

**Geoffrey M. Ziegler, PH.D.**

Foreword by Michael Allen

# **Free to Be Sons of God**

**REFORMED ACADEMIC DISSERTATIONS**

“I have seldom met such a happy blend! Dr. Ziegler conjoins a deeply original meditation—not at all novelty for novelty’s sake but an insight into the truth of Scripture that has until now received scant attention—with philosophical competence and a sure-footed understanding of contemporary issues. His topic—freedom—is one of the main ‘idols’ of modernity, as well as of our hypermodernity, and the fruit of his labor could amount to revolutionary benefits for Christian witness.”

—**Henri A. G. Blocher**, formerly Gunther H. Knoedler Professor of Theology, Wheaton College Graduate School; former Chair of the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians

“In this important study, Ziegler provides a penetrating biblical, theological, and historical assessment of John Stuart Mill’s conception of human freedom as radical autonomy. In our age drunk on the elixirs of individualism, identity construction, and self-determination, Ziegler’s conclusions are as countercultural as they are compelling: that human beings experience true freedom only as they live as obedient children of the heavenly Father who created and redeemed them.”

—**Scott M. Manetsch**, Professor of Church History, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

“I am happy to recommend Geoff Ziegler’s Wheaton dissertation, *Free to Be Sons of God*, now published in P&R’s Reformed Academic Dissertation series. Dr. Ziegler tackles an issue that is important and contested in current society and culture: freedom. He sets the issue in historical perspective by describing and interacting with the seminal *On Liberty*, by John Stuart Mill. He then scrutinizes Mill’s concept of autonomous liberty in light of the Scripture and Christian tradition (especially John Calvin), showing that the freedom in Christianity is tied to the theological status of sonship that God confers on his own people. Dr. Ziegler’s work illuminates an important strand of biblical teaching and

usefully confronts a false view of freedom that is widespread in our modern culture.”

—**Douglas J. Moo**, Blanchard Professor of New Testament, Wheaton College Graduate School

“Geoff Ziegler’s *Free to Be Sons of God* is interesting, relevant, and prophetic. In an age when John Stuart Mill’s philosophy of human freedom as autonomy is the accepted norm (‘I need to be true to myself. I’m free only if I am able to act on my personal opinions and desires, without external restraints, so long as I don’t hurt anyone. Only if I put myself and my happiness first will I benefit others’), Ziegler offers the liberating biblical alternative. His corrective is that ‘biblical freedom, which is the only true freedom, is not found in individualistic self-determination, but rather in the relational shape of divine sonship’—a filial relationship expressed in obedience and conformity to the Father. I found this superb dissertation both stimulating and sanctifying. If you want to be free, or reminded of what freedom in Christ means, take and read.”

—**Douglas Sean O’Donnell**, Senior Pastor, Westminster Presbyterian Church, Elgin, IL

“*Free to Be Sons of God* celebrates the history of salvation that is reflected in a biblical theology of sonship. The result is fresh appreciation for the glorious freedom to which God calls men and women in Christ. Ziegler is a careful interpreter of the Scriptures and a delighted reader of Calvin. Here, too, is a helpful warning about the counterfeit notion of ‘freedom’ with which modernity pollutes our hopes.”

—**Daniel J. Treier**, Gunther H. Knoedler Chair of Theology, Wheaton College Graduate School

# **Free to Be Sons of God**

Reformed Academic Dissertations

*A Series*

*Series Editor*  
John J. Hughes

# Free to Be Sons of God

Geoffrey M. Ziegler

  
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For my father



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## Series Introduction

P&R Publishing has a long and distinguished history of publishing carefully selected, high-value theological books in the Reformed tradition. Many theological books begin as dissertations, but many dissertations are worthy of publication in their own right. Realizing this, P&R has launched the Reformed Academic Dissertation (RAD) program to publish top-tier dissertations (Ph.D., Th.D., D.Min., and Th.M.) that advance biblical and theological scholarship by making distinctive contributions in the areas of theology, ethics, biblical studies, apologetics, and counseling.

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We look forward to seeing the RAD program grow into a large collection of curated dissertations that will help to advance Reformed scholarship and learning.

John J. Hughes  
Series Editor



## Foreword

Humanity remains elusive. Like the fish in the fishbowl, we are opaque to ourselves. That's not to say that there aren't clear calls to which we might give heed. The lures of consumerism and the promises of sensuality suggest that we are but bodies. Individualism and subjectivism instill a sense of self-centeredness in each of us. We are pulled between thinking ourselves masters and slaves, victims and the self-shaped. The opacity of the human follows from the many voices hearkening to us regarding our being and our purpose. The struggle of the church in the face of debates regarding sex and gender on the one hand and race and ethnicity on the other hand shows the struggle we face when seeking to know ourselves.

Christians have hope for discerning the human—its nature, form, and ends – because one voice addresses us with lively authority and life-giving power. The gospel illumines not only by casting light on God's character but also by revealing to us who we have been made to be. In our time and place, perhaps no matters of Christian theology is as pressing as the need for a resolutely theological anthropology that does not merely trade in the lingo of other disciplines but finds its footing in the land of the prophets and the apostles. And, sad to say, confessional Reformed and evangelical Protestant theologians have not led the way in recent decades. We have a living Word – we must pay much closer attention.

Geoff Ziegler's *Free to be Sons of God* calls Christians to be mindful of what it means to be human and to be free in Christ: freed from sin, freed for service, freed in the family of God. Several volumes in recent years have highlighted the significance of the doctrine

## FOREWORD

of adoption or sonship for confessional reformed theology. I'm not aware of any that tether that doctrine to the lingering perplexities and challenges that seem to cling to the concept of human freedom. Ziegler's volume not only provides an analysis of issues fundamental to so many ethical debates – most obviously those pertaining to sexuality and gender – but also offers an entry into this much wider need for biblical wisdom regarding Christian anthropology in a way that is evangelically rooted, confessionally Reformed, and attentive to the wide range of resources and issues in play here.

Along the way, the book serves as a wonderful model of biblical reasoning for three reasons. First, Ziegler guides Christians to think canonically and exegetically. Much has been made in recent years regarding the theological interpretation of Scripture. Here we have an exemplary instance of its execution, as the book spans the testaments and takes in the common themes and developments as well as the diverse idioms of God's Holy Word. I would particularly commend his reading of Exodus as being more nuanced and subtle than many such attempts in recent years.

Second, Ziegler teaches us to study the Scriptures with the guidance of the communion of saints. His own canonical exegesis leads to alert consideration of how John Calvin read these texts, considered these questions, and sought to attest Christ even here: in the question of human freedom. This approach to retrieval is all the most instructive because Ziegler does not read Calvin simply as a source from antiquity but as an exegete of the Word of God. We need to learn to read the doctors of the faith as exegetical conversation partners more than anything else and to engage their testimony, in its varied genres, as diverse instances of exegetical imagination. As such, they help prompt us to go deeper into God's Word rather than calling us away from those Scriptures.

Third, Ziegler summons us to think comparatively and contrastively, relating the scriptural concept of freedom with that of the wider world. He takes the time to patiently analyze the writings of John Stuart Mill and to note ways in which he parallels and diverges

## FOREWORD

from scriptural insights. In so doing Ziegler prepares the reader to engage in apologetic and ethical conversation with non-Christians. Reformed theologians have not always modelled the kind of careful analysis of non-Christian philosophy and ethics that is needed for either cultural competency or Christian apologetics. Ziegler renders some decisive judgments regarding Mill and modern notions of freedom influenced by him, but his readers will see that these decisions flow from respectful and alert reading of Mill in his own terms.

