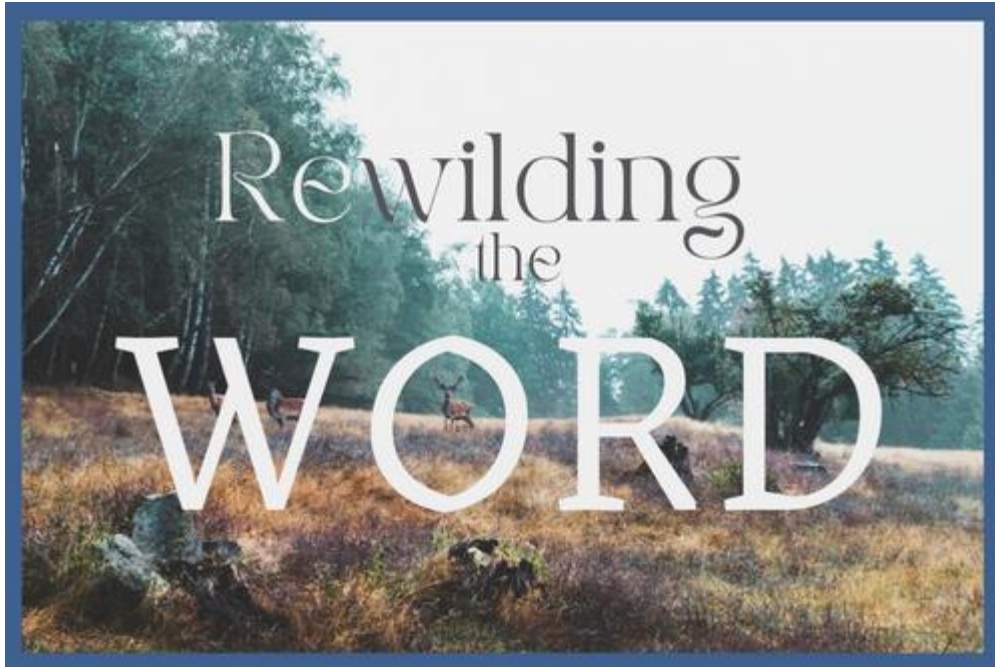


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## GANZ - #20 - REWILDING THE WORD (JULY 2026)

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The *Oxford English Dictionary* at the noun “**independence**” – **1.a. – 1606** – The condition or quality of being independent; freedom **from** external control or influence; lack of reliance on external support; *spec.* **self-sufficiency**. Also, with a prepositional phrase introduced by *of, from, †on, or †upon*, indicating the person or thing not exercising control or exerting influence, being depended upon, etc. And further: **1.c. – 1678** – Lack of deference to authority, insubordination. Chiefly with pejorative connotations.

**Courtney Hall Anderson, AC-PNP, DNP (26 June 2026):** “So here I am, fighting the war against self-reliance and self-sufficiency, and seeking greater dependence, more faithful prayer, eager hope, and eyes to see those who are suffering around me and choose to enter into their pain.”

**John Adams (1735-1826) in a letter to his wife Abigail on 3 July 1776:** “It is the will of Heaven that the two countries [Britain and the United States] should be sundered forever. It may be the will of Heaven that America shall suffer calamities still more

wasting and distress yet more dreadful. If this is to be the case, it will have this good effect at least: It will inspire us with many virtues which we have not, and correct many errors, follies, and vices which threaten to disturb, dishonor and destroy us. The furnace of affliction produces refinement, in states as well as individuals.”

### A Story

During the years (especially 1975-1985) when I was focusing on the reading of Philosophy, I came across the writings of Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997).<sup>1</sup> I had begun to learn by then that it was not only acceptable but also likely that that a reader may possess from a thinker just one idea (!), a penetrating, evocative, and a mind-altering idea. Berlin’s famous distinction between positive and negative freedom was such an idea, which set off in me a kind of explosion (why this happens to a person has a great deal to do with how the Holy Spirit works in him or her, and with his or her willingness to be surprised; i.e., to be *teachable*).

I guessed how Berlin had recognized in his time a thoughtless use of the word *freedom*, as if freedom were an absolute value to those seeking it and a blight to be exterminated by those who wanted only themselves to be free. He explained how there is *freedom from* and there is *freedom for*. I had never considered this.

