Revolution and the Communist Manifesto. According to Marcuse, freedom dare never be permitted to be connected with authority, but can be achieved only by breaking with all authoritative ties. Marcuse's essay was explicitly written against Martin Luther, especially against his freedom tract of 1520: "The Freedom of a Christian" ("Von der Freiheit Eines Christenmenschen"). Luther's tract, the 450th anniversary of which we celebrated last year, also proclaimed freedom as Marcuse does; Luther, however, proclaimed not everyone's freedom but the freedom of "the Christian man". It was freedom, not against every authority but against the wrong authority, the authority of a false, enslaving church system; it was a call to establish the true authority of God and the Neighbor.

Of course, Marcuse here cannot understand Luther, because as an atheistic non-Christian philosopher he cannot know what this is: "A Christian Man" ("Ein Christenmensch"). Luther says: "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." Only a Christian is simultaneously a free and bound person; no one else. The true Christian has his freedom by belief in Christ, and in no other way. Only a Christian is a free lord of all things, and no one else. This freedom shows and proves itself in free obedience against the true authorities, God's authorities, and God Himself as the highest authority above all authorities. But this obedience is freedom, not slavery, which Marcuse does not and cannot understand.

It is to the credit of Werner Elert that he in his *Ethics* has explained how the new obedience (See Augsburg Confession, VI) of the Christians is freedom. It is a fruit of the new creation that takes place in him through the Holy Ghost by faith: "He experiences by faith liberation from the law." Whereas he previously was under the law, so now Christ has freed him not only from the curse but also from the burden of the law (Galatians 4: 4, 5). We are now children of the free woman (Galatians 4: 31). In contrast, a freedom that knows no authority, a freedom which Marcuse and the New Morality proclaim, is no freedom at all, what is the fruit of a freedom without authority? What results from it? It is evident to all of us, and I do not need to describe it; read Galatians 5:16 ff. and you have a true picture, not only of heathendom at times of St. Paul but also of our day (Compare also Romans 1:26 ff.). Freedom without authority degenerates very quickly into the worst slavery; it is the slavery of the Old Man, "which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts" (Ephesians 4:22). (Remarkable is the fact that the New Morality always very quickly bumps up against one point, that is, the Sixth Commandment. Free love and sexual excesses seem to be the real meaning of morality and of life. We shall hear more of it in the next lecture.)

In comparison with that, a true Christian is truly a free man. Christ has freedom and can always free him all his days, also from the slavery of his lusts for a service of love to God and his neighbor. Hence, Luther proceeds to say: "A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." He is subject by love. Faith awakens love, and love is nothing else than a recognition of God's and the neighbor's authority. The New Morality, too, appeals to love. John Fletcher even makes love the last and only principle in his *Situation Ethics*. His book is a hymn of praise on love. Of course, Fletcher refers to Christendom in this

connection, to Christ and St. Paul, and claims that the church has misunderstood Christ and St. Paul and St. John as if she has put new rules of behavior and life in place of the old. There is really only one law: Love; and all commandments, rules, laws, traditions may be broken for love's sake. According to Fletcher, neither the thief nor the adulterer is sinning if love was the motive of his deed.

Over against this, one must say that indeed the new obedience is placed under the command of love and is obligated to it as the highest of all Commandments. The new obedience stands under the order of Christ's own words: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13: 34).

