

# Defending Religious Freedom in a Secular Society

Neil J Flinders /August 2015

## A Synopsis

This article is based on the premise that wisdom may come from looking back for orientation and forward for direction. We know we are part of an increasingly divided society. This is a valid concern. The Founders of this nation proposed and implemented an *inclusive* perspective that nurtured unity—*E pluribus unum*. This principle is now being challenged by some, and aggressively rejected by others. The central contest is a tug-of-war between the *sacred* and the *secular*. Further, *rhetoric* now rules in our confused and changing social order. Values, once honored, are now ignored, despised or detested. *Inclusive* worldviews have been set aside in academia and *exclusive* philosophical propositions are now embraced and promoted. Answers to the age-old questions of *what is real*, *how do we know*, and *what is of value* are being revised. Standing in the wings are three other prevalent enigmas: *Where did I come from? Why am I here? What is my ultimate destiny?* These so-called “terrible” questions haunt everyone’s life sooner or later. The effort in this document is to illustrate how such concerns impact contemporary social issues that threaten the life, liberty and happiness of the citizenry.

There is a self-evident connection between other civilizations that have risen and fallen under the canopy of these same concerns. In the case of Western Culture it is important to understand the Hebrew, Greek, Roman, and Medieval epochs that lie on our doorstep and fashion our varied lifestyles. There are things we can learn from understanding previous efforts to push *propositions* until they seem like *probabilities* so people will accept them as *certainties*. This is what rhetorical sophistry is all about. Hiding one’s mental and emotional *contextual assumptions* so nearly the entirety of a people’s focus is invested in discussions of *content*, *process* (methodology), and *structure*. This creates a fertile place for *guile* to thrive, and it confuses the critical role of *allegiance* in the family, education, law, and our political arenas. Definitions of terms like: freedom, liberty, morality, ethics, absolute, and conditional become obscured by the intellectual fog and the inevitable behavioral free-fall that comes with the making of all values relative. It threatens what some feel is a *fairness for all* doctrine.

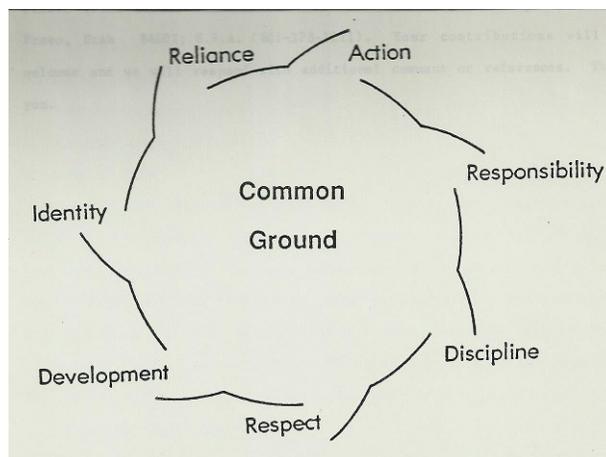
My intent is to frame specific issues in a way that might contribute to desirable solutions. This requires the defining and revealing of human views that permit *inclusive* unity rather than forcibly institutionalizing *exclusive* divisions among the populace. History helps us understand how the world in which we live came to be like it is. This knowledge is very helpful in determining what we can do about it. This seems to be the case in the current struggle between adherents to the conflict over the *secular* vs. the *sacred* world views in America and elsewhere. Factions may be ever-present, but factions can also be united in matters fundamental to the body politic. It is possible to seek *fairness for all citizens* if the goal is inclusion—not exclusion. Personal religious beliefs and dis-beliefs need not destroy that which is vital to the greater good in matters of personal conscience and civil liberty. The old notion expressed in Edwin Markham’s poem, “Outwitted,” provides a simple illustration:

**He drew a circle that shut me out-  
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.  
But love and I had the wit to win:  
We drew a circle and took him in!**

The question then becomes: Which of these two circles is the most preferable? Context ultimately determines whether or not people are willing and able to recognize self-evident evidence.

When issues are contradictory and diametrically opposite in their nature, it is still possible to seek after a choice that provides for the greater good if this choice is governed by the preservation of personal conscience and individual liberty. The critical variable is to establish relationships that enable the like-minded, to unify sufficiently to join in drawing the circle that maximizes *freedom of conscience and liberty for all*. Without some semblance of unity there is little hope for peaceful and successful resolutions. Establishing common ground is an important step in nurturing unity and successful communication. This article concludes with a list of thirteen suggestions that may assist in bringing people together for the purpose of preserving *personal freedom* and contributing to *collective liberty* for all who reside in these United States of America. The founders made their effort; we now have the opportunity to make ours.

The personal content of this article is rooted in the author's previous efforts to probe “The Role of Values in Communicating Truth”<sup>1</sup> I learned that the Founders of this nation anchored their various documents in an Americanized version of certain *universal* values: *Action, Identity, Discipline, Respect, Development, Responsibility, and Reliance*. All cultures embrace and pursue these elements. The Founders intentionally modified (Americanized) these values as: *Freedom to Act, Self-identity, Self-discipline, Mutual respect, Self-development, Personal responsibility, and Self-reliance*. This is self evident as one reads their writings. These universal elements may also serve as *gateways* to facilitate helpful discussions involving differing views. They provide entry points to finding common ground among people of differing perceptions who are seeking to productively communicate with one another. This avenue provides a way to move beyond both (a) *conflict theory* and (b) *strategically competitive theory*—both approaches now very prevalent in contemporary communication practices. The assumption underlying the *gateway model* is that “success” is more likely when it is consciously and consistently pursued through these gateways to common ground. The American Founders certainly stressed their modification of this approach as a way to pursue *fairness for all*.



1 Flinders, Neil J, “The Role of Values in Communicating Truth,” Brigham Young University Language and Intercultural Research Center Symposium Publication: *Bridges of Understanding*, November, 1979. pp. 28. 1-7. See also Flinders, Neil J and Tyler, V. Lynn “Towards a Global Philosophy of Communication for Educators: A Model for Approaching Common Ground” *Proceedings of The Far Western Philosophy of Education Society*, December, 1985. pp. 192-198.

