Poet Maya Angelou once wrote of two birds. One, which in flying freely, claims the sky and one, which in its captivity, sings. The first experiences the freedom of flight, on "the back of the wind," and in response, "names the sky his own." (Angelou, *Caged Bird*, Shaker, Why Don't You Sing?, 1983) The caged bird, experiencing the physical nightmare of bondage, with clipped wings and tied feet, responds by singing "of freedom," "of things unknown but longed for still." (Angelou, *Caged Bird*, Shaker, Why Don't You Sing?, 1983) When considering freedom and vocation, I think of these two birds and their responses, one of empowerment and one of longing. I believe freedom is implicit in the endless gift of God's grace, and requires a response. I believe Christian vocation to be the proper response to the knowledge of God's grace and the freedom implicit in that grace.

The grace of God is not a requirement of God, as God is free to will as God chooses. Indeed, all freedom finds its origin in the act of boundless grace initiated by God for God's people. We come to the opportunity for freedom as a gift, in the very moment "God chose and determined Godself to be our God." (Barth, 73) In that moment, it is willed by God that we be able and it be necessary that we respond to the very act of God choosing to be our God, in the witness of Scripture. It is not a gift to be received without inviting a response. Dietrich Bonhoeffer names this invitation to respond in saying, "the grace of God is freely given, but it is not cheap." (Migliore, 257) The implicit freedom received through God's grace begs a response.

Barth concludes, "Human freedom is the joy whereby a person appropriates for their self God's election." (Barth, 79) I would agree that freedom is only truly experienced in the acknowledgment of God's grace, by which God chooses to be our God, and all that can be conceived to constitute a response to such an understanding. It is my belief that Christian vocation is the proper response to acknowledging the free grace of God. The vagueness as to what form that response may take is intentional. I would be foolish to suggest the particular works that indicate a proper response to the free grace of God, though many have been offered. I just believe there is one, to be revealed to us as God wills.

It is important, as Joan Martin points out, not to conflate Christian vocation with merely one's work apart from its social relations. In her criticism of the "ambiguous positive notion of work," Martin argues that having such an understanding of vocation left the Protestants with "no moral or theological recourse for challenging exploitative work." (FWERD, 181) One cannot merely disregard the cage when speaking of the caged bird's singing. Yet, the freedom implicit in God's grace allows us to experience freedom in claiming the knowledge that God is our God and to demand justice in contexts that do not reflect that. The caged bird is free to sing of freedom only in recognizing that its environment does not reflect the gift of God's grace, and responding, in true Christian vocation, by proclaiming such to the world and calling out the enslaving sin of those who chose to cage it.

Christian vocation, as free response in both the choosing to be God's people as God willed to be our God and acting in the midst of that knowledge, is both individual and corporate. It is important to note the corporate nature of vocation, as it is a reflection that God is "pro nobis (for us)." (Barth, 77) In Christian vocation, in the act of responding to the free grace of God, and in claiming ourselves to be God's people, we also claim to be for one another. God chooses to be for us, which means in choosing God as God's people, we too choose to be for all that God chooses. Martin highlights this aspect of Christian vocation in one characteristic of her "contemporary blackwomen" work ethic, which recognizes a "womanish moral authority, instruction, and action as an intergenerational dynamic for communal maintenance, solidarity, and empowerment in the context of oppression." (FWERD, 188) Freedom and the proper response of vocation is made possible by God's gift of grace, in which we are free when we choose to acknowledge God as God for "us," and in our freedom, are for one another. A caged bird sings not only of its own freedom. It sings for the freedom of all things, as God has promised it to be.

The caged bird sings

with a fearful trill

of things unknown

but longed for still

and his tune is heard

on the distant hill

for the caged bird

sings of freedom. - Maya Angelou