

Os Guinness Last Call for Freedom: How America's Genius for Freedom has become its greatest threat. Intervarsity 2018

Excerpted by Jerry Nelson

"One index of a healthy, free, and democratic society is its ability to deal constructively with differences and disagreements." 2

"But the question facing America is, what is the key to freedom?" 3

"The deepest division is rooted in the differences between two world-changing and opposing revolutions, the American Revolution of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789, and their rival views of freedom and the nature of the American experiment." 3

"The Crisis is an American crisis. For those on one side, the classical liberal and the present-day conservative, the American Revolution...was undergirded by the Jewish and Christian faiths..." 4 And on the other side, the left/liberal, the progressives and the cultural Marxists, that vision of America should be castigated, not celebrated..." 4

"Americans should never forget that today's debate about America is also about the future of the world." 6

"The spirit of Nietzsche still lives on in the American Right.... The spirit of Marx still lives on in the American Left." 7

"America's deepest crisis lies at the point of what has always been America's greatest strength – freedom." 8 "Much of the way American's now think about freedom is unrealistic and unsustainable." 9

Lincoln, "The world has never had a good definition of liberty, and the American people, just now, are much in need of one." 10

This book is about "What freedom means, the ultimate issue of how it is to be sustained, and the practical issue how it is to be restored when it has been nearly lost." 11

"The United States is facing a heaving sea of problems at home: hollowed-out beliefs and weakened ethics, declining trust in institutions and leaders; self-enriching elites; cancerous racism; pay-for-play and dirt-bag politics; politicized criminal justice; crony capitalism; blindered higher education; collapsed civic education; biased mainstream press; journalistic collusion with political interests; politicized corporations; decaying infrastructures; crippling national debt; a surveillance state spying on his own citizens; porous borders; a demographic time bomb; failing inner cities that are the equivalent of failing states elsewhere; a fractious culture warring; a toxic madness of gossips, suspicion, cynicism and conspiracy theories; open talk of states' secession; an epidemic

of addition; a swollen prison population; widespread symptoms of social stress, anxiety, and loneliness; a rise in suicides; and now a deadly attempt by both Left and Right to undermine each other's legitimacy as American and democratic." 11-12

"Yet few Americans have focused on how these crises are rooted in conflicting views of freedom." 12

The kind of freedom that America has enjoyed for the past couple of hundred years is very recent in World history. Not even Athens was the kind of freedom America has enjoyed.

Extremists (on the right and left) are always attempting to shut down debate; what we need is more debate not less.

"America's present carelessness about freedom betrays a lack of respect for freedom that is born of arrogance and hubris that is bred by the illusion of invulnerability." 17

Ten Questions that must be answered:

**First Chapter and First Question: Do you know where your freedom came from?"**

It came from the Magna Carta and from a Judeo/Christian foundation.

"Liberty as more than liberation, the rule of law, the consent of the governed, the responsibility of rights, the separation of powers, the notion of prophetic critique and social criticism, transformative servant leadership, the ethics of responsibility, the primacy of the personal over the political all of these ideals and more are the legacy of the Exodus." 23

**It did not come from Athens or civic Rome; it came from the Magna Carta and that from Jewish/Christian foundations.** "The book of Exodus is the master story of Western freedom." 22 (Cf words of Savonarola, Calvin, Zwingli, Cromwell, Bradford, Franklin, Jefferson, Martin Luther King Jr. et.al. 22

"When classified according to their founding, four major types of society are prominent.

**"First**, there are organic societies, societies that are linked by blood, kinship, ancestral ties, and intimate acquaintance." (Scottish clans, African tribes, etc.)

**"Second**, there are hierarchical societies...that are linked by force and conquest..." (Roman empire, Prussian monarchy, Chinese Communism today).

**Third**, there are contractual societies...based on a series of legal contracts that serve the interests of the citizens..."

**Fourth**, there are covenantal societies, societies that are linked by choice and binding agreement, such as ancient Israel after the Sinai covenant, Switzerland after the birth of the Helvetic Confederation in 1291 and the United States after rejecting the Articles of Confederation and passing the US Constitution in 1787.”

The “COVENANT” idea is rooted in Israel and affirmed in the Reformation. 24

In Covenant society God himself is partner to the covenant; the covenant includes all the people (unlike Athens); it covers the whole of life (how we work, rest, wear, run business, how to treat the poor, etc).

A COVENANT is (1) freely chosen (“There is no legitimate government without the consent of the governed.”) It is (2) morally binding (each citizen makes a pledge to the other citizens) thus the “pledge of allegiance.”

