

Paul's Juxtaposition of Freedom and Positive Servitude in 1Cor 9:19 and its Reception by Martin Luther and Gerhard Ebeling

Von Wayne Coppins

I Introduction

In my book *The Interpretation of Freedom in the Letters of Paul* I presented an in-depth study of freedom in Paul's letters with special reference to twentieth-century ›German‹ New Testament scholarship.¹ In this article my purpose is to highlight the fruitfulness of reception history for theological reflection by examining how Paul's juxtaposition of ›freedom‹ and ›positive servitude‹ in 1Cor 9:19 was taken up by Martin Luther in his 1520 tractate *The Freedom of a Christian* and how both of their contributions were taken further by the Lutheran theologian Gerhard Ebeling. In the first instance, I aim to show that rather than merely replicating or reasserting Paul's thinking on the relationship between freedom and positive servitude,² Luther develops Paul's thought in important respects. Likewise, I will contend that while aiming and claiming to bring the common vision of Paul and Luther to expression, Gerhard Ebeling formed a new synthesis that went beyond them both. In comparing the three authors' treatments of this issue, my goal is both to draw out the distinctive voice of each and to show how their thinking emerges from a shared engagement with the same subject matter. In my conclusion, I will then

1 See W. COPPINS, *The Interpretation of Freedom in the Letters of Paul. With Special Reference to the ›German‹ Tradition*, 2009.

2 In my book I chose to speak of freedom and ›service‹ when referring to those instances in which Paul made a positive use of the metaphor of slavery. Here I have decided to adopt the more cumbersome phrase ›positive servitude‹ in order to flag up more clearly the fact that Paul is making use of the *slavery metaphor* in a positive manner. It now seems to me that the use of ›service‹ does not sufficiently highlight this point and thus loses some of the power of Paul's language.

examine how both of these points can be seen as vital contributions to the contemporary theological task of entering into dialogue with others and of thinking constructively about the relationship between freedom and positive servitude. To this extent, I also understand this article to be a contribution to the theological interpretation of scripture.

II Paul's Juxtaposition of Freedom and Positive Servitude in 1 Cor 9:19

As my use of »positive servitude« rather than simply »slavery« indicates, my focus is upon Paul's positive employment of the δουλ- word group in the context of his use of the ἐλευθερ- word group.³ At the outset, of course, it should be acknowledged that this is *not* always the case. On the contrary, in many key passages Paul emphatically distances believers from the metaphor of slavery which is negatively contrasted with the positive metaphor of freedom (Gal 2:4; 4:21–31; 5:1; Rom 8:15.21). Moreover, his use of the substantive δουλεία is exclusively negative (Gal 4:24; 5:1; Rom 8:15.21). Alongside these distancing uses, however, Paul can also positively employ δουλ- terminology, in the context of ἐλευθερ- terminology, to portray the (present or future) situation of believers (1 Cor 7:22b; 9:19; Gal 5:13; Rom 6:18. 22; Rom 7:6). For reasons of space and with a view to its rich reception history, this article will focus exclusively on a single key text,⁴ namely Paul's juxtaposition of »freedom« and »positive servitude« in 1 Cor 9:19.⁵

As will become evident from my subsequent discussion of Luther and Ebeling, 1 Cor 9:19 has played a key role in the history of scholarship on the relation between freedom and positive servitude in Paul. For this reason, it is all the more necessary to pay careful attention to the dynamics

3 I am, of course, aware of the limitations associated with restricting my focus to selected word-groups. For a discussion of this point, see COPPINS (s. n. 1), 46–51.

4 For an analysis of the full range of Paul's ἐλευθερ-texts, see COPPINS (see n. 1). For a broader discussion of Paul's treatment of freedom and positive servitude, see esp. 41–45 and 169–174.

5 For the sake of precision, it should be noted that Paul does not make use of the substantives ἐλευθερία and δουλεία in this verse, which employs the adjective ἐλεύθερος and the verb δουλόω.

and constraints of the text itself.⁶ The Greek text of 1 Cor 9:19-23 may be presented as follows:

- 19a ἐλεύθερος γάρ ὢν ἐκ πάντων
19b πᾶσιν ἑμαυτὸν ἐδοῦλωσα,
19c ἵνα τοὺς πλείονας κερδήσω·
20a καὶ ἐγενόμην τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ὡς Ἰουδαίος,
20b ἵνα Ἰουδαίους κερδήσω·
20c τοῖς ὑπὸ νόμον ὡς ὑπὸ νόμον,
20d μὴ ὢν αὐτὸς ὑπὸ νόμον,
20e ἵνα τοὺς ὑπὸ νόμον κερδήσω·
21a τοῖς ἀνόμοις ὡς ἄνομος,
21b μὴ ὢν ἄνομος θεοῦ
21c ἀλλ' ἔννομος Χριστοῦ,
21d ἵνα κερδάω τοὺς ἀνόμους·
22a ἐγενόμην τοῖς ἀσθενέσιν ἀσθενής,
22b ἵνα τοὺς ἀσθενεῖς κερδήσω·
22c τοῖς πᾶσιν γέγονα πάντα,
22d ἵνα πάντως τινὰς σώσω.
23a πάντα δὲ ποιῶ
23b διὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον,
23c ἵνα συγκοινωνὸς αὐτοῦ γένομαι.

The translation and interpretation of v. 19 is hotly debated. Contested issues include 1) the scope of πάντων, 2) the meaning of ἐλεύθερος, and 3) the force of the present participle ὢν. I will tackle each of these issues in turn, with special reference to the difficult third question, which is particularly relevant for determining the relationship between »freedom« and »positive servitude« in 1 Cor 9:19.

Issue 1: *The interpretation of πάντων*. While a weighty minority of scholars such as Wolfgang Schrage, Andreas Lindemann and Raymond Collins wish to leave open the possibility that πάντων may refer to »all things« and not merely »all people«,⁷ the immediate context strongly

6 I recognize, of course, that not everyone would accept the view that texts have »dynamics« and »constraints«. I think they do, at least for interpreters who wish to enter into dialogue with them.