These three aspects of his work model the very anthropology that Ziegler commends. They depend on divine instruction for their own execution, for we are not made to create or find our own way but live on borrowed breath and walk by the light of another. They follow Christ not on their own but identify with the *ekklesia* of God and are built up as part of that body of Christ. They take their knowledge of Christ and his gospel not as a mere possession or birthright of grace, but also see every blessing of God as an occasion for testimony and service to the wider world. For exegetical, historical, and missiological-apologetic theology, then, Ziegler's book serves as an example to be emulated and a summons to be heeded. I hope many will listen and take up its call.

Michael Allen  
J. D. Trimble Professor of Systematic Theology  
Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando



## Acknowledgments

This book was originally a doctoral dissertation submitted to Wheaton College's Bible and Theology Department, and that submission almost did not happen. As I moved from the quiet confines of doctoral studies to the lively and somewhat chaotic atmosphere of pastoral ministry, there were times when completion of this project seemed perennially out of reach. Only with the assistance of many was I able to cross this finish line.

I am indebted to Mark Thompson, Peter O'Brien, Barry Webb, and the many other good teachers at Moore College who helped form my approach to the Bible and my conviction that on its every page is the gospel proclaimed. More recently, Doug Moo and Stephen Spencer both provided valuable guidance as I sought to figure out how to do a work that bridges the divide between Biblical and Systematic studies. Dan Treier generously devoted much time to reading my manuscript and giving me the (sometimes painful) feedback that I needed, along with important words of encouragement to keep me moving forward. And I am enormously grateful to Henri Blocher for being my doctoral supervisor. I cannot think of a better role model of one for whom careful scholarship and faithful, devoted worship of Christ are one and the same. It has been an honor to work with all of these people.

Throughout this process, I have been helped and strengthened by the different church families I have had the privilege of calling home. The members and pastors of Covenant Presbyterian Church in San Jose supported me as our family transitioned from ministry to academia. The staff and people of College Church in Wheaton helped

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

me stay ecclesially rooted during my studies. Most significantly, as I stepped into my current role at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Hinsdale, the elders and members of this church have been incredibly supportive, offering encouraging words and the tangible support of providing me the time I needed to complete this work. In Christ's body, the grace of God has been made very real to me.

My deepest sense of gratitude is towards my closest friends and family. Mike Allen has been of immeasurable help in bringing this to fruition. His insightful criticisms and suggestions along the way, and especially his ongoing friendship, have been of immense importance. My wife, Jennifer, and our three sons have been patient and encouraging every step of the way. I cannot imagine going through this process without them. I certainly would be the poorer for it.

Given this book's thesis, it seems especially appropriate to thank my parents, from whom I first received the gospel and who were faithful in their calling to raise me "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." I have many recollections of my father leading rather unusual theological conversations around the Sunday dinner table and also of him studying late at night, seeking to teach himself New Testament Greek, though he was an electrical engineer by profession. His passion to know what is True has forever shaped me, and I am grateful for the privilege of being his son. It is to him that this work is dedicated.

Finally, and above all, I give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose filial service is perfect freedom. To him be all glory.

## Abbreviations

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| <i>AB</i>    | <i>Anchor Bible</i>  |
| <i>ABD</i>   | <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary. Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992</i>   |
| <i>AnBib</i> | <i>Analecta Biblica</i>  |
| <i>ANF</i>   | <i>The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Edited by A. Roberts and J. Donaldson. Buffalo, 1885–1896.</i>   |
| <i>AOTC</i>  | <i>Apollos Old Testament Commentaries</i>  |
| <i>BDAG</i>  | <i>Bauer, W. F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. 3rd ed. Chicago, 1999</i> |
| <i>BECNT</i> | <i>Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament</i>  |
| <i>BJRL</i>  | <i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>   |
| <i>BNTC</i>  | <i>Black's New Testament Commentaries</i>  |
| <i>BZAW</i>  | <i>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>   |
| <i>CBQ</i>   | <i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>   |
| <i>CC</i>    | <i>Calvin's Commentaries. Calvin Translation Society. 22 vols. Grand Rapids, 1974.</i>   |
| <i>CNTC</i>  | <i>Calvin's New Testament Commentaries. Edited by</i>  |

## ABBREVIATIONS

*Thomas F. Torrance and David W. Torrance. 12 vols. Grand Rapids, 1959–1972.*

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| <i>ConBOT</i>  | <i>Coniectanea biblica: Old Testament Series</i>   |
| <i>CTJ</i>     | <i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>  |
| <i>CW</i>      | <i>Collected Works of John Stuart Mill. Edited by John M. Robson. 33 vols. Toronto, 1963–1991</i>          |
| <i>DPL</i>     | <i>Dictionary of Paul and His Letters. Edited by G. F. Hawthorne and R. P. Martin. Downers Grove, 1993</i> |
| <i>EBib</i>    | <i>Etudes bibliques</i>  |
| <i>EvQ</i>     | <i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>   |
| <i>HTR</i>     | <i>Harvard Theological Review</i>  |
| <i>IBC</i>     | <i>Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching</i>                                       |
| <i>ICC</i>     | <i>International Critical Commentary</i>   |
| <i>IEJ</i>     | <i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>  |
| <i>IESS</i>    | <i>International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. Edited by D. L. Sills. New York: 1968–</i>           |
| <i>IJST</i>    | <i>International Journal of Systematic Theology</i>  |
| <i>Int</i>     | <i>Interpretation</i>  |
| <i>JAOS</i>    | <i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>  |
| <i>JETS</i>    | <i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>  |
| <i>JSOT</i>    | <i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>  |
| <i>JSOTSup</i> | <i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series</i>                                       |
| <i>JSS</i>     | <i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>  |
| <i>JTS</i>     | <i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>  |

## ABBREVIATIONS

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| <i>LCC</i>     | <i>Library of Christian Classics. Philadelphia, 1953–</i>  |
| <i>NAC</i>     | <i>New American Commentary</i>   |
| <i>NCB</i>     | <i>New Century Bible</i>   |
| <i>Neot</i>    | <i>Neotestamentica</i>   |
| <i>NIB</i>     | <i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i>   |
| <i>NIBCOT</i>  | <i>New International Biblical Commentary of the Old Testament</i>  |
| <i>NICNT</i>   | <i>New International Commentary on the New Testament</i>   |
| <i>NICOT</i>   | <i>New International Commentary on the Old Testament</i>   |
| <i>NIDOTTE</i> | <i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis. Edited by W. A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids, 1997</i> |
| <i>NIGTC</i>   | <i>New International Greek Testament Commentary</i>  |
| <i>NIVAC</i>   | <i>NIV Application Commentary</i>  |
| <i>NPNF1</i>   | <i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 1. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. New York, 1886–1890.</i>                      |
| <i>NPNF2</i>   | <i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. New York, 1890.</i>                           |
| <i>NooT</i>    | <i>Novum Testamentum</i>   |
| <i>NSBT</i>    | <i>New Studies in Biblical Theology</i>  |
| <i>NTS</i>     | <i>New Testament Studies</i>   |
| <i>OTL</i>     | <i>Old Testament Library</i>   |
| <i>PNTC</i>    | <i>Pillar New Testament Commentary</i>   |
| <i>ProEccl</i> | <i>Pro Ecclesia</i>  |
| <i>RB</i>      | <i>Revue Biblique</i>  |