“Covenantal societies require a serious responsibility from their members (citizens)...(and) responsibilities precede rights” 28

**Covenants (even contracts) are the opposite of “freedom of choice” 28**

**Covenant relationship is a “matter of reciprocal responsibility of all for all.” 29**

The emphasis here is on “all” not just “our kind.” “Love of neighbor” comes only one in the Torah but love for the stranger comes 36 times. 29

“The irresponsible society and the irresponsible generation think only of themselves.” This is the opposite of “covenant.” 32

“Thus the importance of the condition of American society, its marriages, its families, its schools, its voluntary associations its civic education, and it handing down from generation to generation – all these things will always determine the state of the union more than the character of the president, the nature of the state, the size of the military, or the condition of America’s roads, railways, bridges and tunnels.” 33

A Covenant requires promise-keeping. “But we humans do not keep promises well.” 42

A Covenant requires maintaining the standard before which the covenant was made – the covenant was with God and under God.. We are not a constitution without God. 43.

Free societies are nothing without the free and un-coerced promise making and promise keeping of the citizens. 43

“Make no mistake: the logical outcome of those who reject covenantalism (or constitutionalism) today is state control.” 44

“Abolish God, Chesterton commented, and the government becomes God.” 44

Four main ways Americans have dismissed their covenantal past which then weakens the role of the founders and constitution:

1. Many have rejected the founders because of their failure to address the issue of slavery, the treatment of women and Native Americans. It is true the founders made a “Faustian bargain” to create the U.S. and it took until now (and we aren’t done yet) to rectify the issues overlooked then and subsequently. The country lurched leftward in the 60s and has been characterized by liberal shame (over our past). The left “turned American history into a museum of evils” 47 Yes, the injustices cannot be continued but the remedy is not “social justice” (redistribution) but repentance and forgiveness. Neither is it in rejecting the constitution but reaffirming it as true for all.
2. Other Americans Charles Beard and Howard Zinn) think the true intent of the founders was to pave the way for their own wealth at the expense of others. Hopefully still a minority view
3. Woodrow Wilson, Charles Dewey and Barack Obama praised the founders but found their work now outdated and we need a “living” interpretation to “progress.” But progressivism lacks a goal – expanded “state” means limited “individual” freedom. G.K. Chesterton remarked, “Progress is simply a comparative of which we have not settled the superlative.” 49
4. There are many Americans who have simply forgotten their founders and lost touch with the covenantal nature of our way of life. By 1965 the covenant was no longer with each other (or God) but with the land.

The left today is characterized by “reliance on the state, their open hostility toward religion, their radical separation of religion and public life, their attempt to control language in order to control reality, their unashamed espousal of power, their egalitarian appeal to envy rather than liberty and their native utopianism that the removal of repressing will mean the fulfillment of freedom.” 51

### **Chapter Two and Question Two: Are there enough Americans who care about Freedom?**

Do Americans know that Freedom requires hard work, and not just assuming all will continue as it is?

“...There are always two moments of special danger for freedom. The first is when any generation is tempted to think it unfair that their ancestors committed them to the arduous task of sustaining freedom. Why should they bear the price? Aren’t they entitled to enjoy the fruits? The second and obvious danger is when freedom grows complacent, when a free people settle down and are tempted to believe that

freedom has arrived and is now assured. Their victories and their monuments in stone are the proof of their lasting success. When this happens, a free people shifts mentally from the challenge of open-endedness to the presumption of certainty and lulls itself to sleep. P58

“In the case of the American project, the challenge to freedom stems from the fact that America is a nation by intention and by ideas, and freedom is America’s central idea.” P59 Do Americans have the will and ability to continue the project?

“Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom.” Quote on p62

“The United States is different from most families, tribes, and nations on the earth whose origins recede into the impenetrable mists of time and are defined only by such factors as language and geography.... America is a nation created at a specific moment in history and in the full light of day.” P64

### **Chapter Three and Question Three “What do we mean by Freedom?”**

**Not just freedom from but freedom for, which means internal and positive freedom.**

Several definitions: “Freedom is the capacity to exercise the will without interference or restraint as the genuine expression of who you are. Or more simply, freedom is the ability to decide what you want to choose and do what you want to do. Or more simply still, freedom is the absence of coercion.” P67

“Lord Acton defined freedom as ‘The assurance that every man shall be protected in doing what he believes is his duty against the influence or authority and majorities, custom and opinion.’ P68

But freedom is more complex:

1. “Freedom is a matter of human will – against all modern forms of determinism.” P68 Guinness insists there is no freedom without genuine free will.
2. “Freedom entails the idea of commitment making and keeping a promise.” A person is entitled to make promises because he has the freedom to keep them. P69
3. Freedom includes the notion of human responsibility. Self-restraint and self-governance. P70
4. Freedom is a matter of power. If power is defined as the capacity to exert the will despite resistance, then power is essential to freedom. P72 But freedom is not only power it involves 1-3 as well or it is just power and lethal to everyone’s freedom
5. Freedom is not only a matter of choice but of having genuine options from which to choose. P73 Freedom is always limited by reality.