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## *How America Moved from Where We Were to Where We Are*

The documents fashioned by the founders of this nation—the so-called American Experiment—are significantly unique. It is a pattern to learn from. They begin with an honest statement of *why* these individuals, speaking for the populace at large, were willing to engage in the risks of creating a new form of government and social life. They knew true power resides in the people, not an elite council, emperor, monarchy or dictator. They did not try to hide the beliefs and assumptions that shaped the intent behind what they wanted the world to know and understand: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness . . .” (The *Declaration of Independence*, July 4, 1776). Later, when they published the *The Constitution of the United States*, they followed the same pattern of revealing their *intentions* as well as their *explanations* of *why* they believed what they were saying and doing. The first sentence is a clear introduction to how they proposed going about this task:

We the people of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

These actions established a bulwark that marked the difference between liberty and despotism. The founders formally acknowledged their belief in a Creator, a Power, a Providence—and a Plan—for humankind to succeed. They believed in certain *innate* and *self-evident* factors not of their making—factors put in place by the Creator. This type of laying bare **Why** they were engaging in creating a new nation is not common practice in most human communication. A more prevalent pattern is to hide the deeper **Why** part of an explanation and focus solely on the **What**, **How**, and **When** of whatever desires are being pursued. This transparency by the Founders was opposite the driving force behind traditional *rhetoric*; using language to accomplish a *veiled* purpose; hiding the real *intent* until the goal is achieved. Rhetoric, often the opposite of sincerity, has long been a tool used for nefarious purposes. *Changing definitions* that confuse values related to integrity is a hallmark of rhetoric.

For example, *freedom* is now often pandered as a synonym or substitute for *liberty*. This creates confusion. It's more helpful to understand, as the Founders recognized, that *freedom* is what the Creator bestows upon humankind; it has to do with *agency* and *conscience*. Liberty is what people bestow upon or steal from one another by how they pursue their various relationships. Freedom is a gift. Our liberty comes and goes, depending on the cultures in which we live and the people with whom we associate. Furthermore the basic views of both *freedom* and *liberty* that we embrace are rooted in what we discern to be good and evil, right and wrong, better and best. Definitions need to be clear—not foggy. A similar confusing perspective involves the terms *morals* and *ethics*. Traditional views of *morality* are related to standards given to humankind by their Creator (e.g., The Ten Commandments); *ethics* are rules that people generate, invoke and use to moderate behaviors for the benefit of both themselves and others.

Making these terms synonyms is seldom helpful. Fuzzy definitions affect the entire domain of *moral agency*, which is fundamental to the purposes for which this nation was created.

If we are *moral agents*, as the Founders presumed—subject to our own decisions—and are in this mortal *realm* to act, then we all enjoy a certain degree of inherent freedom and a desire for liberty. This is the basis for the belief in the power of the people, not just the “divine right of Kings.” Numerous practical matters arise when these factors are connected to *education as well as politics and the Law*. A pattern is laid and promoted. Such patterns soon evolve into various perceptions of *learning, teaching, following and leading*. Every person is affected. Layer after layer of topics, issues, and attributes come into view. These personal variations form the foundations for each individual's *agency-driven education*, and they determine whether learning and acting will be *moral* or just *ethical*.

As theories and counter-theories are proposed and implemented, items for discussion abound. Ideas about *justice* or *fairness* come into play. Greed and avarice are nurtured. Selfishness and manipulative control are constant temptations. Hence we have the modern playground for *rhetoric*, this prevalent element often overlooked in our day-to-day lives. Our current circumstances, however, are not new; they are just cloaked in a new wardrobe as the following example illustrates.

Hugh Nibley published a journal article in 1956 titled “Victoriosa Loquacitas: The Rise of Rhetoric and the Fall of Everything Else.” This was Nibley's effort to focus attention on the dire consequences of institutionalizing the use of speech as a weapon in culture wars—particularly evident in sick and dying cultures. He begins his rather lengthy historical analysis with the observation that addiction to *rhetoric* is similar to

a hopeless alcoholic's devotion to the bottle. Everywhere the ancients give us to understand that rhetoric is their poison, that is ruining their capacity to work and think, that it disgusts and wearies them, and that they cannot let it alone, because it pays too well and, having destroyed everything else, it is all they have left of remembered grandeur.

Nibley then concludes his treatise with a provocative observation: “Like the residue of certain radioactive substances, rhetoric, leaving an unmistakable mark on all that it touches, may yet prove to be the surest guide to the history of our own times.” (see *Western Speech* 20:2 (Spring 1956):57-82; CWHN 10:243-286.)

If the nucleus of *rhetoric* is, as Nibley suggests, simply a matter of persuasively *turning any proposition into a probability*, which can then be built into a *certainty* by high-powered emotional appeal and exerting various forms of authority, it certainly applies today—even in our science-driven society. It is obviously true in politics and the law. I believe his title captures an essence of the current erosion of *personal freedom* and its effect on *collective liberty* in America. The war of words does matter when its application erodes and destroys rather than enhances and builds human culture. Today, our politics and our educational institutions are laced with all sorts of *probabilities* being fanned into *certainties* in the minds of many in our society. Each person can easily make their own list—they can start with vibrating concerns about the physical environment and extend to the riveting controversies over the treatment of unborn children—their tissues and organs—or terrorist-driven atrocities. The unusual and unthinkable are so prevalent that the shock factor is hardly relevant. The role of rhetoric is pervasive in modern society—both historically and currently. Any hope for retaining *religious freedom*

involves recognizing and refuting ill-advised rhetoric. Consider some examples: The Affordable Healthcare Act (Obamacare) (2010–forward), Common Core Standards Initiative (2009–forward), The Values Clarification Curriculum movement in Public Education (1960s and 1970s). These three well publicized instances of *rhetoric-driven public policy movements* fit our current scene and illustrate Nibley's foregoing formula at work.