## ABBREVIATIONS

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| <i>RTR</i>     | <i>Reformed Theological Review</i>   |
| <i>SBET</i>    | <i>Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology</i>   |
| <i>SBLSymS</i> | <i>Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series</i>   |
| <i>SBT</i>     | <i>Studies in Biblical Theology</i>  |
| <i>SJT</i>     | <i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>  |
| <i>SP</i>      | <i>Sacra Pagina</i>  |
| <i>TDNT</i>    | <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. Edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, 1964–1976</i>                                 |
| <i>TDOT</i>    | <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament. Edited by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 8 vols. Grand Rapids, 1974–</i> |
| <i>Them</i>    | <i>Themelios</i>   |
| <i>TOTC</i>    | <i>Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries</i>  |
| <i>TynBul</i>  | <i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>  |
| <i>VT</i>      | <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>   |
| <i>WBC</i>     | <i>Word Bible Commentary</i>   |
| <i>WUNT</i>    | <i>Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament</i>  |
| <i>ZAW</i>     | <i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>  |
| <i>ZNW</i>     | <i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>   |

# 1

## Introduction

Freedom is pure autonomy. That, at least, appears to be the consensus of our present-day culture. Freedom, we are told, is to live by no other ultimate direction than the need to be “true to self.” Examples of this view in popular culture are too numerous to count. Movies and books offer protagonists who must learn to cast aside constraints in order to discover themselves. Advertisements encourage people to demonstrate their independent individuality by purchasing a certain product. Poets and musicians proclaim the human individual’s need to escape the slavery of societal forces by being faithful to his or her (however that gender is defined) own unique set of desires and beliefs.

This is not an altogether new way of seeing the world. A rather similar understanding of humanity and its need for autonomy appears in the following text, written nearly two centuries earlier:

It is not by wearing down into uniformity all that is individual in themselves, but by cultivating it and calling it forth, within the limits imposed by the rights and interests of others, that human beings become a noble and beautiful object of contemplation; and as the works partake the character of those who do them, by the same process human life also becomes rich, diversified, and animating, furnishing more abundant aliment to high thoughts and elevating feelings,

## INTRODUCTION

and strengthening the tie which binds every individual to the race, by making the race infinitely better worth belonging to. In proportion to the development of his individuality, each person becomes more valuable to himself, and is therefore capable of being more valuable to others.<sup>1</sup>

These words, penned by John Stuart Mill in his famously influential treatise *On Liberty*, provide a foundation to his argument for freedom from societal constraints. Precisely because humanity flourishes only as it gains individual autonomy, “men should be free to act upon their opinions—to carry these out in their lives, without hindrance, either physical or moral, from their fellow-men, so long as it is at their own risk and peril.”<sup>2</sup>

This modern view of freedom, advocated by Mill in the nineteenth century, and generally associated with liberalism,<sup>3</sup> appears to have won the day, at least in popular discourse.<sup>4</sup> To most it is axiomatic that humanity is naturally capable of attaining freedom,<sup>5</sup> and that this can only come in a society which experiences none but the

<sup>1</sup> *On Liberty*, in John Stuart Mill, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (ed. John M. Robson; 33 vols.; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963–91 [hereafter *CW*]), 18:266.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 18:266.

<sup>3</sup> See the following chapter for a defense of identifying Mill as a representative champion of modern secular liberalism.

<sup>4</sup> The argument could easily be made that it is also the dominant view in contemporary political philosophy, as especially seen in the highly influential work of John Rawls. Though Rawls’ liberalism is decidedly more Kantian in its formulation than Mill’s, they have in common a strong commitment to protecting human autonomy. For a comparison of Rawls’ and Mill’s views of autonomy, see Samuel Freeman, *Rawls* (Routledge Philosophers; New York: Routledge, 2007) 288–91.

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, this is one of the foundational presuppositions of modern philosophy. As Oswald Bayer notes, Kant, Hegel, and Marx, despite their significant differences, were united in agreement that freedom is inherent in human beings (*Freedom in Response* [trans. Jeffrey F. Cayzer; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007], 77).

## INTRODUCTION

most necessary external constraints, so that each individual can exert autonomy and thereby flourish. While we are not all liberals, Alan Wolfe argues, “we do all live in a liberal world.”<sup>6</sup>

Yet this understanding of human freedom is decidedly not shared by the theology of biblical Christianity. Autonomous existence, rather than being the fullest expression of freedom, is instead identified in Scripture as a distortion of freedom so perverse that in reality it is antithetical to true freedom. While authors such as Wolfe contend that liberalism has a “place” for religion,<sup>7</sup> Christianity ultimately has no place for the liberalism espoused by Mill. Biblical freedom, which is the only true freedom, is not found in individualistic self-determination, but rather in the relational shape of divine sonship.<sup>8</sup> What follows is devoted to defending this thesis.

But before proceeding further it is important first to specify what will be meant in this work by “freedom.” Defining this term is notoriously difficult. On one hand, as Berlin notes, freedom “is a term whose meaning is so porous that there is little interpretation that it seems able to resist.”<sup>9</sup> Some conceptual boundaries are required to enable us to compare various claims to the nature of freedom. Yet at the same time, since much of the debate is itself over the nature of freedom, it is important to find a definition that is sufficiently open so as not to “stack the deck” in favor of one particular view. We begin then, rather provisionally, with the following three observations, which I believe are fair both to the secular liberal and to the Christian conceptions of freedom:

<sup>6</sup> Alan Wolfe, *The Future of Liberalism* (New York: Knopf, 2009), 255.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 157–86.

<sup>8</sup> The biblical metaphor of sonship, being rooted in a specific cultural context, cannot easily be translated into gender-inclusive language. As a rather feeble attempt to counterbalance this lack of gender neutrality, this dissertation will primarily use the feminine singular when a singular personal pronoun is required.

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in *Four Essays on Liberty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 118–72, 121.

## INTRODUCTION

1. While freedom may certainly be used in a descriptive, ethically neutral sense (e.g., a boat is “free” from its moorings), the focus of most debate—and the subject of our investigation—is what might be called a “valuational” view of freedom: i.e., freedom as something that is inherently good and desirable.<sup>10</sup>
2. This valual freedom is understood to describe a life that is in some sense antithetical to slavery and that is an existence in which the human being can (or does) flourish.<sup>11</sup>
3. Because this freedom is presented as an inherently desirable condition, almost every articulation of freedom also sees it as promoting societal, as well as individual, well-being.

Given this as our starting set of parameters for investigating freedom, we now turn to the historical relation between the modern secular liberal definition of freedom and the Christian conception that preceded it.

### Historical Context

The view of freedom as individual autonomy that has emerged in the last few centuries, tracing its roots back to the Renaissance view of humanity, is a striking departure from previous thought. For the centuries between the reign of Constantine and the dawn of the Renaissance, God, as Creator and Redeemer of humanity, defined for Western culture the shape freedom took. Humanity’s drive to be autonomous was largely viewed as the obstacle to true freedom.

