

THEOLOGISCHE REVUE

116. Jahrgang

– März 2020 –

Fritz, Peter Joseph: *Freedom Made Manifest*. Rahner's Fundamental Option and Theological Aesthetics. – Washington: Catholic University of America Press 2019. (XVII) 273 S., geb. € 63,00 ISBN: 978-0813231198

In 1979, the Weston School of Theology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, invited Karl Rahner to receive an honorary degree on the occasion of his 75th birthday. There R. delivered his now famous lecture on “The Fundamental Theological Meaning of Vatican II,” and the Jesuit Faculty held a dinner in his honor. As a memento of his visit, our President, John W. Padberg, gave him a small Steuben glass figurine of a rabbit and said a few words about how honored we were to have him with us. R., along with his thanks, then offered an impromptu meditation on what the rabbit suggested to him: a quiet little animal, not aggressive or dominating, often hidden away, yet proverbially fertile and productive. To him, he said, it seemed the perfect symbol of the role of a theologian, and of the Church itself in the world.

In Peter Fritz's stunning second volume of his proposed trilogy, with his own drawing of a hare on the cover (inspired by Albrecht Dürer's beloved 1502 watercolor which R. briefly discussed in a late essay on theology and art), he begins and ends with a similar reflection: “How can the (seemingly) insignificant announce the eternal?” How can a little field hare so command our attention and awaken such reverberating empathy?

F.'s first volume, *Karl Rahner's Theological Aesthetics* (Washington 2014), set about showing how R. rejected the illusions of the modern subject as self-assertive, self-enclosed and a center of control. In contrast F. revealed in R. an aesthetic foundation (in the broad sense of the manifestation of being—an expression he now considers “too thin”) for a genuinely open and true human subjectivity aware of its essentially receptive character (cf. *Theologische Revue* 111 [6/2015], 495–497).

In the now published second volume *Freedom Made Manifest* F. carries this aesthetics forward: “Human self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-transcendence [...] are not functions of reason simply considered, but of an iterative process of sensibility and intellection driven by imagination.” (182) As R. wrote: “By its very nature subjectivity is always a transcendence which listens, which does not control, which is overwhelmed by history and opened up by mystery.” (cited 194) Again with mastery of the Rahnerian corpus and equal command of commentators both favorable and critical, F. now explores how responsive human freedom is manifested and, still more, manifests the freedom of God who chooses eternally to create, redeem and self-communicate. The whole account is centered on the notion of the fundamental option.

The book proceeds through four stages, the first three reading R.'s theology of freedom aesthetically on the background of its three main sources and the fourth examining its fundamental

condition of exposure, subject to factors beyond its control and “always shadowed by an unresolvable remainder of vulnerability to being undone” (22). An important introduction outlines the book and clarifies F.’s conception of theological aesthetics (as an elevation or transfiguration of the Kantian aesthetics of finitude to one that is guided by revelation). The first chap. then examines R.’s dialogue with transcendental philosophy. From Friedrich Schelling’s treatise on human freedom, which R. studied with Martin Heidegger, F. draws the notion of freedom’s arising from a personal “ground” of an existence performed through individual acts. In both *Hearer of the Word* (43–53) and *The Theology of the Symbol* (53–62), R. moves toward “an ontology of freedom or, better, a theological aesthetics centered on freedom” (35). The chap. closes with a brilliant retrieval of R.’s revision of the concept of concupiscence as pertaining to the entire embodied person whose “spontaneous desire [...] precedes [...] free decision and persists against it” (66) – with a freedom that is thus in no way “idealistic.” (Another lapidary formulation of the properly theological definition of concupiscence, according to R., is “man’s spontaneous desire, in so far as it precedes his free decision *and persists against it.*” [cited 209])

In chap. 2 F. demonstrates how R.’s position on freedom as fundamental option derives from essays and lectures (at Pullach and Innsbruck) on the sacrament of penance. Pivotal here are his retrieval of the patristic understanding of penance as reconciliation with the “wounded” church (not simply an individual matter) and also of Aquinas’s teaching on the outward acts of the penitent as the “matter” of the sacrament. Both imply that Christian freedom is inseparable from ecclesial-sacramental life. (Later in his text, F. expands the conception of a wounded church: “As a credible witness to mercy, the church must regard itself as wounded not just by the sins and guilt of people, but also by their hunger, thirst, nakedness, strangeness in a strange land, illness, incarceration, and untimely death.” [221])