Each of these programs was based on *propositions* endeavoring to become *probabilities* with the hope of eventual *certainties*. And in each case they shared a common *context* that was cleverly veiled until critics forced the rationale into a form of public clarity. The massive 10,000-plus pages of the ACA document were filled with hidden and semi-hidden issues. These issues were rooted in very technical language. Phrases like “You have to pass it before you can understand it,” “the American public is too dumb to understand,” and “You can keep your Doctor” came to symbolize the *socialistic* rather than the *free market* orientation. The ensuing controversies still divide the nation. In a similar fashion the “Common Core” movement in education flourished in some circles, until its hidden origins and issues became better understood; then it too divided the populace. Likewise, the earlier Values Clarification movement gained rapid popularity then floundered—even though, or perhaps because, this “encounter training” was pushed by USOE National Training Laboratories in a radical way.

Each of these programs was initiated in an attempt to obtain *freedom from* some traditional practices, and to foster more *freedom to* obtain whatever the society wanted or whatever the individual's desires permitted. The mechanisms used were speeches to prominent constituencies, media proliferation, sensitivity training (T-Groups) in Bethel, Maine, and even naked experiments in the hot tubs at the Esalen Institute at Big Sur, California and elsewhere. The focus in each of these widespread movements was to adjust personal values. Parental and personal obligations were to be exchanged for government responsibility; family determinations exchanged for standardized federal-and State-driven schooling; the traditional moral code exchanged for personal preferences that were relative to an individual's self perceptions. And a most critical factor in each one was the *common hinge to these rhetorical plans*—the *sacred* was to be subservient to the *secular*. Freedom of religion is clearly at stake in such social environments.

The lesson from past history—the longer view—is much the same as these contemporary examples. A person could spend a professional life studying the details of how rhetoric played a vital role that has created a major shift that now undergirds nearly every academic discipline. These dramatic influences have now moved America's academic intellect from a *sacred* to a *secular* focus. In every case the strategy was to push *propositions* into *probabilities*, which then became apparent *certainties*. Usually while hiding the full *contextual* motivation. For my purposes, a superficial survey is sufficient to recognize the significance of a more detailed exploration. Most libraries are full of evidence for anyone who is interested in probing further. Understanding this story has direct bearing on preserving or retrieving America's religious freedom. We ignore it at our peril, harsh as this may seem.

### **The Shift: Sacred to Secular in the Sciences, e.g. Astronomy, Geology, Biology**

In science it was a shift from the contextual view of *Novum Organum* (1620), by Francis Bacon who said his purpose was to study “God's works” in order to augment, not replace, “God's word,” or revelation. “Let us begin from God and show that our pursuit from its (Science's) exceeding goodness clearly proceeds from Him, the Author of good and Father of light” (Book I: 93, 125). The then new

contrasting movement was expressed by Paul Heinrich Dietrich de'Holbach, whose volume *System de la Nature* (1770) has been called the “Bible of all Materialism.” He declared, “Man is unhappy merely because he misunderstands nature.” He challenged those who would claim to be scientific to banish the notion of God from any scientific pursuit. For him there was nothing miraculous in the world; the ignorant layman may believe in a personal God; but the scientist who did so would place his reason below that of the simplest peasant. His view was that astronomy, physics, and chemistry has long banished the notion that some universal spirit could interfere in natural processes. God is irrelevant.

The move away from the sacred to the secular began centuries ago; so go the illustrations: Isaac Newton's *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* (1686) vs. Pierre Simon Laplace's *Celestial Mechanics* (@ 1829); James Hutton's *Theory of the Earth* (1788) vs. Sir Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology: An attempt to explain the former changes of the earth's surface by reference to causes now in operation.* (1830); William Paley's *Natural Theology: or Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of Deity* (1821) vs. Charles Darwin's *The Origin of the Species: by Means of Natural Selection* (1859). The shifting view from the sacred to the secular grew until it now overpowers the intellectual climate in Western culture—even in Art, Music, and Literature. The stage was set, as one can see by the birth and death dates of men such as those listed below, who popularized new answers to some very old and basic questions. This monumental shift flipped in American universities between 1880 – 1920. The following well-known students are some of those often cited as helping form the new answers.

1748-1832	Jeremy Bentham	(Law)	What makes a good law?
1809-1882	Charles Darwin	(Biology)	Where did man come from?
1818-1883	Karl Marx	(Economics)	How should fruits of labor be distributed?
1856-1939	Sigmund Freud	(Medicine)	What causes man's unusual illnesses?
1859-1952	John Dewey	(Education)	What is Education?
1878-1958	John Watson	(Psychology)	Why do people behave as they do?
1884-1976	Rudolph Bultmann	(Theology)	What about those miracles in the Bible?

*The new answers all had one thing in common;* there is no need to include references to a spiritual domain or to a Divine Providence to answer these or any other significant questions one might have. Language (information) is the great medium in the modern world, and rhetoric continues to play a dominant role. The pendulum has moved far into the *exclusive* and divisive secular domain, and any efforts to preserve or restore a more *inclusive* social environment will not be easy. The contest is between believers in the validity of both *supernatural* and *natural domains* versus non-believers who hold to the view of a *natural domain only*. The implications are cataclysmic for moral values. One view allows both worldviews to participate; the other view is essentially exclusive and restrictive.

Language and its use—communication—is a powerful, indiscriminate weapon, as well as a useful tool. Linguistics, spoken or written, is more than symbolic. Language becomes part of an arsenal that creates and controls the lives we live and influences the relationships of our day-to-day affairs. Language is significant in all relationships, but it can be particularly insidious and volatile in the family, education and legal structure of a society. Sticks and stones can break bones, but language can do more; it can infect and confuse as well as heal or destroy human relationships and civil order. Like it or not, aware or not, a battle is waging, and it does affect us all. Significant changes in America have occurred, and these changes continue to seriously affect the *intellectual climate* in which we live and rear our children. Perhaps paying more attention to history can help us avoid some of our progenitor's pitfalls. Wisdom requires us to look back for orientation, while we look forward for direction.