<sup>10</sup> For the distinction between descriptive and valual freedom, cf. Felix Oppenheim, “Freedom,” *IESS* 5:555–59.

<sup>11</sup> Orlando Patterson persuasively argues that freedom is a concept that developed after and in response to slavery. See *Freedom: Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1991). The idea of flourishing seems to be part and parcel with most valual understandings of freedom: it is inherently good because it is a requirement for an individual’s well-being.

## Early Church

### *Freedom in God's Image*

During the period leading up to and contemporaneous with Constantine, it was especially the notion of the image of God that God had implanted upon humanity that informed an understanding of the nature of freedom. Formed as God's image-bearers who reflected his attributes and were to rule the created world on his behalf as his subjects, humanity was created with true freedom. This freedom not only included the liberty of the will but also the ability to be in fellowship with God and incorruptibility. Many fathers, and perhaps most prominently, Origen, argued that self-determination is of the very essence of human nature.<sup>12</sup> Origen sought to preserve a notion of human responsibility from Stoic notions of determinism and Gnostic classifications of humanity by arguing that this power to choose between good and evil remained a part of humanity's constitution even after Adam's sin.<sup>13</sup> Yet this freedom of choice was not viewed in a vacuum. Full freedom included also freedom from corruption and freedom for fellowship with God. Unlike the freedom of choice, freedom from corruption was a fragile privilege that could be, and was, lost. Incorruptibility depended upon obedience: Athanasius is one of many who portrayed humanity's time in paradise as a sort of probationary period, in which the assurance of immortality was conditional upon humanity first guarding their original grace and innocence.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the freedom to be in fellowship with God depended

<sup>12</sup> Origen, *De Principiis* 2.1.2 (trans. Frederick Crombie; *ANF* 4 [Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1885]).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 270–71. So also Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 4.37 (trans. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut; *ANF* 1 [Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1885]), and Gregory of Nyssa, *Great Catechism* 6 (trans. William Moore and Henry Austin Wilson; *NPNF2* 5 [New York: Christian Literature, 1893]).

<sup>14</sup> Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei* 3 (trans. Archibald Robertson; *NPNF2* 4 [New York: Christian Literature, 1892]).

upon the purity of one's mind, which needed to be unfettered by the lusts of the flesh.<sup>15</sup>

*Loss of Freedom through Sin*

Though the early church fathers provided different interpretations of what happened to the divine image at the fall, they were nearly unanimous in seeing humanity's enjoyment of freedom as fundamentally altered after Adam's sin. Gregory of Nyssa speaks of human beings as those nobly born who, through sin, and specifically through seeking autonomy, sold themselves into slavery to Satan.<sup>16</sup> Deceived by Satan into thinking that good would come to them by disobeying the command of God, their attempt at autonomy brought them under his tyranny. Others, such as Athanasius, saw this mistaken desire for autonomy manifesting itself in bondage to that which is material. Humanity, wrongly identifying the good with bodily pleasure, became "entangled" and "wholly forgot the power they originally had from God."<sup>17</sup>

This spiritual slavery was seen as having implications for both one's future destiny and one's present behavior. In regard to the former, humanity forfeited incorruptibility through Adam's disobedience; losing the gift of life, it was consequently under the law of death.<sup>18</sup> Regarding behavior, humanity was turned away from the knowledge of God and bound by demonic deception, such that humankind were "slaves of fleshly lusts."<sup>19</sup> Precisely how constrained humanity was by sin and Satan is often not clear. While for Origen the freedom of the will was axiomatic, such that humanity is always

<sup>15</sup> Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 2.3 (trans. Archibald Robertson; *NPNF2* 4 [New York: Christian Literature, 1892]).

<sup>16</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Great Catechism* 22.

<sup>17</sup> Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 3.

<sup>18</sup> Irenaeus, *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 31 (trans. Armitage Robinson; London: SPCK, 1920); Gregory of Nyssa *Great Catechism* 15; Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei* 4–6.

<sup>19</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 5.8.2.

capable of doing the good, for many other theologians the tension here remained unresolved.

*Adoption and Deification into Freedom*

Many of the fathers saw Christ's death and resurrection as the manner in which the enslaving claims of death and Satan against humanity were abolished.<sup>20</sup> However, the event holding the greatest redemptive significance for the fathers was the incarnation. In the joining of humanity to divinity in Christ, and in his revealing God the Father in an earthly form, those redeemed by him were freed from deception and corruption to be a part of the very family of God and to become like him. "Because of his transcendent love he became what we are so that he might bring us to be what he is himself."<sup>21</sup>

In some sense this salvation was viewed as a return for redeemed humanity to its pre-fall condition: liberation from spiritual servitude is, for the fathers, not fundamentally an alteration of humanity, but rather a restoration to what one truly is. Irenaeus famously used the language of "recapitulation,"<sup>22</sup> and Gregory of Nyssa stated that those brought forth at the first creation and those who are at the completion of things will be the same because "they equally bear in themselves the divine image."<sup>23</sup> Yet at the same time, humanity is, through Christ's redemption, being brought into a greater maturity than Adam had attained. Upon their deaths, the

<sup>20</sup> Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei* 20–21; Gregory of Nyssa, *Great Catechism* 22.

<sup>21</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 5 Preface. Cf. Donald Fairbairn's argument for an early church consensus in the idea that the incarnation was a necessary means for humanity to be able to participate in the Son's communion with the Father (*Grace and Christology in the Early Church* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003]).

<sup>22</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 5.29.2.

<sup>23</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 16.17 (trans. H. A. Wilson; *NPNF2* 5 [New York: Christian Literature, 1893]).

redeemed will be raised incorruptible.<sup>24</sup> No longer susceptible to sin or under probation, they will attain an even greater likeness to God and capacity for fellowship with him, not merely as creatures or friends of God, but as sons. This knowledge and love of God and ability to share in the divine glory, which come in humanity's adoption and divinization, are for the fathers the ultimate depiction of human freedom.

### *Obedience and Freedom*

Identifying freedom with adoption provided a means for the fathers to hold freedom and the necessity of obedience together without competition: adoption *intensified* the demand for obedience. The redeemed were to submit to God's commands wholeheartedly, out of love, as willing sons, rather than from slavish obligation. "The more extensive operation of liberty implies that a more complete subjection and affection towards our Liberator had been implanted within us."<sup>25</sup> Indeed, it was precisely in this obedience that the person was enabled, by the Spirit, to enjoy the freedom of knowing God and becoming like him.<sup>26</sup>

### **Augustine**

As previously noted, in early church thought a tension existed between the belief that humanity had become enslaved to sin and the conviction that humanity, as image bearers, always retained the ability to choose good. Augustine's thought suggests a resolution to this tension.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei* 27.2.

<sup>25</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 4.13.3.

<sup>26</sup> Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto* 35 (trans. Blomfield Jackson; *NPNF2* 8 [New York: Christian Literature, 1895]); Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John, Books 13–32*, 20 (trans. Ronald E. Heine; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1993).