6. Freedom itself is not an end but a means to a goal. Not only freedom from but freedom for.
7. Freedom has a social and collective dimension.p74

When describing freedom we must note the differences between:

1. National freedom refers to the capacity a nation has to exert its will in relation to the rest of the world whereas political freedom refers to the degree of freedom that citizens enjoy within nations.” p77 “The unrestrained power of the free is one of the greatest enemies of freedom.”p80
2. Internal freedom or external freedom. P81 Internal freedom is the freedom of conscience which the state should steer clear of and is necessary for any true external freedom. External freedom is only possible when internal freedom is present and exercised. “Freedom’s most crucial battlefield, where wars are lost and won, is always the human heart.” P83
3. Negative freedom or positive freedom. P85 Negative freedom is freedom from, positive freedom is freedom for. It begins with freedom from but must become freedom for. “Freedom is not the permission to what you want but the power to do what you ought. And second, such freedom is not individual ony. Each person’s freedom is free only to the extent that each one respects the equal freedom of all others too.” -86

Central to 1789 (French Revolution) and the 18<sup>th</sup> C Enlightenment was a new view of revolution that **placed its confidence in the power of reason and attempted to transform societies by working from the outside in** – in other words, by starting with political institutions, and above all by changing the structures of the state and using them to transform citizens coercively.”

In contrast John Adams wrote, The real Revolution “was effected before the revolution: “The Revolution was in the hearts and minds of the people ; a change in their religious sentiments of their duties and obligations.” P91

Rousseu, Marx and Zedong (French, Russian, and Chinese) tried to bring about change from the top down. They didn’t change human nature, they simply suppressed the opposition

Emphasis on negative freedom alone (let me do what I want to do) without positive freedom (responsibility) results in a promise (freedom) without the conditions (responsibility) to fulfill the promise.

#### **Chapter 4 Question 4**

#### **Have you faced up to the CENTRAL PARADOX of Freedom?**

The greatest enemy of freedom is freedom. Because freedom requires self-discipline and self-denial - A people who make covenant with each other.

Freedom (negative freedom) alone can never bear the weight of freedom without the foundation and framework it requires.” P100

Freedom fails when it runs to excess and breeds license.

Freedom fails when people who love freedom love security more.

Freedom fails when people are so caught up in the idea of freedom that they justify anything done in its name

Freedom needs structures: constitution, rule of law, good laws, right to personal property, etc.

Freedom also needs the “spirit of freedom – the habits of the heart. These “habits” are  
 1. A conviction of human dignity grounded in creation (not chance). 2 A willingness to grant similar freedom to all others. 3. A responsible self-restraint, a master of self – obedience to the unenforceable. P102

Our constitution won’t guarantee freedom without a people who respect the “spirit” of freedom.

Many factors in our culture today work against this “spirit” these “habits” of the heart: broken families, focus on negative freedom to the exclusion of positive freedom, rejection of civic education, feelings as more important than truth, disparaging of the past, etc.

“Reject authority, deny truth, dismiss virtue, ignore restraint, and glorify power and as sure as eggs are eggs, liberty will become licenses, equality will become leveling and justice will become the power move of the powerful.” -104

Real freedom is difficult, demanding and disciplined.109

“The responsibility of freedom may be arduous, but there is always a strong man willing to take over the burden. There is always a utopian ideology offering to submerge the loneliness of individual responsibility in the warm embrace of a cause, the offer of free stuff, bread-and-circuses diversion entitlement programs and in the end a welfare mentality that will end in general dependency.” P109

### **Chapter 5 and Question 5 “How do you plan to sustain Freedom?”**

**It takes not only a constitution, but more importantly, a CULTURE to sustain freedom. A culture of Freedom, Virtue and Faith (Golden Triangle). There must be trust along with checks and balances. “Trust and verify.”**

#### **Freedom requires virtue:**

The Constitution that is the foundational law of the land should be supported and sustained by the faith, character and virtue of the entire citizenry, which comprises its moral constitution or habits of the heart.” 118

Honesty, charity, self-reliance, private morality, humility, etc. were and are foundational to a free society. Again, it is obedience to the unenforceable that is required.