## Rhetoric a Cousin to Guile

There is more to this story, however, than Nibley portrays. In addition to *historical rhetoric*, there is a *personal nature* to the role language plays in our conversations. This topic needs attention and clarification because of the tendency to hide *important beliefs and assumptions*. The trending practice of intentionally hiding or masking fundamental beliefs and assumptions is common in our day-to-day communicative relationships. And it is particularly evident as we interface with professional or semi-professionals—such as those related to the enforcement of state and federal laws. We even hire lawyers to help us manage what to say or not say. This brings us to another relevant factor. The use of *rhetoric* is often a by-product of *personal guile*; both foster the notion that *ends* can justify *means*. Both lead easily to concluding that “truth” is subject to compromise, which is now deemed okay, because nearly everything can be perceived as *relative*. So goes the argument in *values clarification theory*. Absolutes are now often considered illusions, and *ethics* are more popular and preferable than divinely *revealed moral standards*. This hiding of basic beliefs and assumptions can and often does complicate human communication. (Just ask a friend or spouse for examples; they can tell when your veil is showing.)

Our cultural heritage is filled with commentary on the subject of *guile*. The canonized scriptural record, for example, identifies *guile* as a common element in the human personality. Personal guile is the opposite of pure sincerity. Several terms are closely associated with guile, such as crafty lying, envy, evil speaking, hypocrisy, malice and even death. All these connections are linked to mouth, lips, tongue, and speech. They play large roles in the Good vs. Evil story. Check a concordance. It will also list opposite characteristics like faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, service, honesty, and charity. Jesus praised as exemplary individuals Nathaniel, Edward Partridge, and George Miller because, as he said, they were persons “in whom there is no guile.” (John 1:47; D&C 41:11; 124:20). Guile is a universal temptation. The goal is or should be to get beyond guile in our associations. It is not a helpful tool for pursuing Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

## The Intent of This Article

The aim of this article is twofold: *first*, to illustrate the significance of current social and legal applications of language, and *second*, to probe the nature of how this human process functions within the individual. I believe it is possible to understand the basic nature of conflict in human affairs. We should seek to know *why* and *how* circumstances, past and present, nurture the challenges we face in order to recognize constructive solutions. Otherwise, ignorance and apathy prevail, leaving us quite vulnerable to rhetoric, guile and perhaps other weaknesses. Uninformed indifference prevents us from becoming players in the events that shape the world in which we live. Whatever will be, will be (“Que Sera, Sera”) is not an adequate foundation for defending or maximizing *personal freedom* or *collective liberty*. There is abundant evidence that forces are now at work to break down the moral and spiritual strength of people at home and abroad. It is important to become aware and not become an inadvertent victim. As someone has said, “They do not know what is happening to them, and that is precisely what is happening—they do not know!” This ignorance is a major enemy for people who want *fairness for all*. It is a fatal weakness for a democratic republic form of government.

As a beginning, consider the following example involving the US Constitution and certain federal court decisions. Then follow a second probe that attempts to make more clear and evident *why*

and *how* such matters as these can and do occur. My intent is to suggest a platform that might be useful in understanding how change can occur in an *intellectual climate*. This transformation certainly happened in America. Cluttered communication, infected with an abundance of *guile*, has contributed significantly to the negative factionalism we face. Understanding a problem is part of finding solutions to the problem. And when it is a people problem, informed people need to participate.

### **Ignoring or Interpreting the Constitution**

An important contemporary concern involves what seems to be an important change in the views people hold regarding (a) our country's Constitution and (b) the cultural heritage bequeathed to us by its Founders. The value of a Constitution is largely determined by the culture that envelops it. Recently a full-page ad appeared in our daily paper. The ad was sponsored by Hobby Lobby, Hemispheres, and Mardel Stores (*Deseret News*, July 5, 2015). The Heading reads: "In God We Trust. Blessed is the Nation Whose God is the Lord – Psalm 33:12." The remainder of the text is filled with quotes from the Founders, past presidents, Supreme Court justices, Supreme Court rulings, Congress, early education institutions, and foreign opinions. Collectively, the content explicitly declares that this nation is a Christian nation and that the Bible should be read by its citizens and their lives regulated by its precepts. Furthermore, these should be conveyed by education to the rising generation. This ad represents the fears that accompany America's drift in belief and practice from *then and there* to *here and now*. The intellectual climate in this nation has changed dramatically during the past two centuries. The public power structure now in place would dismiss this ad as "out of touch."

Nevertheless, one astute observer noted decades ago that for "130 years" our country grew and thrived; then a combination of influences changed the way Americans thought and acted:

It was during this first century and a quarter of our history, that America, our great America, was built—politically, industrially, economically—the America which has [now] made possible the riot—domestic and foreign—which is now raging; the America which would never have been built under the policies—domestic and foreign—which now dominate us. . . . Some will say, "Oh, he is talking about the past; but this is a new world, new conditions, new problems," and so on. To this I will content myself with answering—human nature does not change; in its basic elements it now is as it was at the dawn of history, as our present tragic plight shows. Even savages inflict no greater inhumanities than are going on in the world today. (J. Reuben Clark Jr., *Stand Fast By Our Constitution*, 1962. pp. 96–97)

After the passing of more than fifty years, the foregoing commentary seems quite timely, the point being that dramatic changes have occurred and stark differences exist among the citizenry.

As a specific contrast to what appeared in the newspaper ad, consider Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's recent public dissenting of the US Constitution. Look at the alternatives she promotes: South Africa's constitution, Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, or the European Convention on Human Rights. She apparently heralds these modern creations as superior to the US founding documents. Ginsburg is typical of current adherents who favor a new view for governing America. Books have been and are being written that clearly describe the monumental shift in perspectives that now drive social intercourse and interpretations of the law in America.

This trend is significant and contributes directly to the increasingly intense factionalism in this nation. An evident and powerful movement has changed the public perception from *sacred* to the *secular*. Many people are engaged in hiding their *context* and moving *propositions* into *probabilities* in hopes they will become *certainties*. This movement is very clear in many decisions regarding what is acceptable and not acceptable activity in the nation's public schools. It is an age-old battle about who should be in charge, who should do the work, who should pay the bills, and what should people believe.