7 See W. SCHRAGE, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*. 1 Kor 6,12-11,16. Vol. 2, 1995, 337; A. LINDEMANN, *Der Erste Korintherbrief*, 2000, 209-211; R. F. COLLINS, *First Corinthians*, 1999, 353.

militates against this equivocation. In short, since Paul goes on to speak of his purpose of saving »the many« (τοὺς πλείονας) in v. 19c, which can only be understood as a masculine plural, and since it is to save the many that Paul makes himself a slave to all (πᾶσιν), which is the counterpart of the all (πάντων) from which he is said to be free, there is very good reason to conclude that the grammatically ambiguous πάντων and πᾶσιν in vv. 19a and 19b should both be understood as masculine plurals, i. e., in each case the reference is to »all people« rather than »all things«.

Issue 2: *The meaning of ἐλεύθερος* in 9:19a. As with most instances of Paul's talk of »freedom«, there is no consensus regarding the meaning of ἐλεύθερος in v. 19a. Rejecting attempts to discern a reference to »freedom from the law« in v. 19, F. Stanley Jones associates the »freedom« in question with Paul's financial independence.⁸ Samuel Vollenweider, however, argues that »*Eleutheria* is now taken up in its relation to the law«, claiming that the »freedom« of v. 19a returns in the subsequent phrases »not being myself under the law« (μὴ ὢν αὐτὸς ὑπὸ νόμον), »as without the law« (ὥς ἄνομος) and »in the law of Christ« (ἐννομος Χριστοῦ).⁹ Against Jones' attempt to link Paul's »freedom« to his »financial independence« it may be objected that Paul's practice of not taking remuneration seems to have been viewed with suspicion by (some of) the Corinthians (cf. 9:3), whereas Paul appears to expect them to affirm his claim to be free (from all) in 9:1.19. In response to Vollenweider's line of thought, two points must be made. On the one hand, he may well be correct in suggesting that *the idea or concept* of »freedom from the law« comes to expression in the phrases »not being myself under the law« and »as without the law« in vv. 20 and 21. On the other hand, it is far from clear that this idea should be included in the meaning of ἐλεύθερος in v. 19, which appears to be concerned exclusively with the fact that Paul is »free from all people« (see issue 1 above). Accordingly, the most one should conclude is that Paul's »freedom« from people is *indirectly* related to *the concept* of »freedom from the law«. As for the meaning of ἐλεύθερος, the fact that Paul juxtaposes his being »free

8 See F. S. JONES, »Freiheit« in den Briefen des Apostels Paulus. Eine historische, exegetische und religionsgeschichtliche Studie, 1987, 46.

9 See S. VOLLENWEIDER, Freiheit als neue Schöpfung. Eine Untersuchung zur Eleutheria bei Paulus und in seiner Umwelt, 1989, 213.

from all people« and his making himself »a slave to all people« suggests that the sense of ἐλεύθερος in v. 19 (and v. 1) is »independent«, that is, »not a slave to others« or »not subject to the demands or compulsion of others«.

Issue 3: *The force of the participle ὄν*. The interpretation of the force of the present participle ὄν is perhaps the most decisive issue for the interpretation of the relationship between »freedom« and »positive servitude« in 1 Cor 9:19. It involves two sub-issues, namely a) whether or not Paul ceased to be free from all when he made himself a slave to all and b) whether the force of the participle is concessive, causal or modal.

Sub-Issue A: *Past or present »freedom«*. Since the present participle indicates an action or state of being contemporaneous with the action of the main verb, should we understand Paul to mean that he *was* free from all but *ceased to be* so when he made himself a slave to all? Or should we understand him to mean that being free from all in the past he made himself a slave to all *without thereby ceasing to be free from all*? In short, is the sense of v. 19a »I was free from all but ceased to be« or »I was free from all and continued to be«? In my judgment, two reference points allow us to answer this question with a relatively high degree of certainty. First and foremost, with the rhetorical question of 9:1 (Am I not free?), Paul is clearly concerned to assert that »he is free« in the present! Hence, it is highly unlikely that he subsequently intends to acknowledge the loss of his freedom in v. 19. Secondly, Paul's subsequent use of ὄν participial constructions in v. 20d (not being myself under the law; μὴ ὄν αὐτὸς ὑπὸ νόμου), v. 21b (not being without the law of God; μὴ ὄν ἄνομος θεοῦ), and implicitly in v. 21c (but [being] in the law of Christ; ἀλλ' ἔννομος Χριστοῦ) are meant to stress that in becoming »as under the law« he did not cease to be »not under the law« and in becoming »as without the law« he did not cease to be »not without the law of God« but rather remained »in the law of Christ«. Likewise, Paul's point in v. 19a is most likely *not* that he *was previously* »free from all« but ceased to be so when he made himself a slave to all, but rather that in making himself a slave to all he did not, in fact, cease to be »free from all«. ¹⁰

Sub-Issue B: *Concessive, Causal or Modal*. Whereas most scholars are agreed that 9:19a should not be understood to mean that Paul ceased

¹⁰ For a more extensive presentation of this line of thought, see COPPINS (see n. 1), 70-72.

to be »free from all« when he made himself a slave to all,¹¹ there is less consensus on whether the force of the participial construction should be understood as concessive (»*though* I am free from all«), causal (»*because* I am free from all«) or modal (*as* one who is free from all). This is not, however, to say that there is no prevailing view, at least with regard to which interpretation is *not* correct. Adopting a modal, causal or modal-causal understanding, a significant number of scholars, especially within the »German« tradition, have emphatically rejected the concessive interpretation. Adopting a modal interpretation, Andreas Lindemann states that »the participle is not strictly causal *and certainly not to be understood as concessive*«. ¹² Leaving open both causal and modal interpretations, Samuel Vollenweider insists that »with a view to the whole of Pauline theology *it is absolutely necessary* to translate the participial expression in v. 19a *not as concessive* but at least as modal if not as causal: »because or in that I am free ...«¹³ Finally, combining the two approaches, Wolfgang Schrage maintains that it is »*in* and out of ἐλευθερία that Paul makes himself ever anew into a δοῦλος«, and explains that if freedom itself is the ground and point of departure for servitude, then it is not »although« but »because« Paul is free that he makes himself a slave to all.¹⁴

Despite the weighty stature and eloquent rhetoric of the representatives of this influential tradition of interpretation, I remain unconvinced. Instead, I find myself in agreement with Gerhard Dautzenberg's contention that »only a concessive understanding of the participle construction corresponds to the opposition of freedom and enslavement«, ¹⁵ i. e., 1 Cor 9:19ab should read »*Although* being free from all, I made myself a slave to all«. Here, a comparison with the participial clauses in v. 20d (not being

11 Cf. VOLLENWEIDER (see n. 9), 210: »Unbestritten ist, dass v. 19a gegenüber 19b nicht einen vergangenen Zustand meint«. Contrast e. g., D. B. MARTIN, *Slavery as Salvation. The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity*, 1990, 133f. While Vollenweider and others assume agreement on this point, I have attempted to marshal the decisive arguments in its favor.

