

## Christianity and a Free Society

There is an old story about an experiment involving a chimpanzee to which scientists were determined to teach verbal communication. For 14 years, the project directors worked night and day with this chimpanzee in its cage, providing it with every comfort and encouragement to form the syllables of simple words.

Finally, the day came when it seemed that the chimpanzee was actually going to construct a simple sentence from the syllables it had been taught. Word went about, and many scientists on that day crowded into the room, and excitedly gathered around the cage. At last, the first words, from the most carefully trained, pampered and cared for chimpanzee on earth were spoken. The first history making sentence uttered by the changed creature was: 'Let me out!'

The moral of the story is, of course that we may have many good things in this world, but they do not mean a thing unless there is freedom.

The liberty and justice enjoyed by free societies are often erroneously seen to be the product of benevolent secular government. It is largely forgotten that the freedoms we enjoy are to a very large degree the result of Christianity's long-standing influence. The great architects of civil liberty and freedom were professing Christians, such as Ambrose of Milan [ who risked his life standing for the principle that no one was above the law], Stephen Langton [largely responsible for drawing up Magna Carta], John Wycliffe [responsible for giving us the Bible in English, and giving the first great impetus to the common man to learn to read], Oliver Cromwell [the Father of the English Parliament] John Milton [ the great pioneer freedom of speech] John Locke [who emphasised the rights of man under God, and opposed tyranny] William Wilberforce [the emancipator of the slaves] and William Shaftesbury [who stood for proper conditions in the workplace].

One of the oldest ways in which individuals are deprived of liberty is when those who are in authority put themselves in a position of being above the law. The chief safeguard against this taking place is the principle, that no one can be found guilty and punished for an offence without the testimony of two or three witnesses. This principle was first laid down in the Bible, and can be found in Deuteronomy 19:15. Where this safeguard is applied the principle is established, that no one is above the law. Further application and development of this principle led to the right of trial by jury, a principle latter enshrined in the Magna Carta.

Christianity also teaches that deep in the heart of every individual is a consciousness of what is right and wrong. The Bible speaks of the written law or the Ten Commandments. As well as being written in the Bible, an awareness of these commandments is written upon everybody's heart. This is called the Natural Law, and it means that everyone born has an awareness of the Ten Commandments, i.e. what is right and what is wrong written on their hearts. John Locke [1632-1703] argued that governments exist to uphold the Natural Law, and that governmental tyranny exists when a man is forced to act against these natural laws of his heart. He further argued that natural rights are not given by kings, emperors or governments. Rather they belong to the people by nature, they are gifts of God and no government has the right to deny them to the people.

Christianity has contributed enormous towards the civil liberties we now cherish. It cannot be denied that had Christ never been born, not one of us would have the freedoms we now enjoy. Christ frees us from sin and from all tyranny. Andrew Jackson one time president of the USA speaking of the Bible said;

*'That book is the rock on which our nation rests. When that book falls I assure you, that the*

*liberties you enjoy will go with it.'*

**The Bible itself says;**

*'Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty.' 2 Cor 3:17*