It had been my experience, many times (yours too?), that people vociferously react when they judge that their freedom is being taken from them. Sometimes it is clear to me why people seek *freedom from* (from manipulation, from control, from domination, or simply from the excessive ugliness of people with a taste for themselves alone). However, it is often clearer to me that these same people have little ability to describe what they want their *freedom for*. (If it is *for themselves*, then this is not freedom at all.)

This idea took a deeper turn in me. I began to understand through my own experiences of injustice (my own but also that of others) how God often had taught me the deepest, most difficult truths when I was living under the dominion of habitual oppressors. What *freedom for* meant slowly began to clarify in me through long suffering, because of these very people, who made the institutions that they were entrusted to lead fear “the freedom of the children of God”.

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<sup>1</sup> The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* - **Isaiah Berlin (1909–97)** was a naturalized British philosopher, historian of ideas, political theorist, educator, public intellectual and moralist, and essayist. He was renowned for his conversational brilliance, his defense of liberalism and pluralism, his opposition to political extremism and intellectual fanaticism, and his accessible, coruscating writings on people and ideas. His essay *Two Concepts of Liberty* (1958) contributed to a revival of interest in political theory in the English-speaking world and remains one of the most influential and widely discussed texts in that field: admirers and critics agree that *Berlin’s distinction between positive and negative liberty* remains, for better or worse, a basic starting point for discussions of the meaning and value of political freedom.

But to my dismay, the School of Oppression turned out to be a school whose Headmaster was God. (The expression “a severe mercy” comes to mind.) The people and their institutions from which and from whom I had sought to be set free (but only when God would allow it) constituted the crucible<sup>2</sup> in which my false hopes were incinerated. God was teaching me what my freedom was for. Think of the very difficult lesson hidden inside the apparent absurdity<sup>3</sup> of Christ’s *command* (not a suggestion):

**Matthew 5 (NJB):** <sup>43</sup>‘You have heard how it was said, *You will love your neighbour and hate your enemy.* <sup>44</sup>**But I say this to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you;** <sup>45</sup>**so that you may be children of your Father in heaven,** for he causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike. <sup>46</sup>For if you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Do not even the tax collectors do as much?<sup>4</sup>

The “difficulty” of this notorious saying of Jesus lies not in what Jesus commands but in the pain experienced (and it is great) when we are *being made into the kind of person* capable of forgiving one’s enemies and knowing why God commands that we do so. If you know what this means, then you know too well how painful it is to be re-made by God, becoming a dependable freedom for the healing of harms and in the context of the widespread destruction of the bonds that should have made us brothers and sisters.

**G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936):** “In prosperity, our friends know us. In adversity, we know our friends.”

I have over more recent years judged that people are too quick to seek *freedom from* (whatever oppresses them). They want to throw off, distance themselves from, what might be the very means that God is using to purify and to re-make them, to clarify for them *what their freedom is for*. Look again at those words quoted at the top of this essay from Courtney Hall Anderson. She is onto this.

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<sup>2</sup> “**crucible**” – used metaphorically. The *Oxford English Dictionary* at the noun “**crucible**”: **1.a.** - **a1475** – A vessel, usually of earthenware, made to endure great heat, used for fusing metals, etc.; a melting-pot.

<sup>3</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* at the adjective “**absurd**” – **1.a.** – **1531** – Of a thing: against or without reason or propriety; incongruous, unreasonable, illogical.

<sup>4</sup> [The New Jerusalem Bible](#) (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), Mt 5:43–46.

**Rumi<sup>5</sup> (translated by Coleman Barks), some lines from “The Bright Core of Failure” –**

You [God] live in beautiful forms,  
*and you are the energy that breaks form.*  
All light, neither this nor that.

Human beings go places on foot.  
Angels, with wings.  
*Even if they find nothing but ruins*  
*and failure, you are the bright core of that. (my emphases)*

For these reasons, I have been thinking about the celebration (about to happen in a few days from now) of our national holiday of *Independence* (see the definition given at the top of this essay). We know historically (1776, etc.) what this means, but that is not how *independence* is being articulated today. It is right that we ask ourselves, “*Independence from what, and for what?*” Getting to answers to these questions is worth our most mature attention and discernment.

**A Text – Emily Dickinson (1830-1886), “No Rack Can Torture Me” (Franklin #649)<sup>6</sup>**

This typically elegant<sup>7</sup> poem by this American master of poesy is about the inner and the outer self (note the “Two bodies” image), about the public self and the private self (how intensely private was the Maid of Amherst), about the soul and the body. Perhaps this poem expresses her understanding of these lines from Matthew’s Gospel, chapter 10:

<sup>26</sup> ‘So do not be afraid of them. Everything now covered up will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear. <sup>27</sup> What I say to you in the dark, tell in the daylight; what you hear in whispers, proclaim from the housetops.