12 LINDEMANN (see n. 7), 211 (my emphasis).

13 VOLLENWEIDER (see n. 9), 209 n. 53 (my emphasis).

14 SCHRAGE (see n. 7), 338.

15 G. DAUTZENBERG, *Freiheit im hellenistischen Kontext* (in: *Der neue Mensch in Christus. Hellenistische Anthropologie und Ethik im Neuen Testament*, ed. J. BEUTLER, 2001, 65).

myself under the law), and v. 21bc (not being without the law of God but [being] in the law of Christ) may again be helpful. In these instances, it is generally recognized that the force of the participle is concessive¹⁶: to those under (the) law [I became] as under the law, *though* not being myself under (the) law; to those without (the) law [I became] as without (the) law, *though* not being without (the) law of God but (being) in (the) law of Christ. Paul's emphasis here is *not* that he became »as under the law« *because* he was »not himself under the law« nor that he became »as without the law« *because* he was »not without (the) law of God but in (the) law of Christ«, nor is he concerned to explain that it was precisely as one who was »not himself under the law« and »not himself without (the) law of God but in (the) law of Christ« that he became »as under the law« and »as without the law«. Instead, Paul is concerned to introduce a qualification so as to avoid a potential misunderstanding. His point is that becoming X might be expected to entail Y, but it does not, that is, becoming »as under the law« (20c) might be expected to entail »being under (the) law« (20d) but it does not; likewise, becoming »as without (the) law« (21a) might be expected to entail »being without (the) law of God« (21b) and not being »in the law of Christ«, but it does not.

It is my contention that the logic of v. 19ab is in many ways the converse of 20cd and 21abc. Here, Paul's point is that whereas being »free from all people« might be expected to *preclude* its apparent antithesis, namely making oneself a slave to all people, it does not, in fact, do so! Such a reading fits well with my earlier contention that the sense of ἐλεύθερος in v. 19a (and v. 1) is »independent«, that is, »not a slave to others« or »not subject to the demands or compulsion of others«. In short, Paul's point is that *although* he was and remained (not a slave to human beings but rather) »free from all people« (and thus could not be expected, required or compelled to subject himself to the wishes of others), he nevertheless made himself »a slave of all people« in order that he might gain the many.¹⁷

While this reading fits well with the hard juxtaposition of »freedom« and »servitude« in the verse, the causal and modal interpretation fail to do justice to this fact. Beyond this crucial point, I would like to highlight two

¹⁶ See e. g., SCHRAGE (see n. 7), 336: »eine konzessive Partizipialbestimmung«.

¹⁷ Cf. COPPINS (see n. 1), 72f.

further weaknesses of the causal interpretation, namely a) the fact that its advocates continue to employ concessive or quasi-concessive language such as »paradox«, »oxymoron«, and »dialectic« in their analyses,¹⁸ and b) the failure of its advocates to address the implications of the fact that something other than »freedom« is given as the basis and cause of Paul's actions in v. 23: »But I do all things *on account of the gospel* in order that I may become a sharer in it.« From this verse, it is evident that *the gospel* is put forth as the basis and cause of Paul's actions in vv. 19–23. Accordingly, it is not necessary to present the »freedom« mentioned in v. 19a as the cause of Paul's making himself a slave to all. This point, of course, is already suggested by v. 19c (cf. 20b, 21d, 22b, 22d), which can be understood to provide both the purpose and cause of Paul's action in v. 19b. In short, it was not his being »free from all« that provided his rationale or actively caused him to make himself »a slave to all« but rather he did so in order that he might gain the many.

III Luther's Reception of 1 Cor 9:19 in his 1520 Tractate The Freedom of a Christian

The most influential reception of Paul's juxtaposition of freedom and servitude in 1 Cor 9:19 and elsewhere is undoubtedly Martin Luther's 1520 tractate *The Freedom of a Christian*, which Luther sent with a letter to the Pope as part of Karl Miltitz's last ditch effort to reconcile him with Rome in the context of the proclamation of his excommunication.¹⁹ That the relationship between freedom and servitude lies at the heart of this tractate is already evident from Luther's famous two propositions, which read as follows in the Latin and in German versions:

Christianus homo omnium dominus est liberrimus, nulli subiectus
 Christianus homo omnium servus est officiosissimus, omnibus subiectus.

¹⁸ See e.g., SCHRAGE (see n. 7), 334–337, who also states that »in v. 19 freedom and servitude stand hard alongside each other« (337). See also my discussion of Ebeling's position below.

¹⁹ For further discussion of the context, character and text of the tractate, see COPPINS (see n. 1), 10–14 and the additional literature cited there. In what follows I employ the following abbreviation: LW = Luther's Works. American ed., 56 vol.s, 1955 ff., e.g. LW 31, 343 = *Luther's Works*; vol. 31; page 343.

A Christian person is a most free lord of all (things), subject to none.
A Christian person is a most dutiful servant of all (things), subject to all.

Eyn Christen mensch ist eyn freyer herr ueber alle ding und niemandt unterthan
Eyn Christen mensch ist eyn dienstpar knecht aller ding und yderman unterthan
A Christian person is a free lord over all things and subject to none.
A Christian person is a dutiful servant of all things and subject to everyone.

