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God is Free

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FOR THE WORLD OUTSIDE AMERICA, the 4th of July has some magic — as though then and there, freedom had come to earth and been embodied in a great state document. But there was an America before 1776. In 1610, the five hundred most independent religious non-conformist families of England supported the Virginia venture and a poet sang: "We hope to plant a nation where none before has stood." Written in 1610, the verse came true in 1776.

What happened between the two dates? There was a church, there were churches in America. And though politically the colonies were mere colonies, the liberty of the nation was preceded by sovereign churches. These congregations begot political liberty; for it was legislated by members of churches who had lived as members of the fellowship of the children of God, and as brothers of Christ. Their fellowship imparted to them a sense of freedom which no single individual possesses. For it freed them from fear.

They proclaimed freedom for every day of the week because they had worshipped in complete freedom on Sunday. Freedom originates in the communion of believers just as it is lost in the community of a gang or herd.

Even so, the law of liberty remains a strange proposition. How can it be a "law by which I am judged," as the apostle says: If I am free, who can judge me? Indeed the people of our day think this to be more folly. They hold that the Puritans had the law and that modern man has the freedom. Before 1776, they say, there was the distressing belief in predestination, original sin, no freedom of the will, brimstone and hell-fire. And in the second America, everybody can do as he pleases (at least until he is drafted).

Our congregations, and a man like Jonathan Edwards in Northampton, indeed believed that nobody was free

but God alone. But where the sceptic only hears his own free will denied, they heard God's free love affirmed. The men who poke fun at the Puritans do not believe in God's freedom. They believe in the business cycle, in the almanac's forecasts, in fate, in the laws of science and of logic, in laws of nature and laws of probability.

Our human battle might go better if we believed that God was free. The Puritans risked their lives on this faith. They treated God as a free agent who was so unbound by precedent and prejudice that he would give every age its won new dress and garment of political forms; if we give our souls and our time to God, we shall receive from his hands a new visible order of things. If we believe that God alone is free, God will renew the face of the earth eventually.

The liberty of God might be described in majestic terms, of mountains smashed, continents submerged, empires dissolved and so on. Because God

Christ's Hands Today

The hands that healed the leper,
Caressed the little child,
And purified the temple,
By hypocrites defiled,

The hands that fed the thousands
Beside the Syrian sea,
And cheered the widowed mother
At Nain in Galilee,

The hands that served the supper
Within the Upper Room,
And then, nail-pierced and bleeding,
Defied the cross and tomb,

Those hands no more can tender
Their ministries of grace,—
And so, our hands must render
Love's labor in their place.

Christ asks your hands and my hands
That He, through us, may still
Pursue his healing mission,
And work the Father's will.

We must become his Presence—
His Other Self today,—
And so fulfil his promise,
"I'm with you all the way."

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is free, he appeared in the flesh in the form of freedom. He did not come as law, or as power, or as doctrine, or as beauty. He came as freedom. Jesus was free. And he remained the divine liberty to the end when he spoke the unashamed words: "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Jesus remained incalculable because our God whom he incarnated is incalculable. Lest we mistake God, Jesus forwent his opportunities of becoming a rabbi, a lawyer, a king, a great writer. But how free he was.

If God is free, the law is simply the perpetuity of his free acts of love. God spoke: "Let there be light." And in perpetuation of this free act, the laws of the stars make them rotate now forever. God said: "Man and woman shall be one flesh." And in perpetuation of this act, we have the institution and law of marriage.

Laws are the consequences of God's acts of love. Whenever a man wakes up to some act of God's love, he will try to legislate for the protection of such an act in permanence. Hence, in the phrase, the law of liberty, the term liberty applies to God, and the term law applies to his legislating children, who rush in for the support of his creative work.

If our laws ever became cold rules of clever planners instead of being begotten by the fear of the Lord in the law-giver's heart, they will fail. And if liberty is usurped by individuals who are not bound by God's universal love, this liberty will destroy itself. The law is not enough. Liberty is not enough.

But when laws follows love, the perfect law of liberty is enacted. As a child may come to his parents in great trouble, and the parents rack their brains and leave no stone unturned until a creative solution is discovered, so we may trust that our father in heaven is equally or much more ingenious he will respond to this generation of his children.

The law of liberty connects the Second America of the Constitution and the First America of Jonathan Edwards. It connects the freedom of God with the freedom of his children. By our membership in God's kingdom we have been freed to depict God's freedom in our laws,

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