Chap. 3 completes the survey of the sources of R.’s theology of freedom by turning to Ignatian spirituality. F. reads its most important features as indifference (seeking not one’s own but God’s will), the “existential” (a concern for the concrete every-day), and loyalty to the church, all of which he sees grounded (in Schelling’s sense) in the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In this and the next chap. F. insists on the Sacred Heart as the true source of Ignatian spirituality, though he often qualifies his position by speaking of personal devotion to Jesus or of the death *and* resurrection of Jesus – a qualification that seems to me required, not least because the “Sacred Heart” is never mentioned in Ignatius’s *Spiritual Exercises*. The key interpretive exercise is that of the Two Standards, from the “Second Week” of the *Spiritual Exercises*, in which the exercitant is called to choose as a fundamental option between the banner of the humble Christ and that of the desire for riches, honor and pride proclaimed by Lucifer (whom F. seems to consider a personal reality).

Chap. 4 resembles the final movement of a symphony, recapitulating and newly relating themes from the previous movements. In response to critics who consider R.’s theology idealistic and incapable of adequately addressing historical calamity (J. B. Metz) or personal trauma (Jennifer Erin Beste), F. here makes perhaps the most constructive contribution of the book, arguing for an understanding of freedom as fundamentally “exposed” – a conception he had introduced in *Karl Rahner’s Theological Aesthetics* – for which equivalent terms would be threatened, endangered, suffering or vulnerable. Sensitively revisiting the sources of R.’s theology of freedom in transcendental philosophy, the theology of penance and Ignatian spirituality, he summarizes: “The whole of Rahner’s theology of freedom, which is a theological aesthetic of freedom, proceeds from a site of vulnerability.”

(198) (For a particularly incisive summary of F.'s treatment of the sources of R.'s theology of freedom, cf. 195–198.)

A decidedly mystical tone pervades this powerful but also lovely book – “an aesthetic of fragility, not of dramatic heroism” (238). It was present already, although F. does not advert to this, while the young R. in 1937 was preparing his lectures on the philosophy of religion for the Salzburger Hochschulwochen the following summer (they would later appear as *Hearer of the Word* [1941]). That year he published (anonymously) a series of meditations in a membership circular for the Viennese clergy that were then collected in the small volume *Worte ins Schweigen* (1938). In the meditation “God of My Prayers” he conceived his prayer life as gathering in fact into a single prayer, imagining his entire life as one long prayer to God (a clear anticipation of what he would later call a fundamental option). In the meditation “God of My Lord Jesus Christ” he pressed the Christic form of that prayer: “In baptism, Father, you have spoken your Word throughout my being [...] Word of the Father, Word of Love, Jesus.”

In effect he was interpreting for the 20th century the great Pauline text on Christ as the “Yes” to all the promises of God and the mediator of humanity’s invitation to humanity for it to offer in turn the eternal affirmation of its creating and redeeming God (2 Cor 1:19–20).

Together with this mystical strain, and for all its systematic acuity, the text of *Freedom Made Manifest* is also run through with a vigorous critique of neoliberal thought and “the merciless ethos of contemporary capitalism” (115). “The dominant ethos in a broad swath of the world today is the neoliberal ethos,” F. writes, “where freedom is rendered as entrepreneurial freedom to compete against others in the ‘free’ market, where social-political freedom is the freedom to commandeer state power to serve business interests, and consequently, where most people (even those who succeed!) are robbed of the deeper freedom described in Rahner’s theology” (25).

Having offered us in his first volume a “reduced” treatment of beauty as the sublime, and here of goodness as freedom, F. promises a third volume, to be called *Love’s Terrible Radiance*, on the transcendental of truth “bracketed in favor of lived experience” as world. In eager anticipation of it I doubt that I will be the only one first re-reading *Freedom Made Manifest*.

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