<sup>27</sup> Though there remains debate regarding the extent of continuity between the early and later Augustine (cf. Carol Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology: An Argument for Continuity* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006]),

*The Nature of Freedom*

While Augustine, like theologians before him, rejects the fatalism of the Stoics, as well as Manicheistic dualism, the freedom he argues for is not that of complete self-determinacy. Human freedom of the will (*liberum arbitrium*) exists when one's will is able to initiate what it wills without being subject to any alien constraint. This freedom is common to all; without it a person would not be responsible for his or her actions. Yet such a freedom is constrained by one's nature: just as God cannot die or err (for this would be a violation of his nature) and yet remains free, so also humans, though possessing free will, cannot choose something that is contrary to who they are.<sup>28</sup> This means that an individual need not be able to will an alternative action in order to be considered free. One could freely will and yet be capable of only willing sin or, like God, only willing what is good.

Yet not all expressions of a free will (*liberum arbitrium*) are equally expressions of freedom (*libertas*).<sup>29</sup> It is the nature of all rational creatures necessarily to seek happiness, and they were given the will specifically for the purpose of attaining the liberty of eternal blessedness in the enjoyment of God. As such, the freedom bestowed upon humanity at creation is not one of perfect neutrality, equally inclined towards good or evil. Rather, it is specifically the ability

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it is his later work which is adopted by the church, and which will be addressed in what follows.

<sup>28</sup> Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 5.10 (trans. Marcus Dods; *NPNF1* 2 [New York: Christian Literature, 1887]).

<sup>29</sup> As Etienne Gilson notes (*The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine* [trans. L. E. M. Lynch; New York: Random House, 1960], 163, 323n85), Augustine maintains a distinction between the meaning of *liberum arbitrium*, which refers to humanity's free choice, kept after the fall, and *libertas*, which is the good use of free choice. Thus the fallen will can both be free (able to will) and unfree (unable to will the good) at the same time. For a more recent discussion on the significance of this distinction in Augustine's thought, see James Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 219–35.

given freely to will the good, an ability that includes the possibility not to sin. Adam's choice to sin was not so much an expression of freedom as a perversion of it.<sup>30</sup> The truest freedom is that freedom which enables one to be eternally blessed.<sup>31</sup>

### *Fallen Freedom*

Augustine depicts Adam's choice to disobey God as an attempt at human autonomy, seeking the good according to his own understanding rather than according to the will of God. This act of rebellion fundamentally altered humanity. Having turned from God and lost divine grace, the soul is now no longer able to rule over the flesh. It has become incapable of doing good; its free will is only able to will sinfulness and is thus an utterly ineffective freedom.<sup>32</sup> Wrongly believing it is pursuing good by indulging the flesh, humanity turns further and further from true blessedness.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, the very forms of freedom the "earthly city" seeks and prizes are themselves forms of enslavement. To enjoy the freedom of licentious living is to be enslaved to vices, and even those who seek the glory of a virtuous life are enslaved to human praise. One can even be a ruler who dominates, and yet still utterly a slave. Earthly liberty is empty, for it does not bring eternal blessedness.<sup>34</sup>

### *Restored Freedom*

In his refutations of Pelagianism, Augustine emphasized that the effects of sin upon humanity are such that it is entirely dependent upon God's intervention to be changed. Through Christ, God

<sup>30</sup> Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 14.11.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.30.

<sup>32</sup> Augustine refers to his act of stealing pears as an attempt at a "counterfeit freedom" (*mancam libertatem*) (*Confessiones* 2.6.14 [trans. J. G. Pilkington, *NPNF1* 1 {New York: Christian Literature, 1887}]).

<sup>33</sup> Augustine, *De Trinitate* 10.7–8 (trans. Arthur West Haddan; *NPNF1* 3 [New York: Christian Literature, 1887]).

<sup>34</sup> Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 2.29, 4.3, 5.18.

implants faith in his elect and works through it to redirect their love, such that they turn from earthly lusts, subject themselves to the divine law, and seek the eternal blessedness of the life everlasting.<sup>35</sup> Those so redeemed are citizens of the “city of God,” and thus only sojourners in the earthly city.<sup>36</sup> Enjoying a partial freedom of hope presently they, upon Christ’s return, will experience the true freedom that is enjoyed when one’s desires and loves are wholly in concord with reality. Enabled to participate in the divine nature, they will be given the divine freedom from the ability to sin.<sup>37</sup>

### ***Medieval Theology***

Theologians in the following millennium can be characterized as primarily attempting to clarify and refine the thinking of the patristic writers (and for the West, Augustine in particular). Many assume or further develop Augustine’s understanding of true freedom being freedom for good, while others, like Origen, emphasize the importance of being able to choose between good and evil. This emphasis anticipates further, more radical developments in Renaissance thought.

### *Freedom of the Will*

Aquinas and Anselm followed Augustine in viewing sinful humanity as utterly dependent upon Christ for true freedom, and both, in different ways, sought to maintain the two contentions found in his writings often considered difficult to reconcile: an action must freely be initiated by the individual for it to be meritorious or blameworthy; and freedom, in its truest form, is the ability only to do good. Anselm rejected Augustine’s eudaimonism in favor of a view of the will as having been created with two inclinations: one for righteousness and one for happiness. True freedom consists in

<sup>35</sup> Augustine, *De Peccatorum Meritis et Remissione* 2.5, 2.9, 3.2 (trans Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallis; *NPNF1* 5 [1887]).

<sup>36</sup> Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 19.17.

<sup>37</sup> Augustine, *De Trinitate* 4.4.

the ability to favor the inclination to righteousness for its own sake, i.e., when righteousness does not satisfy the desire for happiness.<sup>38</sup> Aquinas follows Augustine in identifying the human will as *necessarily* seeking what it perceives as good. Rationality, then, is the locus of freedom, discerning for the will what that good is. Were it able to see without confusion that the good always lies in the virtuous (as it will at the beatific vision), such would always be its free decision.<sup>39</sup> Both of these figures held that true freedom cannot be enjoyed by sinful humanity apart from Christ.

Yet others were uncomfortable with this understanding of the nature of freedom. Duns Scotus and Ockham both rejected the notion that an agent can be truly free and yet only capable of one type of action: “ought” necessarily implies both “can” and “cannot.” True freedom lies not in the intellect, but the will—specifically, a will not determined by nature. Scotus writes of the will’s “superabundant sufficiency” that enables it to act contrary to its natural inclinations for righteousness and happiness.<sup>40</sup> Ockham speaks of a “liberty of indifference,” such that the will is always in any circumstance able to will or nill an action: even the supreme good (*summum bonum*), found in God, can be rejected.<sup>41</sup> This identification of freedom with an undetermined will generating its choices provides a precursor for the modern conception of autonomy.

<sup>38</sup> Jeffery E. Brower, “Anselm on Ethics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm* (ed. Brian Davies and Brian Leftow; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 222–56. Cf. also, in the same volume, Sandra Visser and Thomas Williams, “Anselm’s Account of Freedom,” 179–203.

<sup>39</sup> Alan Donagan, “Thomas Aquinas on Human Action,” in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (ed. Norman Kretzman, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 642–54.

<sup>40</sup> Duns Scotus, *Quaestiones super libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis* 9.15 (trans. Girard J. Etzkorn and Allan B. Wolter; St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1998).

<sup>41</sup> Benjamin Myers, *Milton’s Theology of Freedom* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 28.