Luther himself makes it abundantly clear that he views these two propositions as representing Paul's line of thought in 1 Cor 9:19.²⁰ In the words of the German version: »These two propositions are clearly Saint Paul's, 1 Cor 9:19: ›I am free in all things and have made myself a slave of everyone‹; or as the Latin puts it: »For both are from Paul himself, who says, 1 Cor 9:19: ›Though I am free, I made myself a slave of all‹.«²¹

In seeking to unpack Luther's reception of Paul's juxtaposition of »freedom« and »positive servitude« in 1 Cor 9:19 I will focus on a) differences between 1 Cor 9:19 and Luther's two propositions, b) Luther's Latin and German translations of 1 Cor 9:19 and c) the witness of the tractate as a whole.

1 Luther's Two Propositions and 1 Cor 9:19

While Luther expressly suggests that his two propositions »are clearly Saint Paul's« (German) or are those »of Paul himself« (Latin), for our purposes it is necessary to identify and discuss a number of significant differences.

1) In 1 Cor 9:19 the Apostle Paul is speaking of himself; Luther's two propositions, by contrast, speak of the Christian person. On the one hand, it is not self-evident that Paul would make this precise point in relation to all Christians. On the other hand, Paul's line of thought in 1 Cor 10:32-11:1 ap-

²⁰ This is not to say, however, that Luther regarded 1 Cor 9:19 as the sole basis for his propositions. In fact, the Latin version appears to place 1 Cor 9:19 and Rom 13:8 on equal footing, while presenting Gal 4:4 and Phil 2:6f. as further support. In the German version, however, it is more apparent that 1 Cor 9:19 has pride of place, since the word »again« presents Rom 13:8 and Gal 4:4 as additional support.

²¹ For the Latin Version, see WA 7; 49,22-25; 49,27f. For the German Version, see WA 7; 21,1-6. Unless otherwise indicated all translations are my own.

pears to point in this direction: »Be without offense to Jews and to Greeks and to the church of God, just as I also please all in all things, not seeking my own benefit but that of the many, in order that they may be saved. Be imitators of me as I also am of Christ«. Hence, Luther's development of Paul's line of thought is arguably justified – but it is a development nonetheless.

2) Whereas Luther's two propositions can be seen to correspond with 1 Cor 9:19ab, there is nothing that corresponds to the purpose statement »in order that I might gain the many« in v. 19c. On the one hand, the significance of this point should not be exaggerated, since one of the concerns of the tractate is that the believer may seek the interests of others, since s/he is not concerned with his or her own interests.²² On the other hand, it should not be overlooked that Luther's two propositions do not retain the focus on mission, whereas 1 Cor 9:19–23 is focused on the specific mission of Paul in relation to his self-understanding as Apostle.

3) Luther's two propositions consist of two sentences with main verbs, whereas 1 Cor 9:19 is a single sentence comprised of a participial construction, a main verb and a purpose clause. The result of this difference is that in Luther's case the relation between the two propositions is not expressed syntactically. This relates to the fact that in contrast to his ›German‹ interpreters who frequently speak of Luther's »double thesis«, Luther consistently speaks of his »two propositions«. As for the relationship between the two propositions, Luther writes that »although these seem to fight, nevertheless when they will have been found to come together they will serve beautifully for our purpose.«²³ Here, Luther acknowledges that the two propositions appear to be in tension, but also indicates that he expects to find them coming together and sees this as congenial to his purpose. From this perspective, it is understandable that many scholars speak of Luther's double thesis, and viewing the beginning from the end one may indeed conclude with Dietrich Korsch that »out of the two theses

²² See WA 7; 64–69.

²³ WA 7; 49,26: »Haec quanquam pugnare videantur, tamen, ubi convenire inventa fuerint, pulchre facient ad institutum nostrum«.

one thesis has arisen«. ²⁴ Moreover, this observation enables one to grasp why Luther found it appropriate to entitle the tractate *The Freedom of a Christian*.

4) Luther speaks of the Christian as »a free lord of all (things)« and »a free lord over all things«, and adds that s/he is subject to none, whereas Paul states that he is »free from all (people)«. Here, there are two points to note. First, while Luther's »subject to none« arguably makes a similar point to Paul's »free from all«, Luther's lord of/over introduces a new emphasis, in which »freedom« appears to be associated with a positive lordship of/over. Secondly, while we have argued above that Paul speaks of being free from »all people«, Luther speaks of being lord over »all things« in the German. That this is also the meaning of the grammatically ambiguous *omnium* is clear from the fact that the Latin version subsequently states that the Christian is free »from all things and over all things«. ²⁵ These changes together constitute a significant development. Rather than merely being free from all people, in the sense of not being subject to their wishes or demands, the believer is said to be »a most free Lord over all things«.

In sum then we see that Luther's two propositions represent a subtle development of 1 Cor 9:19 rather than a precise representation of it.

2 Luther's Translations of 1 Cor 9:19 in the Freedom of a Christian

Luther's Latin and German translations of 1 Cor 9:19 also shed light upon his reception of the verse. The Latin reads: »Cum liber essem, omnium me servum feci« ²⁶ and the German: »Ich byn frey yn allen dingen, und hab mich eynß yderman knecht gemacht.« ²⁷ In both cases, Luther does not translate 1 Cor 9:19c, which results in a loss in the missionary focus as noted in relation to his two propositions. Other significant differences from the Greek, however, also emerge in both the Latin and German versions. ²⁸

²⁴ D. KORSCH, Freiheit als Summe. Über die Gestalt christlichen Lebens nach Martin Luther (NZSTh 40, 1988, 154): »Aus den zwei Thesen ist eine These geworden.«

²⁵ See WA 7; 58,5: »omnibus et super omnia«.

²⁶ WA 7; 49,27f.

²⁷ WA 7; 21,5f.