A simple Google search offers a quick summary of Supreme Court decisions that contributed to the 1963 Court's ruling banning prayer in public schools. Recent Courts have also determined that by law, *Atheism* and *Secular Humanism* now have legal standing as "religions." Subsequently, new twists and turns have been added. Various court decisions and actions now redefine what constitutes *religion*, *family* and *legal marriage*. One writer expressed a typical confusing conundrum like this: Secular Humanism *is* a religion "**for free exercise clause purposes**," and it is *not* a religion "**for establishment clause purposes**." This is a troubling example of the law of consequences—whether or not they are unintended or unexpected. Confusion is the result. It makes the common person scratch his or her head in wonderment. Nevertheless, confusion is a likely and often inevitable outcome when people manipulate conflicting assumptions for questionable purposes. Rhetoric, once loosed, has a life of its own and it is hardly fail-safe. Things happen that eventually prove to be undesirable if not chaotic. This may be why President David O. McKay's observation was so prophetic:

By making that [New York Regents' prayer] unconstitutional, the Supreme Court of the United States severs the connecting cord between the public schools of the United States and the source of divine intelligence, the Creator himself. (*Relief Society Magazine*, December 1962, p. 878.)

### **What Changes a Culture's Intellectual Climate?**

New information widely disseminated and individual activity change a culture's climate. Currently, massive amounts of opinion fills the various forms of media. The content and tone reflects intense and conflicting concerns regarding such topics as Personal Freedom, Individual Liberty, Basic Values, Constitutional Rights, Legal Interpretation, and Human Agency; also Theological, Philosophical and Political Assumptions, Mores, Traditions, Religion, Family Structure, Social Institutions, Racial and Ethnic Equality, Morality and/or Ethics, Gender modification, Abortion, and the Harvesting of Unborn Fetus Organs and Tissues are additional examples. These items spawn individual activity. Consensus is spotty, trendy, mercurial and temporary. People wander here and there, or run to and fro—turmoil abounds. It is not a hopeful or comfortable environment and seems to generate uncertainty, fear, frustration and even hate. Stability is put at risk in many aspects of our lives.

These influences are illustrative as they reveal competing desires, allegiances and economic implications. Unity is factional and rarely fixed. This typifies the Twenty-First Century now underway. The public turmoil definitely helps shape the forces that impact each of us, whether we realize it or not. Ignorance is a porous shield and contributes little to our safety, or defense, or in constructing viable responses or solutions. To some extent, everyone is affected by the causes and the consequences of these prevailing issues. Hope and despair seem to ebb and flow unnecessarily. Anxiety increases. Focus can be difficult; distractions are plentiful and often delusional. In these very best of temporal times,

humanity is experiencing much of the very worst of times. The tour, however, is underway.

One only need read some daily newspaper headlines, check the editorial pages, listen a few hours to TV cable news, attend a few city council or school board meetings, raise a question or two with the neighbors about politics, religion, education, the economy, peruse a sampling of Apps to the Internet with a computer or smart phone. Its all there 24/7, day after day, week after week, year in and year out. It's our world; it's the outflow from information and individual actions of recent centuries.

Americans are traveling through an intellectual jungle. We are blanketed under an informational atmosphere that few if any understand but many cherish. In a very real sense this is a new world, filled with ever-evolving mystery—up for grabs with redefinitions as well as user addictions. But the basics of human options remain: Good/Evil; Right/Wrong; Helpful/Harmful; these all remain, though in flux. So how do we function in such an evolving domain? How should we teach our children to function? (Or in some cases, how can our children help us cope?) Are we to feel comfortable with angst, despair, accidental existence, unknown origins or destinations, oblivion and annihilation? This is all on the modern menu. What should be done about the other words we encounter, those that convey life, liberty, eternity, joy, satisfaction, hope, faith, and limitless happiness? These are also personal. Should they have a place and a voice in the secular tent? If so, where is the strategy to help this happen?

I am now well past my eightieth birthday. For many years, I taught a university class that addressed two questions: (1) *How did the world you are living in get to be like it is?* (2) *What are you going to do about it?* The course involved many hundreds of students. I suppose there were hundreds of answers to these questions. My privilege was to witness the inquiry and some of the plans these students shared. I learned what these participants chose to identify as basic factors worth considering and why they felt these could be helpful. Of course, only time would unveil how useful the tentative answers these individuals formulated and applied would be. Some of these factors may be helpful in our current struggle to cope with the growing turmoil of a worldwide factional social topography. Knowledge is essential if application is to be successful. The central quest is *what* knowledge? The rest of this article explores what I believe is most relevant and may be essential to our religious freedom.

### *Item # 1*

## **Each Person's Individual *Context* Is Important**

*“What a Person Thinks with When They Think about Something Makes a Difference”*

I believe the major tensions that now dominate our society are all rooted in *personal assumptions* people make related to three great questions. The answers to these questions underlie every culture. This is what a *culture* is and what it does: (a) *an explanation of what is real*; (b) *a presentation of evidence that justifies that explanation*, and (c) *a collection of provided methods and skills that permit the people to survive in that culture*. Consider this contrast: think Eskimo culture and Polynesian culture. The knowledge and skills needed to survive and function in traditional Eskimo culture are different from those that are necessary in the Polynesian culture. For example, what one needs to know about snow and ice is not the same as understanding the Reef and the tropical Ocean. Yet each is essential to obtaining food, shelter, and clothing. In every culture, we strive to understand and act upon our *contextual* assumptions but may seldom discuss them formally:

- What is real?** Some people probe this concern under the heading of *metaphysics*.
- How do we know?** Some people explore this question by calling it *epistemology*.
- What is of value?** Some people consider these issues as matters of *axiology*.