Franklin, “Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom.” 125

Burke: “Moral standards are more important than laws. 123

James Q Wilson: “In the long run, the public interest depends on private virtue.” 128

Washington: “Of all the dispositions and habits which led to political prosperity (a good government), Religion and Morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of Patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of Men and citizens.” 129

### **Virtue requires faith:**

Does this mean America must be an officially “Christian” nation? NO! BUT “Religion, at the very least, was the sole force capable of fostering the virtue and restraining the vice necessary for the health of the republic.” 133

Does that mean atheists can’t be good citizens? NO. Freedom of conscience (or religion) is necessary for freedom for any. BUT atheism and secularism cannot prove a sufficient foundation to foster the needed virtues of the wider citizenry over the course of generations. 135

### **Faith requires freedom** of conscience (religion).

The founders fought long and hard for this freedom of conscience.

Coercion and compulsion from one side and exclusion from the public square on the other, all contradict conscience and therefore freedom, at its core” 138

“What is the catalyst that can bond together the external laws of the constitution with the internal commitments and duties of citizens – rulers no less than ruled? The framers’ answer was to understand, cultivate, and transmit the golden triangle of liberty, thus the habits of the heart that sustained the citizens and the republic alike... Freedom requires virtue, which in turn requires faith of some sort, which in turn requires freedom... It is imperative to appreciate how this indispensable cultivation and passing on the ‘spirit of freedom’ and the ‘habits of the heart’ goes all the way back not simply to Tocqueville, Montesquieu, and Burke but to Judaism and the Sinai covenant.” 139

### **Chapter 6 and Question 6 “How will you make the world safe for diversity?” The call for a “civil public square” as opposed to either a “naked” or “religious” public square**

The first Constitutional freedom mentioned in the first amendment of the Constitution declares freedom of religion – then speech, press, assembly and redress. Religion is first. – Freedom of conscience.

Pluralism, diversity, freedom of conscience address the issue of how we are “to live together with our deepest differences.” 142

Political correctness is not the solution because it only attempts to silence disagreement or opposition.



The 1988 Williamsburg Charter was a noble but ill-fated attempt to restore a civic education on freedom of religion and conscience for the public schools. “Its key notion, the ‘civil public square’ still offers the best solution to the fruitlessness of the culture wars.” 143

“America is now experiencing an open assault on freedom of religion and conscience. What was the founders’ ‘first liberty’ and the freedom that ‘secures the rest’ is in danger of being dislodged from its central and time-honored place in American life.” 144  
WHY? Five major factors:

**Reduction** of freedom of religion to freedom of worship – from freedom of conscience expressed in the public square to freedom of worship in private. Freedom of worship, freedom of religion and conscience is the comprehensive right to seek, hold, exercise, share and change one’s ultimate beliefs based solely on the dictates of conscience.” 145

**Removing** freedom from the public square altogether. Freedom “from” religion. The problem with this among many is that this goes so far as to remove everybody’s right to the public square – for everyone holds ultimate beliefs upon which their actions are founded.

**Rebranding** – some say religious freedom is nothing more than code for discrimination, intolerance, racism, etc. But religious freedom is primarily a shield to protect conscience not a weapon to promote it. And freedom of religion is for the minority even more than for the majority. And non-discrimination can be used as a weapon as easily as can religion. 148 (Everyone discriminates (makes distinctions); the issue is proper and improper discrimination – and reasonable people know the difference.

**Reimagining** – the utopians who apparently don’t live in the real world. It is naïve to assume we can “flatten” everything and everyone to the same – same values, same religion, same language, same tastes, etc. Talk about a contradiction to diversity! 153

“What is at stake is not so much the loss of a single freedom, vital though freedom of religion and conscience is, but a vital way of protecting and negotiating all other freedoms. The reason lies in **the double benefit of religious freedom. On the one hand, freedom of religion and conscience protect the foundational human search for meaning and belonging. On the other, the condition of freedom of religion determines society’s capacity to promote religious freedom for everyone, and to negotiate peaceably the differences that will obviously arise through such freedom.**” 154-5

“Which model of religion and public life serves freedom best? No one who follows the American culture wars can fail to see the two competing visions now battling for supremacy.... For fifty years, controversies such as these (prayer in public places,

crosses, head scarves, etc) have made the American public square into a cultural war zone rather than a forum for public deliberation and decision..." 157

"Two starkly different visions of public life – on the one side...a naked public square, those who would exclude religions and religious expression from public life and on the other, the proponents of a sacred public square, those would give some religion or ideology a preferred, established or monopoly position in public life at the expenses of everyone else." 157

Strong model of "naked" public square – Republic of China

Milder model of "naked" square – American secularists

Strong models of "sacred" public square – Pakistan, Afghanistan, etc

Weak models of "sacred" square – English established Anglicanism

Advocates for "naked" square – Dawkins says religion IS extremism; Hitchens said, "Religion poisons everything."