But the new obedience in freedom nevertheless is and remains obedience. First, obedience over against the Word. God's Word is not to be separated, neither from belief, nor from the Lord, nor from His Word (John 8:31). Therefore, neither belief nor obedience can be separated from the positive commandments of the Lord and His Apostles. The Commandment of love does not militate against the individual Commandments of the New Testament nor supersede them, but operates in them and through them. "Love is no blank sheet upon which everyone may write what he wishes." But, further, if the new obedience is obedience it yet remains freedom, namely, obedience in freedom. This is Luther's point in his pamphlet. A true Christian fulfils God's Commandments, practices love towards God and all men, not because he must, but because he wants to. God's commandments, also every single positive commandment or word of the Holy Scriptures, the Christian acknowledges as the commandments and words of his God and Savior. In so far as a Christian is a new creature, it is a real delight to him to do God's will, and if he acts against it ("for we daily sin much, and indeed deserve nothing but punishment"), he recognizes it as sin and wrong and is grieved over it and repents. In any case, we must emphasize once more that a Christian can do this: "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). And it is also impossible to serve God and the neighbor in freedom without faith. Man without faith, the heathen and the apostate Christians, are still "under the law." To be sure, Christ has also fulfilled the law for them, and the freedom of God's children is ready for them too, as it is for everybody. But they will not accept this gift but rather despise it. So it comes that they don't see this wonderful opportunity for true freedom that God offers them, and so feel God's Commandments as a burden; moreover, they hate God's law (and finally every authority) in the depth of their heart because it hinders them from living according to their lusts.

So the natural man, the unbeliever, cannot understand freedom as freedom in obedience, or obedience as obedience in freedom, but only as freedom from law and as freedom from every authority. Psalm 2 depicts this situation of the world: "Why do the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing? . . . Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us" (Psalm 2:1, 3). Revolution is the trademark of the natural man and his world.

You must know this, if you will understand modern man and the modern world. Marcuse's program is that of the apostate world, which cannot do otherwise than to emancipate itself from God and to surrender the last remnant of faith and the fear of God to lead men to destroy all authority among men, in order thus ostensibly to free them.

Every day we can see what the results are. (In general I speak of the German situation, but it seems to me that there is not much difference in America.) We recall that the real problem of modern man, as we developed it in the first lecture, is that man is not good but evil. But he will not believe it. He will believe, against truth, evidence, and experience, that man is good, that at least he himself is good. And so he cannot help it; he must misuse all freedom against authority. Freedom is not wholesome for him (by the way, the same is true with regard to too much prosperity), anyway not in the long run.

We in our country have had much experience with the opposite: loss of freedom, force, tyranny, as well as poverty and hunger. All of us remember very well how we suffered, that no one dared to speak publicly as he wished, even to speak for what he held to be right. And the change to the opposite which we experienced is unforgettable, with the result that we know very well how to treasure freedom, freedom of belief and freedom of conscience. We know that in relation to such bondage the freedom which we now enjoy is a wonderful

acquisition and gift from God. But how long will it last? Therefore we must use it for God and the Gospel as long as it endures.

A certain degree of freedom is necessary for life. On the other hand, freedom, too much freedom (license?) is a real danger, at least in the long run. You surely know what that means in your country. And especially in our country a new generation has grown up which knows bondage, force, and mental anguish only by hearsay. (Not so in the Eastern Zone, where a terrible repression of opinion and a strict order of force is still reigning). For the new generation in our country, freedom is no more a hard-won acquisition but a self-evident way of life. And that means for many of them that they don't know what to do with it. They don't see in it an obligation to willing service to their fellowmen but a plaything for idleness and self-indulgent pleasure. To such, freedom means that the evil lusts of the Old Man are now released, that everybody lives his life only for himself, earns money without a sense of responsibility for what he is doing, serves his self interests, knows no respect for elders and fellowmen, takes what he can get even if it belongs to someone else, desires his neighbor's wife, destroys his marriage if he wants to, and is even ready to kill him if he is in his way. There is no doubt that people in our nations are well down the road; at any rate, this is the necessary consequence of the program of Herbert Marcuse: Freedom with law; freedom without any authority. With reference to man as he really is, evil and revolutionary by nature, one who is not ready to do the good willingly, there is only one help: Place man where he belongs, that is, between freedom and authority or between freedom and law. To be sure, without any freedom life is not worth living. Freedom is part of the daily bread for which we pray. It was no Utopia to fight for freedom of men from slavery, from tyranny which by tradition belongs to this land. But it is a Utopia to claim and to fight for unrestrained freedom, freedom without law and authority. Even the wildest Wild West still knew the blessings of law.