People do not need to enroll in a philosophy course to engage in seeking answers to these three questions. Everyone creates his or her own answers—consciously or by trial and error. This is a natural outcome of living one's life that everyone experiences in some way or other. We all know we have beliefs. How well an individual may be able to explain what he or she believes, however, varies from person to person—but everyone *assumes their own answers* to these three questions and then creates *beliefs* and *actions* based on those assumptions. This is how a person forms a *context* that largely determines and governs that individual's decisions and choices. Most people do not engage in a serious self-examination of their own assumptions; furthermore, they tend to hide the *context* that undergirds their life experiences. The prominent pattern is simply to not focus on or reveal their personal *contexts*; they just immerse themselves in dealing with the *content*, *process*, and *structure* of their lives—which includes interacting with others. Nevertheless, it is the *context* we formulate that shapes the answers to the *Why?* questions of life that leads to the other basic concerns. In major ways our *context* determines what happens to the use of the *content*, *process*, and *structure* that frames our lives.

It is from their *contextual* foundation that people seek, acquire and use *Content*. *Content* focuses on the *What?* questions—the information of life. And this information leads to *Process*—our methods for making use of that resource of information. This is when the *How?* or (methods) we use develop. Methods help a person to make use of the content. Every parent, teacher and participant in all vocations becomes aware of the importance of methods and skills. It is when we are engaged in applying our methods that *Structure* emerges as a concern; people intuitively begin to explore strategies of *When?/Where?* This is the way *content* and *methods* are put to work in our daily decisions and affairs. We make decisions and choices about when and where we will do whatever it is that engages our actions. The process is universal: we all gather content, develop methods and skills and try to figure out when and where to use these personal resources—at home, school, work, and play. This is not a mystery; people follow the pattern knowingly or unknowingly every day. But these underlying elements are not the end of learning and living. There are other fundamental questions to consider.

## *Item #2*

### **The Great and Terrible Questions**

Three other questions also permeate the human experience and shape this nation's social order. Some historians have referred to these as the “terrible” questions because they are so personal and significant to our existence:

- Where did I come from?** It's about origins
- Why am I here?** It's about purpose
- What is my ultimate destiny?** It's about existence

Religious belief systems have posed the most noted answers to these questions. The various institutional sources appear in a variety of categories: revelatory, cultural, mythological, mystical, and

various so-called superstitions. Beyond these classifications a more recent one has surfaced—*science*. Since *modernism* gained its fame in Western societies, *reductionist science* has offered its views on the origin and destiny of humanity—all of which are limited to *hypothetical guesses*. The limitations of these theories come with little comment and no consensus, particularly regarding a person's existence prior to birth or after death. The premises and allegiance to science has become dominant in the academy. In one way or another the major disciplines are interlinked. Theoretical mathematics can be reduced to Physics, Physics to Biology, Biology to Chemistry, Chemistry to Psychology, and Psychology to Education. Great as this materialist notion is; that is, if we can take something apart or reduce it to its various components, we can figure out how it works and what to do with it. Yet life itself still remains a mystery, despite all the detail we are now able to collect and analyze. Serious limits to knowledge remain. Preferences and speculation abound. The options run the gamut from the *sacred* to the *secular*. The populace continues to mill around in a divided society; Lo here! Lo there! seemingly beckon everywhere. Meanwhile, *personal agency* usually succeeds in trumping it all; but to what end?

There are a myriad of answers to these six questions cited in Item #1 and Item #2. The premises are often, if not always, blended in a person's worldview (the context) he or she uses to develop beliefs and make decisions day by day. Anyone hoping to *preserve or restore religious freedom* would benefit, it seems, to have a clear understanding of this larger picture. Otherwise people wear themselves out fighting battles immersed in the shadows of *content, methods, and processes—all to little or no avail*.

A brief example may help illuminate why conflicts emerge in a society because of the answers people provide to these fundamental questions. Consider two critical historical indicators that frame our present circumstances in America.

### **Historical Indicator #1**

#### **The Merging of Hebrew Religion and Classical Greek Philosophy**

Two prominent and critical historical epochs characterize our history. Each one involves a series of events that have had a dramatic influence on the formation of today's American society. The first distinctive development involves three very different worldviews: (a) the ancient *Hebrews* had their views, as did (b) the early *Greeks*, and so does the more recent (c) *Modern Secular Society*. The differences in these three worldviews are fundamental. Western culture is, at present, a social conglomerate of all three views, each one vying for attention and allegiance. Contemporary society is a hodgepodge of various combinations of these three intellectual tributaries; each one has tumbled down through time and ended on our doorstep. Adherents to one or the other or some combination of various personal versions pervade our communities. Consider a thumbnail sketch of the competing stories.

*Story A.* The Hebrew premise is that God (a person—our Heavenly Father) created:

- (1) man and woman (male and female),
- (2) the Earth on which humankind lives, and
- (3) the Universe in which Earth is situated.
- (4) communication with and among his children.
- (5) provisions for the means by which his children could obtain a physical body, experience birth on earth, mature physically, procreate, die and return to a heavenly state of continued personal existence.

Therein resides the core emphasis of this worldview. It links (a) personal behavior, (b) knowledge of the truth, and (c) freedom. The implication is that without *moral agency*, a knowledge of the *truth*, and a willingness to *embrace* it, *there can be no freedom, and without freedom there will be no liberty*. These are requisites for every individual; and in this story the *traditional family* (male and female) is the intended social structure in which humanity initially pursues this journey. Everything else is subsidiary. The story line can be described like this:

Adam and Eve began the population of the earth.

God explained and gave answers to the “terrible” questions.

God also gave commandments to guide his earthly children.

Some accepted and followed these rules for moral order.

Others rejected the rules and substituted lifestyles of their own.

Counter-cultures based on *rejection and substitution* were created; factions flourished.

Men and women from that time forth became (a) carnal, (b) sensual and (c) devilish,

(a) Seeking various ways to satiate their physical appetites,

(b) Accepting as valid knowledge only that which could be perceived by their physical senses, and

(c) Contriving ill-advised lifestyles that were contrary to God's instruction.

*Story B.* The Greek story is quite different. Ancient Greece had embraced the supernatural characters described in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*—Zeus, Hera his wife, and their twelve children, the gods of Mt. Olympus. These individuals represented a cultural image that was ultimately rejected by the intellectual community (ca. 500 B.C – 300 B.C.). The philosophical ideal expressed in Plato's *Republic* and the works of other Greek enlightenment theorists helped move Greek society away from the concept of Deity as a person. The Golden Age of Greece embraced a new view of authority, a type of *secular psychology* founded on reason and rhetoric. Basically, it was the notion implied in the Greek word *encyclopedia*: put your foot in the center of the universe and seek knowledge, in order to admire, appreciate, and celebrate the Cosmos. For many Greeks the concept of human destiny changed.

