

REPORT ON RESEARCH PERIOD SPONSORED BY THE HANIEL STIFTUNG

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Thanks to the generous support of the Haniel Stiftung I had the privilege to spend three months at the Humboldt University in Berlin under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Rolf Schieder. I participated in the program on Religion and Politics and the Haniel Summer School and completed my dissertation on communicative freedom. In this report I shall broadly sketch how these different dimensions of my stay in Berlin played out.

1. Dissertation

The primary aim of my research project is to investigate the place and role of communicative freedom in the theology of Wolfgang Huber. As Huber develops communicative freedom as a critical concept it is my view that investigating the way in which the theological content of the concept engages its socio-historical context serves as meaningful interpretative instrument by means of which to structure the concept and place it within Huber's theology.

The research project consists of two movements. In a first movement (Chapter 1) the concept's significant theological sources is investigated. It is argued that understanding the way in which Huber utilises the apostle Paul, Martin Luther, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Heinz Eduard Tödt substantiates Huber's claim that communicative freedom is the rearticulation of the rediscovery of freedom by the Reformation and will allow one to place the concept in its theological context.

In the second movement (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3) the way in which communicative freedom engages modernity is investigated. In Chapter 2, those dimensions of classic modernity that the concept affirms are examined. The focus is specifically on how it affirms the individual and modernity's structuring of human sociality. In Chapter 3, the contribution of communicative freedom to the renewal of modernity is investigated. This is done by investigating how communicative freedom engages progress, the tension between freedom and equality and finally how it can be realised in a diverse and integrated world.

The secondary aim of this study is to present Huber's work on freedom in such a manner that its relevance for the context within which it is written, namely South Africa, is clear. This secondary aim is reached mainly by developing communicative freedom as an engagement of modernity, as the South African society can broadly be described as a society that understands itself in modernist terms. In post-apartheid South Africa major advances have been made in achieving freedom for all, and liberation in the narrow sense – namely the attainment of equal institutionalised freedoms for all – has been reached. The clearest example is the Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution. In this second chapter of the Constitution the institutionalisation of the basic equal freedoms of all South Africans is affirmed, as is illustrated also by the non-derogable rights, namely equality (Section 9), human dignity (Section 10), life (Section 11), freedom and security of the person (Section 12), freedom from slavery, servitude and forced labour (Section 13), children's freedom (Section 28) and the freedoms of arrested, detained and accused persons (Section 35).

The fact that constitutionally guaranteed freedoms have been achieved for the whole of South African society does not mean, however, that the struggle for freedom has ended. In post-apartheid South Africa a new range of challenges requires public attention. Even only a passing glance over the current South African reality reveals some daunting challenges. Many South Africans still do not have the opportunity to participate in government, they still do not have work and security, not all have opportunities for learning, many still do not have houses and many still do not experience peace and friendship. For example, the United Nations places South Africa only 121st of 177 countries on its Human Poverty Index (2007/2008), the country has one of the highest Gini-coefficients in the world (an indication that the South African society is one of the most unequal in the world), an HIV/Aids-pandemic is endangering a whole generation (estimations are that 5.5 million of South Africa's inhabitants are HIV positive) and South Africa's crime statistics are of the worst in the world (according to official statistics for April 2006 to March 2007, 19 202 people were murdered, 52 617 were raped and 13 599 motorcars were hijacked).

2. Dissertation and the “Gefährlichkeit von Religionen”

When the theme of the dissertation is applied to the program on Religion and Politics' focus on the “Gefährlichkeit von Religionen”, some important implications arise. Most

importantly my research indicates that Christian resources on freedom can be applied in a pluralistic, secular and democratic context by means of the concept of communicative freedom.

This implies that even a monotheistic religion such as Christianity can contribute to the societal discourse on freedom without requiring consensus concerning the presuppositions that are employed. Huber's work on communicative freedom is of special relevance, firstly, as it conceptualises the place of the church in society. It was shown how his work on communicative freedom is unambiguously done within the context of secularisation, constitutional democracy and pluralism and how communicative freedom is developed as a Christian concept relevant for the public sphere whilst affirming the secularisation of society, democracy and pluralism. Huber shows that the church can only fulfil its duty in this regard by contributing to the diversity, independence and civil courage of civil society

Huber's work on communicative freedom assists, secondly, in its assertion that the church has the responsibility to play a public role. In the South African context it means that the church should contribute to the maturing of democracy in South Africa. In their study *Civil society, democratisation and foreign aid in Africa* Robinson and Friedman¹ show that the assumed set of democratic institutions, namely "free and fair elections, the freedom to participate in autonomous organisations outside the realm of the state, an elected legislature, an independent judiciary and an accountable political executive" (2005:41) are not necessarily present in all African democracies and also not in South Africa. "While South Africa ... [is a] functioning multi-party [democracy], [it] is [not] fully responsive to its citizens: liberal democratic norms may be present in some institutions and procedures, but absent in others because democratic institutions are still maturing" Indeed, in many cases the public space in Africa is characterised not by civil society's search for legitimacy, but indeed by the state's search for legitimacy. Diaw² (2005:31) therefore holds that the public sphere in many African societies is characterised by their "backlash, their inventiveness in escaping the subjection that the

¹ Robinson, M. & Friedman, S. 2005. *Civil society, democratisation and foreign aid in Africa*. IDS Discussion Paper 383. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.

² Diaw, A. 2005. New Contours of Public Space in Africa. *Diogenes* 206:29-36.

post-colonial African state [tries] to impose on them in its slide into authoritarianism” (Diaw 2005:31).

In a context such as South Africa it is therefore clear that the church as a strong actor within civil society need not imply the latent danger of violence but is indeed imperative for the maturing of democratic institutions that serve the equal human dignity of all people who find themselves within the borders of South Africa. This research broadens the question on the influence of religions on societal violence by indicating how religions can contribute not to a more violent but to a more peaceful and dignified society. The research that forms the basis of my dissertation was therefore conducted in order to unlock the constructive potential of especially Christianity within the South African public sphere.

3. Haniel Summer School

I also had the privilege to participate in the Haniel Summer School. Apart from the excellent academic input that was given it also afforded the participants the chance to learn some methodological lessons concerning interdisciplinary work and how to translate subject-specific terminology in order to engage in dialogue that transcends the confines of the specific discipline.

It was an excellently organised Summer School that had a good balance between interaction and input. Personally I was also impressed by the way in which the Summer School consistently attempted – and more often than not succeeded – in bridging the gap between pure academic reflection and how it can possibly take form in concrete situations.

All in all the opportunity the Haniel Stiftung afforded me to be exposed to theology and interdisciplinary work in Berlin enriched my dissertation and my future work in South Africa in a way that I could not imagine beforehand, and I am deeply grateful.