²⁸ Both versions may also be compared to Luther's New Testament translation, which not surprisingly remains closer to the Greek text: »Denn wiewohl ich frei bin von jeder-

The Latin version of the tractate remains fairly close to the Greek text. In addition to leaving out the purpose clause in v. 19c, the most significant difference is that Luther merely writes »free«, omitting the phrase »from all« which is found in both the Greek text and the Latin Vulgate (*ex omnibus*). This arguably has the effect of making the »freedom« in question more open to be understood in a positive or active manner, i. e., as »freedom for« or »freedom over« rather than merely »freedom from«. In agreement with the Greek text, however, Luther's Latin translation of v. 19a should be understood to mean that Paul »was free and continued to be« rather than that he »was free and ceased to be«. ²⁹ Likewise, as I argued for the Greek text, the *cum*-clause in the Latin text should be interpreted in a concessive manner: »although I am free«. ³⁰

Whereas Luther merely wrote »free« in the Latin, the German version includes the phrase »free in all things« rather than »free from all« as in the Greek. Here, by employing »in« rather than »from«, Luther again arguably leaves more room for a positive or active understanding of the »freedom« in question. Moreover, by speaking of »all things« rather than »all people«, he broadens its scope. Both of these changes are all the more striking when one considers that in his New Testament translation he writes »frei ... von Jedermann« (free from everyone). In writing »I am free in all things« the German version leaves no ambiguity about the present nature of the freedom in question. But this version transposes the Greek

mann, habe ich doch mich selbst jedermann zum Knechte gemacht, auf dass ich ihrer Viele gewinnen« (»For though I am free from everyone, I nevertheless made myself a slave to everyone, so that I might win the many«).

²⁹ As with the Greek syntax, the Latin syntax of Luther's translation of v. 19a allows for both readings. That the option stated above captures Luther's understanding is evident from the fact that when he explicates his understanding with reference to the example of Christ, he speaks of Christ as *at the same time (simul)* a free person and a slave.

³⁰ Like the Greek participial construction, the force of the Latin *cum* clause is largely dependent upon the context. Hence, on the basis of the syntax alone, it could have a range of meanings including »because« and »although«. With a view to the context, however, it seems clear that the sense here is »although«, since Luther employs unambiguously concessive language when he goes on to unpack his point with reference to Gal 4:4, stating that »Christ, although (*quanquam*) lord of all, nevertheless (*tamen*) was born from a woman, born under the law, at the same time a free person and a slave, at the same time in the form of God and in the form of a slave«.

participial construction into two sentences connected by ›and‹ (*und*). In this way it leaves open the question of the precise relation between them and thus conforms more closely to Luther's two propositions.

3 *The Relation of Freedom and Positive Servitude in the Tractate as a Whole*

Rather than attempting to provide an exhaustive study of the relation between freedom and servitude in the tractate in its entirety, the limited aim of this section is to show how some of the differences highlighted thus far are taken up in the tractate. The first point to highlight is how it unpacks the ›all things‹ from Luther's two propositions and his translations of 1 Cor 9:19. Whereas I have argued that Paul is concerned to assert that he is free from all people and that the relation of this ›freedom‹ to the law and other entities is at most indirect, Luther's ›all things‹ is broad enough to include an astonishing range of entities including the law,³¹ life,³² sin(s), death, and hell.³³

With regard to the relation between freedom and servitude, the tractate contains a number of different emphases. Here, Luther is especially fond of the concessive construction ›although free, nevertheless a slave‹: ›although (*quanquam*) the Christian is thus free from all works, s/he ought nevertheless (*tamen*) ... to take the form of a slave ... and to serve‹.³⁴ Alongside this emphasis, however, there are also instances in which Luther indicates that the Christian serves ›freely‹, ›in freedom‹, or ›as a free person‹.³⁵ Finally, though less frequent, there are some cases in which freedom is identified as the ground, cause or impetus of service. For example, it is said that Christians do the will of the authorities ›out of love and freedom‹ and elsewhere that the Christian does everything ›out of pure freedom‹.³⁶ In other words, Luther also makes use of both modal and causal constructions.

31 WA 7; 53,31 (= LW 31, 349). Cf. LW 31, 361. 366. 371-373.

32 LW 31, 355.

33 LW 31, 352. 355. 368.

34 WA 7; 65,32-34. Cf. WA 7; 49,28; 50,2-4; 65,11-13.

35 See e.g., WA 7; 64,36; 64,33; 67,5; 67,31; 37,4; 67,7; 37,9 f.

36 See WA 7; 37,4; 62,12; 32,31.

In sum Luther's reception of 1 Cor 9:19 extends and alters Paul's own line of thought in several ways. Noteworthy developments and shifts of emphasis include, a) applying a statement about the apostle Paul to the Christian person in general, b) omitting the mission focus in v. 19c, which is specifically concerned with Paul's own apostolic mission; c) using language suggestive of a more positive or active freedom such as »free lord over«, and »free in all things«, rather than simply replicating Paul's more negative expression »free from all«; d) expanding the reference of the freedom in question from »all people« to »all things« and filling out this point with concrete examples such as the law, sin(s), life, death, and hell; and e) retaining and even sharpening Paul's concessive presentation of the relationship between »freedom« and »positive servitude«, while also including both modal and causal emphases. The inclusion of these latter emphases appear to contribute to Luther's more overarching purpose of showing how his seemingly antithetical theses can be found to come together, a purpose that gives rationale to his decision to place both of his theses under the single title *The Freedom of a Christian*.

4 Gerhard Ebeling's Reception of 1 Cor 9:19 and Luther's Two Propositions

The topic of freedom was a life-long theme of the Lutheran theologian Gerhard Ebeling. In addition to his concise book *Frei aus Glauben* (Free by Faith) and his many articles devoted to the topic,³⁷ Ebeling developed his understanding of freedom in his books on Luther, his *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens* and his commentary on Galatians.³⁸ Again and again in these works, Ebeling zeroes in on 1 Cor 9:19 and Luther's two

37 See G. EBELING, *Frei aus Glauben. Das Vermächtnis der Reformation*, 1968 (in: IDEM, *Lutherstudien*, vol. 1, 1971, 308-329); IDEM, *Die königlich-priesterliche Freiheit* (in: IDEM, *Lutherstudien*, vol. 3, 1985, 157-180); IDEM, *Der kontroverse Grund der Freiheit. Zum Gegensatz von Luther-Enthusiasmus und Luther-Fremdheit in der Neuzeit* (in: IDEM, *Lutherstudien*, vol. 3, 1985, 366-394).

