



FREEDOM

Post-Modern Slavery

Anna Robbins

As the light of the 200th anniversary of the end of the transatlantic slave trade has faded from view, we are left in the twilight of new slaveries. There are over 12 million slaves in the world today – more than at the height of the transatlantic trade. Children, women and men in diverse places are chained and exploited so that others may profit from their labours, and their bodies. Over a million people, mostly women and girls are trafficked each year, most across international borders. The majority of these come from the poorest segments of the poorest countries.

Poverty itself, and the combined effects of climate change enslave millions. There are already some 25 million environmental refugees, a figure set to skyrocket through severe water shortages, and failed crop cycles. People who have no choices about their future, and who struggle daily for survival, are padlocked to poverty.

What about us? We too are enslaved. We bow down to the gods of this world in the form of cars and clothing, celebrities and jewellery. The singer-songwriter Bruce Cockburn got it right: Though chains be of gold, they are chains all the same. Such chains preoccupy us so that we ignore the growing bondage of government legislation, increasing restrictions on freedom of movement, and liberty of conscience. Historically, Christians have been champions of freedom. They recognised that physical freedom means little if the conscience is kept in chains. Moreover, they knew that those who bear the image of God deserve the dignity of liberation from physical enslavement. That is not to say that they had some naïve notion about human nature, or even of God's preferential intervention that would always readily overcome injustice. But if being in Christ meant anything, it meant that in the public realm, brothers and sisters should be free to live, and free to worship.

Some of us today have rejected the idea of biblical freedom and unwittingly succumbed to the determinism of a post-modern naturalistic cycle of cause and effect. No one is free: all that we think and do is the result of culture, upbringing, and genetics. We posit this together with a false paradox of the absolute freedom of the individual that leads society towards violence and anarchy, where all are bound by the demands of others.

We who have inherited relative freedom have the obligation to preserve and extend liberty for others in this world. In fact, this is something about which we have no choice. We are either slaves of the enemy or slaves to Christ.

Being enslaved to Christ means ensuring others have the freedom to make choices about their own lives, including whether or not to follow Jesus. To be free to choose to follow Jesus may mean knowing you are in safety, that you won't be killed for confessing Christ, and that you have a meal in your belly.

This is our real constraint: to be voices for the voiceless, to provide food for the hungry. 'If you say to them, "Go in peace, keep warm and eat your fill", and do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?' As PT Forsyth would remind us, we are only really free when we recognise that we are not free at all.

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