

REFLECTIONS ON FREEDOM

In 1865, the French historian, Edouard de Laboulaye, proposed that his country present a suitable memorial to the United States on the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. That "suitable memorial" is the Statue of Liberty which was formally dedicated Oct. 28, 1886.

This famous statue has become a symbol of freedom for people all over the world. It was officially designated as a national monument in 1924. It features a woman with an uplifted torch in her right hand. In her left hand is a tablet with the date, July 4, 1776 written in roman numerals. A broken shackle lies at her feet. The star shaped wall about the base is the wall of Ft. Wood which was built on Bedloe's Island from 1808 - 1811.

The figure is composed of more than 300 copper shells and is supported by an iron framework. The framework was designed by Alexandre-Gustave, builder of the famed Eiffel Tower in Paris. The figure is nearly 152 feet tall and weighs 225 tons. It stands on a 150 foot pedestal. On that pedestal is the sonnet, "The New Colossus," written by Emma Lazarus. It reads in part: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free. The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door".

The fabric of American society is composed of people from all over the world who "yearn to breathe free". Patrick Henry spoke for millions when he said: "Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery. Forbid it Almighty God! I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death".

Sadly, however, many enslaved people do not "yearn to breathe free". Like the proverbial elephant tethered by a tiny rope, they have been trained to accept bondage. In Spanish such people are called "agachados". The word means "stooped" and harkens back to the days when dispirited Indians were enslaved by the Aztecs. These pitiful creatures would line up by the thousands to die as human sacrifices. On one special occasion in 1486, over 60,00 had their hearts cut out with an obsidian knife. Rather than revolt, they waited dutifully in line with bowed head and stooped shoulders to be dragged to the sacrificial stone.

A more modern example of an "agachado" is the sad story of Juan Miguel Gonzales. His wife died in quest of freedom, but he would rather be Red than dead. His famous son, Elian, as you know, was rescued from the sea by a passing fisherman.

I was privileged to visit Cuba in the Spring of 1999. Today, that beautiful island is like a prison. Other than escape, the only way out is to become "trustee". A few of these are permitted to travel as long as they are chaperoned by armed guards. It is not at all uncommon for some of these to defect when they get the chance. That's why Juan Miguel had to be in constant contact with his Cuban guards. In Cuba, Juan Miguel makes only slave wages. Cuban Medical Doctors, for example make only \$15 per month. Life is so deplorable there that many woman doctors resort to prostitution in order to survive.

Now, with the help of the Clinton administration, Juan and Elian are back on the plantation. The prison psychiatrists will do everything they can to destroy all thoughts of freedom in the mind of little Elian and see to it that he never yearns to breathe free again.

But what about you? The Scriptures teach that "**when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience which leads to righteousness**" (Rom. 6:16). Christian freedom is not for limp wristed sissies who are happy on the Devil's plantation. It is for those courageous souls who yearn to breathe free. It is for those who dare to dream the impossible and risk everything to see that it comes to pass.

Freedom in Christ means far more than political freedom. It means freedom to excel in every good word and work. It also means freedom from sin, freedom from fear, and freedom from judgment. Jesus said it best: "**If the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed**" (John 8:36).