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<sup>5</sup> *Britannica*: “**Rūmī** (born c. September 30, 1207, Balkh [now in Afghanistan] – died December 17, 1273, Konya [now in Turkey]) was the greatest Sufi mystic and poet in the Persian language, famous for his lyrics and for his didactic epic *Mas̄navī-yi Ma’navī* (“Spiritual Couplets”), which widely influenced mystical thought and literature throughout the Muslim world. After his death, his disciples were organized as the Mawlawiyyah order.”

<sup>6</sup> Emily Dickinson, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited by R.W. Franklin (Harvard University Press, paperback edition 2005).

<sup>7</sup> “**elegant**” – The *Oxford English Dictionary* at the adjective “**elegant**” – **2.a.** - **c1475** – Of language, literature, or literary style: characterized by harmonious simplicity in the choice and arrangement of words; free from awkwardness, coarseness, or clumsiness; graceful, refined.

<sup>28</sup> 'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; fear him rather who can destroy both body and soul in hell.'<sup>8</sup>

Dickinson writes:

No Rack can torture me -  
My Soul - at Liberty -  
Behind this mortal Bone  
There knits a bolder One -

You cannot prick with Saw -  
Nor pierce with Cimitar -  
Two Bodies - therefore be -  
Bind One - The Other fly -

The Eagle of his Nest  
No easier divest -  
And gain the Sky  
Than mayest Thou -

Except Thyself may be  
Thine Enemy -  
Captivity is Consciousness -  
So's Liberty -

### A Close Reading of the Text

**No Rack can torture me** – The *Oxford English Dictionary* at “**to rack**” notes – “**1.c. – 1549** – *transitive*. To pull or tear apart, separate by force, break up. Also, in extended use. Also, *figurative*. **1.d. – 1757** – *transitive*. To shake (something, esp. a person's body) violently; to injure or damage in this way; *spec.* to exert stress on or distort.” This is a violent image being deployed by a hyper-sensitive poet (this is her gift but also her suffering) who knows the pain of a world that over-emphasizes the outer self and makes its stern judgments about the outer lives of others. Such people stay remote from a sufficient self-knowledge, unaware of their inner (i.e., spiritual) lives and of the hard work that a robust inner life demands of them. As a result, they remain painfully incapable of “reading” the inner lives of others. Dickinson was massively developed in her inner life and in large part kept herself out of public view.

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<sup>8</sup> [The New Jerusalem Bible](#) (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), Mt 10:26–28.

**My Soul - at Liberty** - The *Oxford English Dictionary* at “**liberty**” - “**I.1.a. - c1384 - Theology.** Freedom from the bondage or dominating influence of sin, spiritual servitude, worldly ties, etc. **I.1.b. - c1405 -** Freedom or release from slavery, bondage, or imprisonment.” We notice the poet’s *inner freedom*, an essential value protecting a person from the countless ways that the “outer” world offers to a person to be enslaved: a servitude to so much that just does not matter at all.

**Isaiah 55 (NJB):** <sup>2</sup> Why spend money on what cannot nourish and your wages on what fails to satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and you will have good things to eat and rich food to enjoy. <sup>3</sup> Pay attention, come to me; listen, and you will live. <sup>9</sup>

This poem makes clear that liberty cannot be given to us by anyone, by any Institution however holy or important it claims to be. *Liberty is inner freedom* that only association with God can secure - a freedom that the world has no capacity to give to anyone and to which the world will habitually react badly. It asks much of a person to win such freedom, a real dying to self.

**Galatians 5 (NJB):** <sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ and yet I am alive; yet it is no longer I, but Christ living in me. The life that I am now living, subject to the limitation of human nature, I am living in faith, faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.<sup>10</sup>

### A Prayer

**St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556)** - Take Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. Thou hast given all to me. To Thee, O Lord, I return it. All is Thine, dispose of it wholly according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and Thy grace, for this is sufficient for me.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> [The New Jerusalem Bible](#) (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), Is 55:2-3.

<sup>10</sup> [The New Jerusalem Bible](#) (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), Ga 2:20.

<sup>11</sup> See here for an explanatory expansion of this famous prayer:  
<https://www.jesuitsestois.org/news-feed/an-expanded-version-of-st-ignatius-loyolas-suscipe-prayer>.