*Hierarchy*

One other development relevant to understanding the modern break with medieval thinking relates to the understanding of the church structures as mediating God to humanity. As its rejections of heresy in the first few centuries after Christ demonstrate, the church of the patristic age did not perceive the demand for submission to church leadership to be in conflict with the promise of Christian freedom, but rather a pre-requisite for it: outside of the church, with its teaching and discipline, there is no salvation. The late medieval emphasis upon the hierarchical ordering of all existence strengthened this connection. Around the year 500, the writer identifying himself as Dionysius the Areopagite conceived of the angelic orders and (correspondingly) the church as a hierarchy of beings, vertically ordered from God downward according to their degree of deformity.<sup>42</sup> Each order mediated God to the one below it. Centuries later, Bonaventure followed Pseudo-Dionysius in identifying the church's hierarchy (at the top of which stands the pope) as the ordered means by which a believer is enlightened and perfected. Echoing this understanding, the papal bull *Unam Sanctam* (1302) argued that the pope was the chief human intermediary to God to which all powers—sacred and secular—must be subject if they are to be saved. This interposing of the religious institution between the soul and God seems to have been instrumental in preventing a strong sense of individuality from emerging.<sup>43</sup>

***The Move to Individual Autonomy***

The departure from this identification of freedom with submission to God and, by implication in the medieval age, the church, is one of the defining traits of modernity. A precursor to the modern emphasis upon the autonomous individual can be seen in the

<sup>42</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ecclesiastica hierarchia* (in *The Complete Works of Dionysius the Areopagite* 2; trans. John Parker; Oxford: James Parker, 1897).

<sup>43</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (2 vols.; Scribner Library Edition; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), 1:59.

## INTRODUCTION

Renaissance emphasis upon human dignity and capability. Both through the emergence of the bourgeois classes in the Italian city states, and as a reaction against the hierarchical authoritarianism of the medieval church, a profoundly optimistic view of humanity developed. The Christian conception of the importance of the individual was wedded to neo-Platonic and medieval mystical (expressed by Meister Eckhardt and Nicholas of Cusa) ideas of the soul as having infinite potential.<sup>44</sup> Exemplifying this is Pico della Mirandola's famous description of God's address to Adam:

You alone are not bound by any restraint, unless you will adopt it by the will which we have given you. I have placed you in the centre of the world that you may the easier look about and behold all that is in it. I created you a creature, neither earthly nor heavenly, neither mortal nor immortal, so that you could be your own creator and choose whatever form you may assume for yourself.<sup>45</sup>

This view of humanity as being nearly limitless in powers marks an important turning point. Propelled further by the collapse of previous ecclesial and political structures and a new cosmology,<sup>46</sup> as well as by ongoing scientific achievements,<sup>47</sup> this conception of humanity provided the seedbed for the modern elevation of autonomy. As Descartes and, in the following century, Kant, would both exemplify in their own ways, the human subjectivity now was placed at the rational and ethical center of reality, once the sole domain of God. Freedom became defined in terms of obedience to some aspect

<sup>44</sup> Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 1:21, 61–63.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:21–22.

<sup>46</sup> Walter Kasper, *The Christian Understanding of Freedom and History of Freedom in the Modern Era* (Père Marquette Lecture in Theology; Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1988), 5.

<sup>47</sup> Richard Bauckham, *God and the Crisis of Freedom: Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 33.

of the self, rather than in terms of the human's relationship to its Creator. An individual is capable of being truly free because she can be true to self.<sup>48</sup>

### Roman Catholic Response to Freedom as Autonomy

Christianity in its many forms has struggled to respond to this Copernican revolution. Walter Kasper helpfully narrates what he sees as a movement within Roman Catholicism from rejection to appropriation. The nineteenth century, Kasper argues, typifies Catholicism's initial antagonism to modernity. Pope Gregory XVI in one encyclical describes the belief in the liberty of conscience as "absurd" and freedom of opinion and press as "evil,"<sup>49</sup> while Leo XIII argued that any elements that are new in the "modern liberties" are "the fruit of the disorders of the age."<sup>50</sup> The First Vatican Council also associated these modern developments with decline and decay.<sup>51</sup>

The Second Vatican Council, however, according to Kasper, marked a different posture. Seeking to redress the estrangement between the Catholic Church and the modern culture, the Council sought to appropriate some of the modern developments and advocated religious liberty. Taking this appropriation further were those who identified autonomy as the secular realization of Christian theonomy.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Intriguingly, Bayer argues that this modern view of freedom is simultaneously antinomian and legalistic. It generalizes the freedom that the gospel brings so that it is accorded to human beings by their very nature: the law has been defeated for all, so that all are free and good. In this sense it is antinomian. Yet it is also legalistic in its burdening every person with the demands of having to liberate oneself into this authentic freedom (*Freedom*, 8–9).

<sup>49</sup> Gregory XVI, *Mirari Vos*, Encyclical letter on Liberalism and Religious Indifferentism (1832), 14.

<sup>50</sup> Leo XIII, *Libertas Praestantissimum*, Encyclical letter on the nature of human liberty (1888), 2.

<sup>51</sup> Kasper, *The Christian Understanding of Freedom*, 20.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 24–29.

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Kasper himself argues “that this secularization thesis means an essential step forward for a relevant determination of the relation between Christianity and the modern era.”<sup>53</sup> Yet he believes that the theology of “neo-liberalism” cannot be the last word. While the modern emphasis on autonomy may indeed build upon the foundation of Christian thought, it is nevertheless also a protest against Christianity and the church. And this “properly religious element” both judges and surpasses the freedom of secular autonomy.<sup>54</sup> Finding applicable the axiom that “Grace presupposes nature and completes it,” Kasper contends that “Christian freedom presupposes human freedom, gives it its final determination and provides it with its final fulfillment.”<sup>55</sup> God’s address to the human presupposes a formal freedom by which the individual can of her own choice respond. In this sense the human freedom of modernity is presupposed. Yet Christian freedom completes human freedom with its “final specification”: a freedom for God and neighbor.<sup>56</sup> “Freedom of man must be set free,” into “the freedom of the sons and daughters of God.”<sup>57</sup>

### Protestant Responses

The Renaissance emphasis on individuality and human dignity gave birth, not only to modernity’s emphasis upon autonomy, which might be understood as a development of individuality outside the limits of Christianity, but also to the Reformation, a development of individuality within Christian limits. To be sure, some within Protestantism have responded in a manner similar to post-Vatican II Catholicism, seeking to appropriate the modern era’s secular

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 31–32.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 37–41.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

turn as the secular realization of Christianity.<sup>58</sup> Yet alongside these efforts have been other Protestants who, while sharing in some of the concerns about the authoritarian structure of Catholicism, are still deeply critical of the elevation of autonomy as freedom. Because the argument of this dissertation locates itself within this particular form of response to modernity, I will now provide a survey of some of the more recent examples of these, before identifying the contribution of my argument to this critique.

### **G. C. Berkouwer**

G. C. Berkouwer's *Man: The Image of God*, written in the middle of the last century, provides us with a significantly more antagonistic response to the modern understanding of freedom than that of Kasper.<sup>59</sup> He rejects any appropriation of the view of human freedom

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 25. Kasper argues that an example of this response can be found in the “neo-orthodoxy” of the twentieth century, as seen in Trutz Rendtorff, Friedrich Gogarten, and, to a lesser extent, Wolfhart Pannenberg.