38 See G. IDEM, *Luther. Einführung in sein Denken*, 1964, 239-258; English translation: IDEM, *Luther*, translated by R.A. WILSON, 1970, 210-225; IDEM, *Martin Luthers Weg und Wort*, 1983, 75-77; IDEM, *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, Vol. 3, 1979, 171-190; IDEM, *Die Wahrheit des Evangeliums. Eine Lesehilfe zum Galaterbrief*, 1981; English

propositions in order to unpack his own understanding of the relation between freedom and positive servitude.³⁹ At the outset it should be noted that in this matter Ebeling finds no dissonance between Paul and Luther, whose shared vision he seeks to unpack.⁴⁰

In his 1964 book on Luther, Ebeling argues that »the against-each-other of freedom and servitude upon which Luther builds his work ›On the Freedom of a Christian person‹ only interprets in paradoxical formulation the unity of both and thereby the nature of freedom«. ⁴¹ Ebeling's point here is that while Luther's *formulation* may be paradoxical, *the nature of freedom itself is defined by the unity of freedom and servitude* and thus implicitly not paradoxical. This second point is repeatedly emphasized with increasing sharpness in subsequent works. His 1968 work, *Frei aus Glauben*, insists that since Paul's concern in 1 Cor 9:19 is not with the limitation of freedom but rather with its realization, one should not speak straightaway of »paradox«. His 1979 *Dogmatik* makes the same point even more pointedly, stressing that in 1 Cor 9:19 Paul is concerned with an understanding of freedom as freedom to serve, an understanding that is »united in itself« and therefore »completely non-paradoxical«. ⁴² Likewise, his 1983 Luther book insists that one should not speak of paradox in relation to Luther's two propositions since »Christian freedom is not constricted and diminished through servitude but rather fulfills itself therein«. ⁴³

translation: IDEM, *The Truth of the Gospel. An Exposition of Galatians*, translated by D. GREEN, 1985.

39 See esp. IDEM, *Frei aus Glauben*, 1971 (see n. 37), 319; IDEM, *Dogmatik* (see n. 38), 190. Cf. also IDEM, *Luther*, 1964 (see n. 38), 242; IDEM, *Luther*, 1970 (see n. 38), 212.

40 See IDEM, *Frei aus Glauben*, 1971 (see n. 37), 319; IDEM, *Dogmatik* (see n. 38), 190. Though a student of both Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Rudolf Bultmann, Ebeling regarded himself as a student of Luther before anyone else. See IDEM, *Gespräch über Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (in: IDEM, *Theologie in den Gegensätzen des Lebens*, 1985, 647): »Wenn ich eines Schüler bin, dann am ehesten Luthers«.

41 IDEM, *Luther*, 1964 (see n. 38), 242; cf. IDEM, *Luther*, 1970 (see n. 38), 212.

42 IDEM, *Dogmatik* (see n. 38), 190.

43 IDEM, *Weg* (see n. 38), 76 f. Notably, Gerhard Ebeling's teacher Rudolf Bultmann employed the language of paradox in his discussion of freedom and servitude in relation to 1 Cor 9:19. See R. BULTMANN, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, ⁹1984, 343 (original emphasis): »es bedeutet, daß die grundsätzliche Freiheit in jedem Augenblick die Gestalt des *Verzichtes* annehmen kann – des *Verzichtes* scheinbar auf die Freiheit selbst, der

Ebeling's growing antipathy to the language of paradox is directly related to his central conviction that the nature of freedom is defined by *the solidarity of freedom and servitude*. Since his 1968 work *Frei aus Glauben* develops this point with particular nuance and eloquence in relation to both Luther and Paul, my further analysis of Ebeling will primarily consist in a close study of this key passage:

And finally Christian freedom is also defined by an inner tension, which Luther brought to expression in the famous formula: ›A Christian person is a free lord over all things and subject to none. A Christian person is a dutiful servant of all things and subject to everyone.‹ This is the exact paraphrasing of that which Paul says in 1 Cor 9:19: ›Though I am free over against all, I made myself a slave to all.‹ The sense would come out still more clearly if one were to translate: ›Because I am free over against all I made myself a slave to all.‹ For here the concern is not with the limitation of Christian freedom but precisely with its execution in the solidarity of freedom and service. Therefore one should not speak straightaway of ›paradox‹ either. It is not a contradictory subject matter but one that completely fits together, not discord but concord, that freedom is both of these together and that freedom is only in the with-each-other of both.⁴⁴

Notably, Ebeling begins here by acknowledging that ›Christian freedom is also defined by an inner tension‹. This, he claims, is brought to expression in Luther's famous formula, which is regarded as ›the exact paraphrasing of what Paul says in 1 Cor 9:19‹. In this context, Ebeling initially translates 1 Cor 9:19ab: ›Though (*Wiewohl*) I am free over against (*gegenüber*) all, I made myself a slave to all‹, before asserting that ›the sense would come out still more clearly if one were to translate: ›Because (*Weil*) I am free over against all I made myself a slave to all‹. At this point, Ebeling then provides the rationale for his alternative translation by explaining that the concern here is not with the limitation of freedom but rather with its execution or realization in the solidarity of freedom and service.

aber vielmehr eine paradoxe Betätigung der Freiheit selbst ist, wie sie in dem ἐλεύθερος γὰρ ὢν ἐκ πάντων πᾶσιν ἑμαυτὸν ἐδούλωσα spricht (1 Kor 9, 19)‹; ›the basic freedom can at any moment take on the form of *renunciation* – seemingly the renunciation of freedom itself, but in reality a paradoxical exercise of freedom itself, as in the declaration ἐλεύθερος γὰρ ὢν ἐκ πάντων πᾶσιν ἑμαυτὸν ἐδούλωσα (1 Cor 9:19)‹ (my translation). Cf. R. BULTMANN, *Theology of the New Testament*. With a New Introduction by Robert Morgan, translated by K. GROBEL, vol. I-2, 2007, 342.

