



Seven Questions to the Catholic Church in Germany on Freedom and Autonomy

The "Synodal Way" in Germany claims to define a "new sexual morality". It refers to an alternative anthropology and an understanding of freedom that has occupied German-speaking theology for some time.

There, "freedom" is ascribed to the human subject in such a radical way that it is

- a) an absolute capacity for self-determination,
- b) that it has its origin in itself ("self-originality"),
- c) is detached from the Creator;

thus it is no longer inwardly structured by its creatureliness¹.

The fact that "freedom" is only made possible and supported by God, and that it is there to attain the fullness of the good in attachment to God and in orientation towards him, is no longer seen. Nor that human freedom is broken by original sin. "Autonomy" becomes the only possible starting point for ethical reflection. Under the conditions of modernity, even the faithful person must be released into the freedom to know and determine for himself what is good for him. Therefore, there can no longer be a generally binding church doctrine. Neither the dogma of original sin, as bindingly defined by the Council of Trent, nor the tradition of natural law thinking could be maintained.

The person who determines himself is programmatically detached from his natural ground; man has no "nature". He is indeterminate freedom. A binding Christian ethos, which is

¹ Creatureliness and creaturely structure are to be understood here in an exemplary way, as Emerich Coreth SJ and Josef Pieper have interpreted Aquinas' doctrine of freedom: "Thomas understands human freedom from its apriori bond to the good. This, however, does not mean a constricting necessity, but the original opening of the horizon of goodness, in which freedom can only take place. But it takes place on the basis of reason's insight into what we should do. This is the condition of freedom and the call to freedom: to freely do the good. It is made possible and embraced by God, who, as the first cause of divine freedom, has placed us in our human freedom, has "released" his creatures and at the same time he is the last goal of our will and action, that must necessarily always and in everything be striven for, therefore also the last norm for our free choice of means to the goal. As much as Aristotelian elements are taken up here, in Thomas they are incorporated into a Christian synthesis, for which the ultimate meaning of human freedom lies in its being freedom towards God and towards eternal salvation in God." From: Emerich Coreth, *Vom Sinn der Freiheit*, Innsbruck 1985, 50. See also Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance*. Notre Dame, Ind., 1966. Prudence translated by Richard and Clara Winston (1959).



proclaimed obligatorily by the church, and which contains more than the repetition of the axioms of self-determination and their mutual recognition, becomes internally impossible and is also rejected.

The theory just outlined shows a wealth of differentiations internally, also with regard to closeness and distance to the faith of the church. It is not a question of individual theologians, but of a form of thinking which meanwhile determines the real church and is increasingly also represented by German bishops. The consequences of this position include the rejection of the sexual morality of the church (its commitment to marriage as the exclusive place of sexuality, its valuation of sexual lifestyles that does not conform to the church, etc.) as well as the polarity and complementarity of the two sexes as an essential part of the biblical witness to the human being.

Especially on „Synodal Way“, this way of thinking heralds an epochal paradigm shift in the basic understanding of the human being and his freedom.

This confuses and worries us deeply. We ask ourselves whether this way of thinking does not fundamentally contradict basic convictions of the Christian faith. We therefore brought central assumptions of this position into the form of **"Seven Questions to the Catholic Church in Germany on Freedom and Autonomy"**.

These questions urgently need to be clarified. We cannot be in unity in our church in a state of diametrical contradictions.

1. Can one think of "freedom" without considering the constitutive meaning of its creatureliness?

Is human freedom only thought of correctly and in accordance with its own dignity under the conditions of modernity if it is understood as an absolute capacity and thus without the inner constitutive reference to the Creator who constantly brings it forth and shapes it and directs it towards Himself as the fullness of the good?

2. Are the doctrine of original sin and the modern understanding of freedom in an irresolvable contradiction?



Does the Christian doctrine of original sin, as formulated by the Council of Trent, contradict the unconditional validity of such an understanding of freedom and its dignity under the conditions of modernity to such an extent that it must be abandoned?

3. Does Christian ethics today consist in negotiating the limits of self-determination?

Must a Christian ethics under the conditions of modernity be limited to the mutual recognition of the self-determination of freedom and the negotiation of its limits?

4. Has the Church today lost the legitimacy to give binding ethical instructions?

If the Church wants to recognise the gift of autonomy in the sense of the afore mentioned understanding of freedom, must it fundamentally renounce binding and universally valid ethical instruction?

5. Must the judgement of conscience be carried out today "etsi deus non daretur"²?

Is it really enough that a judgement of conscience can only standardise itself on its own dignity of freedom and the dignity of others and that God is deliberately passed over as a reason for standardisation, since in "post-metaphysical thinking" it is not certain that he exists at all?

6. Is it necessary to separate person and nature today?

Does a decisive advance in the Christian understanding of the person lie in the fact that it is no longer to be understood from any attachment to a given truth or nature? And does the human being thus attain "freedom" for the first time in modernity as a capacity for unconditional, self-determination, as a "freedom" that is completely undetermined in the face of this self-determination?

7. Are Christian thinking on natural law and the modern understanding of freedom in irreconcilable contradiction?

Does the natural law thinking of the Christian tradition contradict an authentic and inevitable understanding of human freedom in the modern age so fundamentally that it must be abandoned?

² lat.: ... as if God did not exist