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Freedom in the Bird Cage

Chirping, squawking, and scratching, the bird makes its wishes known. The cage is small and confining, holding it back from growing, keeping it from soaring in the clouds, killing it little by little. There is so much of the world the bird has not seen, so much to experience, but not behind these bars. No matter what the bird does, it cannot be free.

In a story about a child locked up in a closet, the author refers to the child as an “it,” showing that the child is not human, not a person, does not have a soul. It receives no communication with those living a happy life outside in the city. It knows how the bird feels. In this story depicting *The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas*, the people of Omelas live utopian lives and are not bound to moral laws, enjoying pleasure and happiness. But

“...theirs is no vapid, irresponsible happiness. They know that they, like the child, are not free. They know compassion. It is the existence of the child, and their knowledge of its existence, that makes possible the nobility of their architecture, the poignancy of their music, the profundity of their science” (Le Guin 119).

Complaining, debating, and rioting, our society throws its temper tantrum as does a three-year-old. Morals are confining and demanding, holding us back from freedom, keeping us from exploiting the world and ourselves, killing us little by little. We could do whatever we wanted if laws and morals weren't always on our back. But we are not like a helpless bird. We are individuals. “We have rights!” No one can tell us what to do. So we chose freedom from the bird cage. We blast our way out and soar through the air all on our own.

“How perfect life would be if society had no limitations and restrictions. Rules are meant to be broken,” say the culture shredders. One must notice two simple facts societies forget in their zeal to be free from the bird cage: morals exist and we agree that they are good (Rom 7:16). “If you really want to get relativists to admit it [the innate moral law], all you need to do is treat them unfairly. Their reactions will reveal the moral law written on their hearts and minds” (Geisler 174). Society has spent so much time getting away from the moral law that it hasn't stopped to evaluate why morals exist in the first place. Everything has a reason for being.

There is a cost to purging society of part of its foundation. The cost may be too high and, in the end and society would be worse off without morals than with them. A society tearing itself away from any idea which suggests morals can see the results. In the classroom, an immoral society teaches children that they do not have to respect the life in another human, that they are just animals. Then other animals, formerly accepted as humans with the image of God in them, burst into the room and shoot all of their fellow animals. And the rest of us animals waste much time and money blaming something or someone else for the problems we created when we cut our foundational legs from under ourselves.

In such a way, the identity of a society and culture is lost. Identity defines a culture and allows it the understanding of its own origins, its own purpose and its own goals. There are no more definites, no more absolutes, no more methods for discovering differences and distinctions. Two

unlike objects can now be the same. The disease drills itself into the very fabric and breath of the culture until the society has no identity and no uniqueness. Without an identity, a culture becomes stagnant, for it neither darts forward nor shrinks backward, but only gets stuck in the mud.

What good can the Christians do? The problem is that society always seems to invade Christianity, to sulk in the background and slowly attack those on the fringe. This tactic works perfectly in slowly numbing Christianity until it is rendered ineffective and no different than the surrounding culture. Then it is easy for the culture to simply refute, “Christians are no different than me! Why should I accept Christ?”

In this situation, God demands of the Christian, “You shall be holy for I am holy” (1 Pet 1.16). Then Jesus calls them the “salt of the earth” in Matthew 5:13, which is a way of saying, “Be full of flavor so that you can show the world My better way.” There must be a trust regained by any Christian seeking to help society stop committing internal suicide. Christians must be able to point out the advantages of living and growing inside the birdcage. They must show why the moral law exists and be the examples of how to follow it.

Now the bird is soaring higher than it ever has! The clouds are getting farther and farther away. But there is a problem with the air; it is too thin. Shortness of breath leads to weakness in its wings. The small, defenseless bird, which appeared much larger and robust inside its cage, begins to zip toward the earth. Those far away clouds are now high above it and that invisible ground is about to swallow it whole. This tiny bird was not made to fly so high in the sky. When a society jumps out of the bird cage and seizes the “opportunity” to be free, it will inevitably use its freedom to hurt itself. Everyone and everything which is part of that society will suffer and endure pain. What was exciting for a minute becomes a hindrance for a lifetime. What was advertised as fun and pleasure is now lackluster and anguish.

Worse than the consequences of not following any moral law is the unexpected slavery attached to immorality. Now, even though pain ensues when immoral choices are made, the society cannot help itself. It is trapped in only knowing immoral acts. It is as if the society is a car which has left the street and streetlights, turning off into a dark alley and not looking back toward the light. It gets darker and darker, harder to see any semblance of light, until there is no more light at all. Then it is impossible to know what direction the light had come from. No longer is the society merely lost, but also blind, finding it impossible to return to the light.

As the bird plummets to its demise it thinks to itself, “If only I’d stayed in my cage, this would not be happening to me.” Hopeless and helpless, the little fowl closes its eyes before its deserved destruction. But destruction never comes, for one of its friends has seen it falling to the ground and rescues the little bird by slowing it down and then helping it to fly again. Together the two fly back to the cage where true freedom awaits the prodigal bird’s return.

The answer to how Christians can help this culture to come back to moral reason and reality is to be the lights on the hill that Jesus spoke of (Matt 5.14). When the society has traveled so far into the darkness with no way to return to the light, the light must come to it and seek it out by illuminating the darkness, bringing focus and clarity to the situation. The rescue includes not only finding the society in its darkened state, but also teaching it how to function in the light again, bringing restoration and morals to their proper place. The culture lives and thrives inside the cage where freedom governs longer and fuller life.

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