
MORE ON THE COSTS OF FREEDOM

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By Jim
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And the LORD came down to see
the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. And the LORD
said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they
begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have
imagined to do. Genesis 11:5-6 KJV

You probably
remember the Bible story of the famed Tower of Babel as an early instance of
humans arrogantly demonstrating their technological genius and freedom from
outside control by building a great tower---ostensibly to reach into the realm
of God. Notice how the text quaintly relates that "now nothing will be
restrained from them, which they have imagined to do."

It's both a
blessing and a curse that humans are inquisitive and driven to achieve things
beyond the ordinary. That's where
explorers, scientists, inventors, innovators, and social reformers get their
drive for achievement. But it's also where we get oppression, falsehood,
outrageous social behavior, and opportunism of all kinds. So it's a source of
progress as well as a wellspring of trouble.

Last week we
discussed some costs of freedom and decided that democracy with all its faults
is vastly preferable---at least in this country---to any other option ranging
from dictatorship through anarchy.

Maintaining
democracy and freedom is costly in terms of sacrifice and building the legal
and social restraints necessary to curb the all-too-obvious human tendency
toward perversion and excess. Viewing the recent news and the ever-present
filth and insanity available night and day over the airwaves, I'm not sure that
we deserve freedom, nor am I greatly optimistic that we can preserve whatever
we have left unless we institute great change quickly.

Democracy as

a viable form of government requires intelligent, peaceful, literate people willing to adhere to natural law, or common moral law, generally attributed to God and transferred to the public by religion. But the demands of profit-oriented capitalism put great pressure upon employers to soft-pedal morality in favor of increasing production and profit at the cost of paying living wages to workers.

So the real truth is that the lure of money and power causes us to operate selfishly with little concern for others.

From the Garden

of Eden it has been so---humans straining against any attempts, even by God, to in any way limit their freedom to follow their own inner voice. But what if that inner voice speaks violence, hatred, willful disobedience, and scorn for legitimate social controls? Then we have the form of street violence we're seeing now, with people of all races and colors being treated violently with no thought for their personhood or the welfare of society.

In order to survive,

freedom must be balanced by responsibility. Today we hear a discordant din of rights: workers, students, women, racial minorities, religions, sexual preference, and practically everything else. But few speak of responsibilities. Excessive emphasis on rights without a corresponding acceptance of responsibilities threatens society with contentiousness and conflict because no one can have rights unless another accepts responsibilities.

Government

exists to balance public and private rights and responsibilities. When these get seriously out of balance, government stands ready and willing to apply its powers to redressing the balances and preventing grievous inequities. But when government becomes subordinate to money and offers its services to the highest bidders, we face issues like we have today---with government seemingly responsive more to money than to justice. Such a government becomes unable to effectively perform its major function of creating a political, social, and corporate environment in which all people can thrive, not equally, but equitably, since there are obviously human differences that affect personal achievement and success.

This is

where the religious establishment comes in. As custodians of morality, churches have a duty to continuously "speak truth to power." Thus we as Christians have a role in creating the kind of government we need to grow and prosper.