44 EBELING, *Frei aus Glauben*, 1971 (see n. 37), 313.

Having thus articulated his basic position, Ebeling then unpacks it in several ways. Firstly, he suggests that one should not immediately reach for the language of paradox. Secondly, taking up the language of music he explains that rather than being contradictory, as in a paradox, the subject matter here is one that completely fits together or is completely in tune, being an example of concord or harmony rather than discord or disharmony. Finally, he explains further that freedom is the with-each-other of both freedom and servitude and that freedom is only found in the with-each-other of both.

Before turning to the heart of Ebeling's argument, attention should be given to two points of detail in his discussion. First, it is noteworthy that, like Luther, Ebeling leaves off v. 19c in his translation, which results in a loss of the mission context in general and Paul's apostolic mission in particular. Secondly, it is perhaps significant that Ebeling chooses to translate the Greek ἐκ with *gegenüber*, which I have translated literally as »over against«. In this way, he arguably prepares the way for his more positive or active understanding of freedom, »freedom over against«, in contrast to a solely negative understanding of freedom as »freedom from«.

But perhaps the most striking feature of Ebeling's argument is that he initially translates 1 Cor 9:19a as: »Though (*wiewohl*) I am free over against all« before arguing that »the sense would come out still more clearly if one were to translate: »*Because* I am free over against all«. ⁴⁵ It is unclear why Ebeling begins with the traditional translation »though«. Perhaps it is nothing more than a tip of the hat to Luther, who employs *wiewohl* in his translation of the New Testament. Alternatively, he may do so for rhetorical reasons, i. e., because stating the traditional translation first enables the reader to perceive the difference in his alternative translation more clearly. Or it may reflect a tacit acknowledgment that the surface level favors this translation, whereas *the sense* of the verse is captured more clearly with the translation »because«. Though it is difficult to be certain, I am inclined to favor the last of these options, perhaps in conjunction with one or both of the others. Whether or not this speculation is accurate, it is clear that Ebeling's primary emphasis lies elsewhere, namely in his contention that *the sense* of 1 Cor 9:19 is concerned with the realization

⁴⁵ IDEM, *Frei aus Glauben*, 1971 (see n. 37), 319.

or execution of freedom in the solidarity of freedom and service. It is at this point that one of the most interesting facets of Ebeling's interpretation emerges, namely his twofold use of freedom. We could call these »freedom-1« and »freedom-2« or »small freedom« and »big freedom«. On the one hand freedom-1 is the entity that is in solidarity with servitude. On the other hand, freedom-2 consist in the with-each-other of freedom-1 and servitude, and it is freedom-2 that is meant when Ebeling speaks of »Christian freedom«.

Having traced the contours of Ebeling's thought in some detail, I now wish to compare his presentation to that of Luther and Paul. The first point to note is that Paul (as I have interpreted him) and Luther (as Ebeling acknowledges) highlight the apparent tension involved in the relationship between freedom and servitude. By contrast, Ebeling seeks to minimize this tension or at least to place it in a larger context. He does not, however, remove it entirely, for he explicitly acknowledges that Christian freedom is defined by an inner tension. Where this tension is located exactly is not stated and one can only speculate on where Ebeling would place it. But with a view to his overall synthesis perhaps he would place it in the relation between freedom-1 and servitude? Whatever the answer to this question, Ebeling's main concern is clearly to show that rather than being constricted by servitude, freedom-2 (or Christian freedom) realizes itself in the solidarity of freedom-1 and servitude. To what extent then is this latter concern also present in Luther or Paul?

Three observations suggest that Luther does share Ebeling's central concern. First, while noting that his two propositions *appear* to be at odds, Luther foresees them coming together and regards this as congenial to his purpose.⁴⁶ Secondly, Luther's placement of both of his propositions under the overarching rubric of »The Freedom of a Christian« is comparable to Ebeling's twofold use of freedom, in which Christian freedom (or freedom-2) consists in the solidarity of freedom-1 and servitude. Thirdly, the fact that Luther also includes modal and causal emphases can be seen to point in this direction. In short, it is possible to view Ebeling's position as in tune with that of Luther.

⁴⁶ See WA 7; 49,26. See n. 23.

Luther's treatment, however, also differs from Ebeling's in several respects. As already noted, Luther does not eliminate concessive emphases. On the contrary, the concessive construction »although free, nevertheless a slave« occurs frequently throughout the tractate. In this way, Luther's presentation appears to give greater emphasis to the striking and unexpected nature of such servitude, that is, it seems to work with the logic that freedom might be expected to preclude servitude but it does not. Notably, Martin Penzoldt advances a similar thesis in critical dialogue with Ebeling's translation of 1 Cor 9:19:

But it appears to me that this ›although‹ expresses yet a small reservation against thinking all too quickly from the end of the whole Christian movement and instead stresses the unheard of fact that one becomes completely free and then in this freedom and out of this freedom becomes active in servitude.⁴⁷

Luther also differs from Ebeling in the precision of his formulations. While I have attempted to show above that Ebeling's interpretation can be seen to develop certain lines of thought advanced by Luther, it should not be overlooked that in *The Freedom of a Christian*, Luther never presents the reader with a precise formulation that sets forth the causal relationship between freedom and servitude. In fact, it is telling that when Ebeling wishes to reach for an optimal quotation from Luther, he has to employ a statement that is oriented in the first instance around faith and love rather than one specifically ordered around freedom and service: »Behold, from faith thus flow love and desire for God and from love a free, willing, joyful life to serve the neighbor without reward«⁴⁸. In contrast to Luther, Ebeling never tires of advancing his thesis with tightly formulated precision: »The freedom that the Christian has through faith is precisely freedom to the servitude of love. And it is only then the servitude of love when it

47 M. PENZOLDT, Der Begriff Freiheit bei Luther (in: Dimensionen menschlicher Freiheit, ed. H. BIELFELDT et al., 1988, 229-242, 232): »Aber mir scheint in diesem ›wiewohl‹ doch ein kleiner Vorbehalt ausgedrückt, allzu schnell vom Ende der christlichen Gesamtbe-
wegung her zu denken, statt lieber diesen unerhörten Sachverhalt, daß einer ganz frei und dann in dieser Freiheit und aus dieser Freiheit dienend tätig wird, zu betonen«.