The new idea of the individual was that the ultimate destiny of a person is to become a disembodied transient intellect, capable of fusing with the Cosmic Mind, rather than an eternal, embodied personality, such as the Hebrews espoused (see Acts 17:16–34). This concept flourished. Society changed because basic beliefs changed. The new view for the Greeks was exhilarating; secular excitement in Greek culture stimulated admirable *temporal* achievements that dazzled not only themselves and later Rome, and ultimately modern Western culture. Science, art, music, and a great variety of divergent schools of thought flourished. The power and the fruits of the human intellect were compelling. As a consequence, influential people reveled in the idea that humanity's ultimate positive destiny was to *abandon his or her personal identity* and become one with the *Cosmic Mind*. For the Greek intellectual community, it was the Cosmos that was eternal—the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow—not the individual or a personal God. The old *mythology* waned as Greece experienced a dramatic change in its intellectual climate. The stage was set for a new merger. During a period known as the meridian of time the ancient Hebrew view merged with the philosophical influences of the Greek Enlightenment.

Soon after the death of Jesus Christ, a well documented movement began to merge ancient Hebrew theology and the new Greco-Roman philosophy. This process occurred two thousand years ago, following the mortal life of Jesus Christ (ca. A.D. 300 – A.D. 1300). *Philosophy was mingled with scripture* in what was then known as the: “Christian” religion. A new *static* theology emerged during this period. It was static because Deity became a mystery rather than a person; the Creation was deemed *Ex nihilo—created out of nothing*; a new norm arose: God had finished delivering doctrine, ongoing Divine revelation ceased. Existing revelation was canonized. The biblical library was printed and widely distributed. Deity had said what needed to be said; the common reference was various versions of the Judeo-Christian biblical records. Eventually, for differing reasons, *protest movements* began; numerous sects were formed and promoted in a series of *religious reformations*. Collectively, this *static Christianity* became a dominant world religion and assumed its place as a major source of answers to the “terrible” questions. This was one great epoch. Another epoch was pending that was to cause similar dramatic changes in what became known as the “*Modern*” world.

## **Historical Indicator # 2**

### **The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Shift from a Sacred to a Secular Society**

As the various *Renaissance(s)* and the *Enlightenment* joined the *Reformation* movements, another stage was set, this time for the birth of contemporary *modernism*. Between 1880 – 1920 a great shift occurred in America's academic community; the intellectual climate experienced a dramatic change. Traditional views, with their *sacred* connotations, were challenged and publicly ignored. Acceptable “reality” was redefined as explanations regarding *what is real* were reduced to physical matter acting on physical matter. The old dualism of two building blocks in the nature of reality was rejected; that there is both *spirit stuff* and *physical stuff* from which reality is composed became suspect. This old premise was rejected among the academic elite, and many of the concepts based on that view were also set aside. *Spirit stuff* was deemed not measurable or controllable by accepted scientific methods; the old view was increasingly ignored, rejected, or considered not relevant to what is central to humanity's pressing concerns. It was discarded first by the intellectually elite and subsequently by most of higher education. As John G. Machen put it, the *cathedrals of learning* became *citadels of secularism*. The new idea was that when reality is properly defined, there is only one building block; it has to be some form of physical matter acting on physical matter. This established a new premise. Though often hidden, the *secular hypothesis* became quite standard in the various disciplines of academia: “*The more we learn about the secular the less need there is for the spiritual.*” Numerous speeches, thousands of articles, and hundreds of books document this shift that now controls much of the social power structure. A long list of debates and a persistent push led to the 20<sup>th</sup> century embrace of *secular humanism's* dominant role in the public sector and at all levels of education, and gradually in the law and the policies by which our society is governed. The trend continues more or less unabated and is seldom examined in public education at all levels.

**[Note for Latter-day Saints. These two *Historical Indicators* are related to the topic of “Defending Religious Freedom in a Secular Society,” much like a knowledge of the *Apostasy* helps one better understand and appreciate the *Restoration* of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Religious freedom does not come and go in a vacuum without a context.]**

## Summary: Defending Religious Freedom in a Secular Society

It is vital to understand the intellectual climate if one hopes to defend, promote or eliminate whatever is nurtured therein. In the case of American culture, the *contexts* people previously used to think with when they thought about life changed; now they are often cleverly kept hidden. *Rhetoric* has deep roots and is comfortable when draped in the camouflage of *guile*. Increasingly, the public spotlight on most conversations, programs, and policies now shifts the focus almost entirely away from *context* to matters of *content*, *process (methods)* and *structure*. This seems to be normative in most media bias. This practice is now, or may soon become, the major challenge in education, government, the law, and in public discourse of nearly all varieties. People seem to freely express themselves regarding *content*, *process* and *structure*, but they seldom share their *personal context*—this remains covert and can be a strategic dodge. The *Why?* that determines, shapes and drives what they are saying and doing is shielded. Keeping this critical domain largely hidden can foster a pervasive amount of *guile*. We may hear some *truths* but not all the *truth* when this occurs. If religious freedom is to be preserved and successfully defended, we need to seek all truth—not just its outer shell. This will not be easy. It may be very difficult. And if we cannot defend religious freedom, we will lose vital liberty.

In the academy of modern education, for example, rank advancement usually depends on research, publication, and creation. These elements house the rewards. Yet in our quantifying, measurement, cost-oriented culture, addressing *personal context* has become *toxic*. It is rare. Focusing primarily on *Why* the contributors acted and where their *personal contextual allegiances* lay is largely ignored or summarily rejected by editorial bias. This creates a chilling effect; it pushes both intellectual liberty and true honesty aside. Professional journals as well as public meetings are filled with studies, observations, findings and proposals that are centered in *content*, *process*, and *structure*. Seldom is there an open effort to reveal, express or publish an examination, critique, or challenge to the validity of the *personal contexts*. These factors that lie hidden behind the speeches or articles that are accepted and promoted are shunned as being private and politically incorrect. This trend corrupts the debate and cultivates *guile*.