Man cannot endure this limitless freedom because it ruins and destroys the world, because man is what he is, not the good fellow he believes himself to be but the selfish fallen enemy of God, and man who wants to live according to his lusts and for whom law is nothing else than a hindrance to unrestrained sin and free love. So nothing remains if the world is to be preserved as long as God wills it, but to give and permit man as much freedom as he needs to be a human being; but at the same time to establish and to anchor law and all God's ordained authorities under the Fourth Commandment so deeply into public life that at any time wickedness and evil can be restricted, if necessary, by the most severe means, because the higher powers bear not the sword in vain (Romans 13: 4).

Temporal authority ("Die Obrigkeit") -- this word comes out of Luther's vocabulary. Luther wrote another important tract: "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed" (1523). (See Luther's Works, Volume 4-5, II, pp. 75-129.) This writing is just as important and up-to-date as that of "The Freedom of a Christian", Here Luther has spoken decisively. He explains that Christians as Christians properly are not in need of government, just as they need no distinct authorities at all. For them the sword of force is not necessary because they are willing to do the good by free will and for conscience sake, for Christ's sake. But nevertheless they are "subject to all authority which has power over them", even to an ungodly or atheistic Authority so long as such don't demand anything from Christians which is contrary to God's command, or contrary to faith, for the sake of his neighbor and society, whether in community or state, so that discipline and order can be retained among people, so that right and justice can prevail in the nation.

And even if the church, as church, has nothing to do with secular things, it is not to usurp power over men, or use force; it has only one means with which to operate, namely: The Word, the Gospel (Augsburg Confession, XXVIII, Non Vi Sed Verbo). Still the Christians, as Christians and as citizens of their respective countries, are obliged to serve their country, their community, as best they can. They should assume governmental offices and duties as long as they are not thereby forced to do wrong and to act contrary to the faith -- all for the neighbor's good and for God's sake. This all sounds convincing, and something a Christian endorses-- one, who for love's sake, is everyone's servant and subject to all. But, of course, there is a whole mass of incidental questions which are difficult to answer; there are borderline questions which are not easy to be answered, which are solved from case to case (casuistry), but: in all of which love is the chief

commandment. Nevertheless, as you have seen, where are answers, answers of the true Lutheran Church to these otherwise insoluble problems concerning Freedom and Authority.

With reference to the details, the many single problems, I think it is not possible to discuss all or even some of them just now. I hope that the discussion period will offer opportunity to raise some of these problems. Maybe there are questions you have just of me. I know whereof I speak from long personal experience. I have lived through times of restrained freedom in my country. I was a pastor in the Third Reich. In World War II I was also a soldier and an officer of the army under Hitler and Himmler. For years I belonged to the unit that manufactured armament, and to the staff of a man, Albert Speer (author of last year's best selling book, *Inside the Third Reich*), who was condemned as a war criminal in Nürnberg, and presently I am president of a church, the Lutheran Free Church in Germany, that is partly in West Germany and partly in Eastern Germany. It is my duty each year to go into the DDR to visit those congregations that now live under a socialistic, that means communistic and atheistic, regime, and to counsel them on what to do. In all these situations, I have cried to live and to act as a Christian ("Christenmensch") according to the principles I have here outlined. I must say that God has saved me -- often in a miraculous manner -- so that no problem was too difficult to solve and so that the temptation could be endured. I never had to kill men and came home healthy, a free man, after the war. But I have also experienced into what dilemmas a true Christian again and again comes under an atheistic government when he has to be subject to two masters, but in all is allowed to serve only one Master, our Lord Jesus Christ.

But I have experienced, too, that the true Lutheran Church, that Confessional Lutheranism, has answers in situations like those and that the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions don't forsake a "Christenmensch". I close this part with those words which Martin Luther closes his liberty tract:

We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor. Yet he always remains in God and in his love, as Christ says in John 1:51, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

As you see, it is a spiritual and true freedom that makes our hearts free from all sins, laws and commands, as St. Paul says, I Timothy 1:9, "The law is not laid down for the just." It is more excellent than all other liberty, which is external, as heaven is more excellent than earth. May Christ give us this liberty, both to understand and to preserve. Amen.