48 See EBELING, Luther, 1964 (see n. 38), 242: »Siehe, also fließt aus dem Glauben die Liebe und Lust zu Gott und aus der Liebe ein freies, williges, fröhliches Leben dem Nächsten zu dienen umsonst«; cf. IDEM, Luther, 1970 (see n. 38), 212; WA 7; 36, 3f.

occurs out of freedom«;⁴⁹ »For here the concern is not with the limitation of Christian freedom but precisely with its execution in the solidarity of freedom and servitude«.⁵⁰

In sum, while Ebeling's interpretation of the relation between freedom and servitude can be seen to develop the trajectory and concerns of Luther's argument, he has both minimized Luther's concessive emphasis with its expression of the unexpected or striking character of a freedom that is joined with servitude, and he has presented his synthesis with greater frequency and precision than Luther. This latter point may result from the fact that Ebeling more clearly advances a twofold use of freedom, which I have identified as freedom-1 and freedom-2. In other words, while we have already seen that Luther extended and introduced shifts into Paul's line of thinking, we see here that Ebeling, in turn, extended and developed Luther's line of thought further.

What then is the relationship between Ebeling's interpretation and that of Paul himself? Here, I think the difference of perspective is greater. Whereas Luther's tractate may well reflect a movement akin to Ebeling's twofold use of freedom, it is far from clear that the same can be said of Paul. In short, whereas 1Cor 9:19ab appears to juxtapose »freedom« and »servitude«, it is not evident that Paul has developed the insight that the with-each-other of freedom-1 and servitude is itself the realization of Christian freedom or freedom-2. Nor does he appear to develop the less complex idea that »servitude« is a/the realization of freedom rather than its surrender or the limitation of its use. In part, this difference may follow from the fact that Paul already has an entity that is doing the work of Ebeling's freedom-2 (or of freedom in the less complex model), namely the gospel, on account of which he does all things in v. 23, or his purpose of gaining the many, which gives him the impetus to make himself a slave to all in v. 19bc. As for the logic of Paul's juxtaposition, his emphasis appears to lie primarily on the seemingly counterintuitive fact that though he is free from all, which might be expected to preclude his becoming a slave to others, he has, in fact, made himself a slave to all. This is not to say that Paul's argument contains no room for the more developed understanding

49 See IDEM, Luther, 1964 (see n. 38), 242; cf. IDEM, Luther, 1970 (see n. 38), 212.

50 See IDEM, *Frei aus Glauben*, 1971 (see n. 38), 319.

of Ebeling, but merely that Paul himself doesn't appear to develop this vision himself. What Ebeling appears to do is to re-interpret Paul's argument from the end of Ebeling's own complex synthesis:⁵¹ »rather than precluding servitude, freedom-1 proved compatible with it; hence the whole process involving the solidarity of freedom-1 and servitude should be redefined as the realization rather than the constraint or limitation of freedom-2.⁵²

V Reception History and Theological Interpretation of Scripture

In this article I have argued that Gerhard Ebeling has developed and given greater precision to the concerns of Luther, while both Luther and Ebeling have introduced a greater shift of perspective in relation to Paul. I hope that this examination of the juxtaposition of »freedom« and »servitude« in 1 Cor 9:19 and its reception by Luther and Ebeling may serve as a positive example of how the discipline of reception history can contribute to theological interpretation of scripture. Here, part of the question concerns the meaning and goal(s) of exegesis. On the one hand, Karl Barth famously chastised New Testament scholars for the poverty of our attempts at genuine understanding and interpretation, which in his view entails a reconsideration of the material until the actual meaning of it is disclosed.⁵³ On the other hand, New Testament scholars are often rightly skeptical of the extent to which theologians find their own understanding of the subject matter already implicit or developed in the New Testament itself. Whether or not one agrees with Barth's position in its entirety, it does seem reasonable to expect New Testament scholars to make at least some attempt to understand the subject matter of the New Testament texts and not merely to concern ourselves with matters of socio-historical and literary context. At the same time, if one should indeed attempt to reconsider the material until the actual meaning of it is disclosed, then it is also crucial to make a distinction between the steps that appear to

⁵¹ Cf. PENZOLDT (see n. 47), 232.

⁵² In response to my presentation of an abbreviated version of this article at the 2010 Regional SBL conference in Atlanta, Dan Cantey plausibly suggested to me that Ebeling's concern to establish a higher unity may reflect the influence of Hegel.

⁵³ See K. BARTH, *The Epistle to the Romans*, translated by E. C. HOSKYNs, 1953, 6f.

have been taken by the author we are interpreting and our own wrestling with the logic and problems posed by the subject matter. It is my contention that the discipline of reception history can do justice to both of these concerns. While the interpreter will indeed be concerned to reconsider the subject matter with a view to genuine understanding, s/he will also take care to show how and where subsequent interpreters have introduced new distinctions or developed a new synthesis, always with a view to the strengths and weaknesses of a given development.

If the purpose of theological interpretation of scripture, however, is indeed to penetrate to the meat of the nut, to adopt a phrase from Luther, then the question will not merely be whether or not Paul or another has taken a given step, but rather whether a new distinction or perspective furthers our understanding of the subject matter. In our case, this means asking whether or not Luther's shifts of emphasis and Ebeling's new synthesis further our understanding of the question of relationship between freedom and servitude, which is raised by Paul's argument in 1 Cor 9:19. For, as Cristina Grenholm and Daniel Patte rightly argued in a criticism of my own teacher Peter Stuhlmacher, the fact that a Biblical writer has not yet developed a certain idea or distinction is *not* sufficient in itself to declare it to be invalid.⁵⁴ With a view to this perspective, the task of reception history is not merely to identify new developments which are assumed to be false by necessity. On the contrary, by attending to both similarities and differences of perspective, reception history presents us with the opportunity to advance our understanding of the subject matter as we seek to pursue the task of theological interpretation of scripture with both nuance and depth.

⁵⁴ See C. GRENHOLM/D. PATTE, *Overture. Receptions, Critical Interpretations, and Scriptural Criticism* (in: *Reading Israel in Romans. Legitimacy and Plausibility of Divergent Interpretations*, ed. C. GRENHOLM/D. PATTE, 2000, 26 f.).