In the field of professional education, for example, this transition intensified mid-twentieth century, when the role for *Philosophy of Education* was set aside in favor of the role for *Psychology of Education*. Psychology was designed to foster measurement criteria and statistical inference—Philosophy not so much; it often probed for context. The role for deception increases dramatically when it is the norm for people to hide their *primary allegiances* and focus on applications and methodological aspirations. It becomes much easier to compartmentalize values and seek to turn *propositions* into *probabilities* and then *certainties*. In this environment rhetoric, not truth, is likely to rule. It is an invitation to *guile*. This is increasingly apparent in the law and seemingly evident in many if not all other disciplines. But everyone is not happy about this—nor should they be. It would be well for people in every discipline to search themselves and determine how their field or specialty got to be like it is. It is not a stretch to recognize that if, as the secular model demands, there is *no reality* beyond the physical then the person who believes otherwise could be considered *insane*—because they admit to believing in things that do not exist. This view of insanity has been used to justify putting people to death. It encourages *compartmentalizing*. Context does matter.

Sharon Salzberg, a Buddhist teacher and author of *Lovingkindness: The Revolutionary Art of Happiness*, provides her simple and alternative view:

In order to live with integrity, we must stop fragmenting and compartmentalizing our lives. Telling lies at work and expecting great truths in meditation is nonsensical. Using our sexual energy in a way that harms ourselves or others, and then expecting to know transcendent love in another arena, is mindless. Every aspect of our lives is connected to every other aspect of our lives. This truth is the basis for an awakened life.

Dangers do lurk in the compartmentalized life. Hypocrisy is not a firm foundation. There is good reason to explore better options. Believers in the premises of America's founding documents, those who are convinced of the *reality and value of a spiritual domain and moral imperatives*, need to be courageous. It is not sufficient for people who love freedom and liberty to be content with the notion that these founding documents contain only *rational guidelines that leave people as free as possible in their social interaction—their lifestyle*. This is the moral debate. That last premise is too exclusive, and it is inadequate to sustain the most positive options for defining the ultimate destiny of humankind. There are many topics to talk about, issues to evaluate, and attributes to acquire. We need to seek after these with vigor. Most of our lives would be improved if three hinges were installed on each individual's doorway to life:

Attach the temporal to the spiritual;  
This will *change one's priorities*

Place others beside or ahead of self;  
This will *change one's attitudes*

Connect one's present with the future;  
This will *change one's behavior*

Because a substantial degree of personal agency is universal, as these three factors come into play impressions occur that reveal things to us, about our self and others, things we should know, respect and value. This process may well be the keystone for successful agency-driven education. This is where America's Founders believed human power resides—in the people. Perhaps this pattern is most relevant to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Their history and the theology of the Restoration offers poignant meaning to a people who have both suffered and prospered under that banner. There are dozens of references to the view of Joseph Smith regarding the need for religious freedoms and liberties. And he repeatedly expressed his tolerance toward the beliefs of others, “so long as their religion did not interfere with the civil rights of men, according to the laws of our country? None at all.... I have the most liberal sentiments and feelings of charity towards all sects, parties, and denominations; and the rights and liberties of conscience I hold most sacred and dear, and despise no man for differing with me in matters of opinion.” (PWJS, 419, 423-424.) This feeling is also clearly manifest in the Articles of Faith he penned for publication in a newspaper. (see A. of F., 11, 12, and D&C 134: 1-2, 4). The emphasis and opportunity is clear. In order to succeed, like-minded people must come together in a common cause of unity in order to protect and preserve religious freedom—whatever their denomination or belief system might be. It is a civil necessity, not a theological issue. Thus, the continuing admonition of Latter-day Saint leaders to members and citizens alike who desire to retain religious liberties: join in the defense and preservation of those God-given and constitutional rights with all who are willing to seek after and work for the blessings that flow therefrom.

## A Few Suggestions for Those Interested in Defending Religious Liberty

1. Be a willing *witness*. This may be our greatest power. Develop and use your own way of expressing the *primary context* that governs your life. Find it, understand it, and share it.
2. Invite, and expect those with whom you interact, to express their *contextual allegiances* as they present and promote material in the way of *content, process, or structure*.
3. Make an effort to personally understand how our society came to be like it is. Become familiar with the path that led to the present. Understand the basic consequences.
4. Gain a clear understanding of why believers in an *exclusive secular society* would be inclined to dismiss, persecute, and even destroy those who favor an *inclusive sacred worldview*.
5. Learn the limitations of a *purely secular society*; practice expressing them.
6. Learn why some belief systems claiming religious status are counter-productive. “By their fruits” is a valid mechanism on which to base judgment.
7. Recognize the value of distinguishing between *morality* and *ethics*. It matters.
8. Understand the heritage bequeathed by the Founders, the *moral order* inherent in our founding documents; compare this foundation with the various *relative alternatives* espoused in contemporary society. Chart it by contrast and comparison.
9. Acknowledge that *exclusive secularism* robs our nation of the *moral code* the Creator provided to ensure success in the quest for Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of happiness.
10. Discuss with others why *guile* is not a helpful quality of character.
11. Seek to understand proper covenant-making in our society. Find your answer.
12. Recognize that *morality* and *spirituality* are not synonyms. Traditional *Morality* is adherence to principles that protect and preserve the well-being of others as well as self—sometimes at the expense of self. *Spirituality* is the result of religious practice usually involving authorized rites, rituals, and ordinances sponsored by a *specific organization*. These *sectarian practices* are what the Founders believed should *not* be established by the Government. They were *for* the *moral order* implied by the Ten Commandments—*not* against it. Honoring Providence and parents; avoiding murder and adultery; stealing, lying, cheating, resisting covetous greed are all helpful—not harmful—to America.
13. If you believe in a power higher than the human intellect, pray for help and seek confirmation in behalf of yourself and others. This was the American way.