It might be argued that Dietrich Bonhoeffer, with his language of a “world come of age” and the time for “religionless Christianity,” should be included as one who was favorable to the modern identification of freedom with autonomy (cf. the letters written to Bethge from April to August of 1944 in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* [ed. John W. De Gruchy; trans. Isabel Best et al.; vol. 8 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*; ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009], 361–518). Yet, when these letters from prison are read in the context of the rest of his writings, it becomes apparent that Bonhoeffer was not welcoming secular human autonomy, but rather anticipating the opportunity for the church to understand that Christian discipleship involves all of life in this world and is not relegated to a “religious” portion on the periphery (Richard H. Bube, “Man Come of Age: Bonhoeffer’s Response to the God-of-the-Gaps,” *JETS* 14 [1971]: 203–20). As Ann Nickson convincingly demonstrates, Bonhoeffer rejected the modern identification of freedom as autonomy, instead identifying freedom as freedom for God and others (*Bonhoeffer on Freedom: Courageously Grasping Reality* [Oxford: Ashgate, 2002]; cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* [ed. Clifford J. Green; trans. Reinhard Krauss et al.; vol. 6 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*; ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005], 219–98).

<sup>59</sup> G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Studies in Dogmatics; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962).

as autonomy, finding no compatibility between it and the Christian understanding of freedom.<sup>60</sup> Instead, he argues that this abstract idea of freedom as “autonomy and arbitrary power, as a purely formal power of man to go his own way” is a “perverted and secularized concept of freedom.”<sup>61</sup> It is a conception that arises from an abstract and irreligious anthropology, where humanity’s essence is mistakenly described apart from its relationship to God.<sup>62</sup> Such a view of freedom necessarily implies a competitive relationship between God and human freedom, so that the “more powerfully God’s acts affect our lives, the narrower our freedom becomes.”<sup>63</sup> Scripture unmasks this as illusory freedom (2 Peter 2:18–19). It is in this attempted autonomy that the enslaved will is found.<sup>64</sup>

In line with Augustine’s distinction between *liberum arbitrium* and *libertas*, Berkouwer argues that the biblical view of freedom is not that of formal possibility but material actuality: it is the freedom of being a child of God, made concrete through humanity’s relationship to Christ.<sup>65</sup> Thus humanity’s submission to God and communion with him are not obstacles to freedom: they are identical with this freedom. Fulfilling the “law of Christ,” freedom reveals itself in a “love-filled ‘free for,’” in which the individual is turned toward the neighbor.<sup>66</sup> Being restored into this freedom does not mean a loss of self, but rather by no longer being our own we “rediscover ourselves in our true humanness and our true destiny.”<sup>67</sup> Human nature, as God meant it to be, stands before us in Christ, and in him we see that true human nature “show[s] forth the image of God as a child

<sup>60</sup> “It is . . . impossible to combine the material freedom of the child of God and the formal freedom of choice in a satisfying and meaningful synthesis” (ibid., 335).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 327.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 322–23.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 325.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 322–24.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 329.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 326.

of God.”<sup>68</sup> For this reason, no distinction should be made between human freedom and Christian freedom: the freedom unveiled in the preaching of the gospel is not a “supernatural” freedom, but rather the freedom humanity was created to enjoy.

### **Richard Bauckham**

Richard Bauckham, in his recent wide-ranging discussion of what he calls “the crisis of freedom” of modernity, seems to have a very slightly more positive perspective on the modern conception of autonomy than Berkouwer. “The history of freedom in the modern period is double-edged”: while it has deep problems, we also find in it the affirmation of human dignity and a protection of individual freedoms over against church and state powers.<sup>69</sup> Contrary to Berkouwer, he contends that the ability to choose between good and evil is a crucial aspect of human freedom that “must at all costs be protected and valued.” Were Adam and Eve not to have been given the “freedom” to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would not have been able to freely choose to obey God. True goodness only can come about when one has the ability to choose the alternative.<sup>70</sup> Correspondingly, while deeply critical of the human project of the modern age, he concedes that (giving it “the most generous Christian interpretation”) there is an appropriateness to Bonhoeffer’s much-quoted idea that the world has “come of age.” Humanity, though not yet arrived at mature adulthood, has perhaps entered into adolescence, breaking free of childish dependence by appropriating its freedom (presumably of choice), without yet recognizing that “this very freedom is rooted in dependence on God and on nature.”<sup>71</sup> A similar connection between freedom and choice can be found a page earlier, where Bauckham states that John 15’s language of friendship

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 329–30.

<sup>69</sup> Bauckham, *God and the Crisis of Freedom*, 197.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 48, although see below about Bauckham’s emphasis on freedom being the freedom to be good.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 44.

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between Jesus and believers “puts perhaps an even stronger emphasis on freedom” than the language of divine-human sonship, because “it is a relationship created by mutual choice.”<sup>72</sup>

That said, Bauckham is quite critical of the modern identification of freedom with human autonomy. At its heart is “the illusory desire to absolutize our freedom by becoming our own creators.”<sup>73</sup> In its denial of the givenness of creaturely freedom, the modern view of freedom as autonomy removes self-determination from the limits that specify it. Without these, freedom “degenerates into the banal pursuit of self-gratification or the cynical pursuit of power.”<sup>74</sup> Being left to choose without any basis, the individual lacks the protection from marketing forces that seek to manipulate the consumer.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, a freedom that involves self-liberation from all constraints is ultimately a freedom of domination, promoting a hyper-individualism that fragments society and encourages oppression of the poor and exploitation of the earth’s resources.<sup>76</sup>

The alternative Bauckham proposes is an understanding of freedom that begins with its givenness: as with human identity and existence, so also human freedom ultimately is given by God and is therefore a creaturely, finite freedom.<sup>77</sup> It is not always precisely clear what for Bauckham the nature of that freedom is.<sup>78</sup> As previously

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 36, 198.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 37–40.

<sup>78</sup> Bauckham argues that the biblical conception of freedom is broad and complex, and that no one model of freedom can adequately categorize it. Consequently, freedom should be understood multidimensionally (e.g., politically, physically, psychologically, spiritually, inner and outer) in a way that corresponds to the multidimensional nature of human life (*Ibid.*, 21–25). But, while providing a helpful reminder of the complexity of freedom, this appears to somewhat beg the question: what does it mean to be free in each of those dimensions—e.g., is it a formal freedom of choice or a material, concrete freedom?

noted, at times he appears to emphasize formal freedom: the freedom that has been given, while shaped by one's context, influences, etc., is still spoken of as a "freedom to choose what to make of ourselves and our lives."<sup>79</sup> Likewise, while stating that humanity's finitude does not deny it its freedom, Bauckham still speaks of individuals exercising freedom "within limits," implying that freedom consists in possibility, albeit a limited, or specified one.<sup>80</sup> However, ultimately it appears that this formal freedom is a means to the end of the material freedom for which we were created: "our freedom is perfected when . . . we finally attain the freedom simply to be good."<sup>81</sup> This freedom is found in a relationship of mutual belonging with God, and it is Trinitarian. Empowered by the Spirit, the believer participates in the Son's filial relationship with the Father. The believer is freed from enslavement to false idols and other tyrants by being called to obey the transcendent Father, whose rule uniquely establishes, rather than diminishes, human freedom. Dependent on the Father, one is also freed from the compulsion to be self-constituted and in total control into the truthful creaturely life of prayerful and confident trust. Furthermore, by enjoying intimacy with the Father, the believer enjoys the freedom of security in belonging. Meanwhile, the believer enjoys friendship and solidarity with Jesus and is shaped and transformed by the Spirit in a way that does not reduce personal freedom, but enables it, because conformity to the law of God enables us to "become most truly ourselves."<sup>82</sup>

### **Reinhard Hütter**

Hütter, similarly to Bauckham, speaks of a "fundamental crisis of freedom that threatens humanity."<sup>83</sup> He contends that the

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 202–8.

<sup>83</sup> Reinhard Hütter, *Bound to Be Free: Evangelical Catholic Engagements in Ecclesiology, Ethics, and Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 9. Though

modern view of freedom is deeply flawed because it sees freedom as a possession, rather than a gift that is being received.<sup>84</sup> Tracing the development through Kant, Fichte, and Nietzsche, Hütter argues that humanity “exchanged attributes” with God, taking upon itself ungrounded freedom of sovereignty and ascribing to God contingency, which in turn ultimately led to the death of God.<sup>85</sup> Human freedom became absolute. The law’s otherness as something received was lost, for law is now developed from freedom—it must be originated by the subject. The result is necessarily a decline into “individual sovereignty, will to power, and license.”<sup>86</sup> And even as society celebrates the “Promethean self’s daydream of freedom,” the insights of Darwin, Freud, and Marx question whether human freedom really exists amidst the powerful biological, social, psychological, and economic forces. And so, in the present climate, “we find ourselves as late moderns on a manic-depressive roller-coaster ride” between the dream of “autocreativity” and “endless victimization by ‘the system.’”<sup>87</sup>

Perhaps the ultimate target of Hütter’s argument, however, is not secular modernism, but the antinomian mainline Protestant (and especially Lutheran) response to it. In Protestant ethics, Hütter observes, freedom has come to be conceived of purely as a negative “free from.” Consequently, law and freedom are placed in antithesis to each other.<sup>88</sup> This development stems both from modern theologians wrongly understanding Luther’s doctrine of justification by faith to imply that law’s sole purpose is to unmask and convict us,

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Hütter has since converted to Roman Catholicism, *Bound to Be Free* was written while he was a Protestant and will be treated as such here. However, it is worth noting that hints of this subsequent theological move are clearly present in these essays, not the least of which being his strong sympathies with *Veritatis Splendor* (John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, Encyclical letter, Vatican Web site, August 6, 1993, [http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0222/\\_INDEX.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0222/_INDEX.HTM)).

<sup>84</sup> Hütter, *Bound to Be Free*, 113.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 7–9, 116–24.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

and also from the powerful influence of Kant's notion that human freedom is self-legislative.<sup>89</sup> The result is the view of freedom as a good will (having been motivated by the gospel) which, spontaneously, apart from any external law, does what is loving and good.<sup>90</sup>

But Christian freedom, which is "genuine human freedom," is "fatally misconstrued in the absence of serious consideration of God's commandments."<sup>91</sup> While what is described as negative freedom is important, it is only so inasmuch as it frees people for the positive freedom of living in communion with God, which is "the most fundamental level" of freedom.<sup>92</sup> Citing Luther's interpretation of Genesis 2 for support, Hütter argues that this freedom is a gift, dependent upon God, and that this freedom has a concrete form which is found in the following of God's commandments.<sup>93</sup> "Genuine freedom is concretely embodied in the very practice of obeying the commandment, a practice that constitutes the framework in which God's goodness is received and proclaimed."<sup>94</sup> Both Luther and the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* challenge contemporary Protestantism to recognize that freedom is life with God, received by faith in Christ and actualized by receiving the gift of God's commandments through meditating upon and enacting them. This meditation and enactment comes by the power of the Spirit and is a communal practice, as the church together receives this freedom.<sup>95</sup>

### The Project of This Dissertation

It is worth noting that these critiques of the modern conception of autonomy each speak of freedom as something that possesses

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 147–48.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 7, 144.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 141.f

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 142–44.

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a concrete shape and whose ontological basis lies outside of the individual. For Berkouwer and Bauckham, this shape is defined by a divine sonship that is a participation in the Trinitarian communion. Kasper, similarly, locates the fullest expression of freedom in being a child of God. Hütter spends little time exploring the close connection between freedom and divine sonship, although he does speak of “the freedom of the children of God,”<sup>96</sup> but his identification of freedom with obedience in Trinitarian communion with God certainly implies it. All of these writers, their differences notwithstanding, seem to agree that the divine-human relationship perhaps best approximated by the metaphor of divine sonship is where true human freedom is located. Given this, it is surprising that neither in these works nor, to my knowledge, any other contemporary examinations of Christian freedom, are there any extended exegetical or dogmatic discussions of this filial conception of freedom. My purpose then, in this work, is to build upon these critiques by providing an exegetical and theological support for the notion that freedom as divine sonship provides a superior conception to the modern notion of freedom as autonomy.

My argument will proceed in four main steps. First, I will examine John Stuart Mill’s highly influential articulation of human freedom, exegeting *On Liberty* in the context of his larger work, and will as part of this investigation attend to his criticism of what he takes to be the Christian view of freedom. I will argue that Mill’s advocacy of negative liberty is founded upon his conviction that enlightened individual autonomy, properly supported by society, both brings individual human flourishing and happiness and also moves human progress steadily forward. I will argue that this conviction is naïve and that humanity’s inability to arrive at a united understanding of the good signals a fatal flaw in his form of secular liberalism. This backdrop presents the demands placed upon the subsequent chapters: a credible articulation of freedom must be able

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 179.

to withstand his criticisms while simultaneously succeeding where he failed.

In the following three chapters, I will seek to demonstrate that there is a biblical conception of human freedom, and that this conception can appropriately be identified as the freedom of divine sonship. Using the Exodus as an entry point into my OT analysis, I will seek to demonstrate that Scripture's descriptions of the freedom enjoyed at creation and subsequently lost in the fall, the freedom promised by God to his people, and the freedom partly realized in the history of Israel are the same, and that this freedom is accurately characterized as the freedom of divine sonship. It is a freedom that includes the privileges of fellowship with God, divinely granted authority and the glory of reflecting God, and it is also a freedom with corresponding responsibilities: there is no ultimate tension between freedom and command. The following two chapters will focus in turn on the mutually reinforcing, yet distinct, conceptions of freedom found in the Pauline and Johannine writings. Building on the OT analysis, I will argue that each in his own fashion identifies fallen humanity's enslavement with its current exclusion from the divine household, present Jesus as the fullest expression of freedom in his divine-human sonship, and contend that humanity takes possession of true freedom by entering again into God's family through adoption and regeneration. These NT writings present the same privileges and same compatibility between freedom and command that are found in our OT analysis.

Following this biblical analysis, I will enlist the help of John Calvin to guide our investigation, as we seek to synthesize the various threads of the biblical material. In Calvin we find a theologian and exegete sympathetic to our project: both freedom and the human privilege of divine sonship play significant roles in his thought, and careful analysis demonstrates their deep connectedness. His depiction of the manner in which humanity enjoys divine sonship at five stages—creation, fall, the (forward-pointing) redemption of Israel, the incarnation, and humanity's full redemption—develops a more full-orbed description of the freedom of divine sonship.

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In my conclusion I will return to Mill and his critique of Christian freedom. Having identified and articulated the Christian conception of freedom, I will seek to demonstrate that, with Bauckham and Berkouwer, divine sonship presents us with a superior view of freedom than that supplied by modern secular liberalism.