Advocates for "sacred" square – Omar Ahmed, cofounder of CAIR, "Islam isn't in America to be equal to any faith, but to become dominant...and Islam the only accepted religion on earth."

What is needed is a "civil public square" – with three "r"s – rights, responsibilities and respect.

(Ben Sasse's book THEM – Why we hate each other and how to heal it)

A civil public square does not require or depend on interfaith dialog. Nor does it require any ultimate ecumenical unity...Rather, **a civil public square is forged through an agreed political framework of rights, responsibilities and respect, within which each faith is free to be faithful to its own beliefs and yet responsible to know how to deal respectfully and civilly with the vital differences of other beliefs.**

### **Chapter 7 and Question 7 "How do you justify your vision of a free and open society?"**

There must be a vital partnership between secularists and religious believers if there is to be a solid hope of building a free and open society.

At least three major groups must be cobelligerents – Jewish, Christian and Secularists. And they must stand against radical left/liberalism and radical Islamism. It must be understood that not all ideologies are compatible with freedom.

### **Chapter 8 and Questions 8 "Where do you ground your faith in human freedom?"**

**The only sure ground is a creator God who made humans in his image.**

"For all practical purposes, the overwhelming majority of people in the world take their views of the meaning of life and their views of freedom from one of the three major families of faith – the Eastern, the secularist, and the Abrahamic." 185

"There is no common core unity between the world's faiths and philosophies." 185

Eastern: the universe is an impersonal ground of being; human life is bondage on the wheel of samsara. Freedom in eastern thought is release from this world of illusion.

Freedom is freedom from individuality, for the individual self is an illusion. “The Eastern views have little or nothing to say in addressing the political freedom that is central to Western democracy and to the arguments surrounding the American experiment.”  
Yoga and other forms of Eastern practices offer just an escape (though temporary) from the world. 186

Secularism: Ultimate reality in the universe is chance. Some consider this freedom – untethered from outside control – I’m the captain of my own ship. If we want meaning we must make it up ourselves. We are accountable to no one. But when others are equally “free” we have a problem. Science may be solution to many things but “The approach that succeeds in the scientific exploration of nature may fail in the scientific exploration of human nature.” 191  
“Freedom is not the fruit of either logic or lab.” “Nature is morally silent.” 192

“Judaism and the Christian faith have been the primary shapers of the Western world, along with the Greeks and the Romans. What the two directly biblical faiths share in common is their belief that behind the universe is a personal and infinite God, and that two momentous truths flow out of who God is and what God has done: Human freedom, God’s greatest gift to mankind, and Meaningful History, the arena in which we live and act.” 193

“God’s absolute freedom is granted to humans, made in his likeness, in measure. Human freedom is a gift from God. 193  
From our Declaration of Independence: “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.”

**Chapter 9 and Question 9 “Are you vigilant about the institutions crucial to freedom?”**

**We must maintain a democratic REPUBLIC.**

“Americans must weigh the reality and decide for themselves what they want: personal freedom from government or progressive freedom under government.” 212

Democracy and freedom are not Siamese twins. Democracy without limitations can be the rule of the majority without regard for the minority.  
We have a democratic republic not a pure democracy.

**Chapter 10 and Question 10: “Are you vigilant about the Ideas crucial to freedom?”**

Bad ideas create bad policies and intolerable lives.

1 Multiculturalism / identity politics / victim politics / tribalism

“The overall impact of multiculturalism has been blunt, lopsided, and damaging in two ways. First the stress on group identity has meant a diminished respect for the dignity and worth of the individual person, regardless of what group they belong to and therefore a diminishing of the importance of individual human rights... In addition, multiculturalism has upset any pretense at balancing three foundational tensions that are critical to the American experiment and to any free society. First, there must be a balance between unity and diversity, universality and particularity, commonality and differences. Second, there must be a balance between kinship and consent, the former being citizenship that comes through birth and descent and the latter being citizenship that comes through belief and assent, as with the immigrant to the United States. And third, there must be a balance between the American unum and the American pluribus.  
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“The old notions of melting and assimilation have been thrown out as coercive, and there is no longer any national, core, or mainstream identity for anyone to be assimilated into.” 226

We only separate from each other further as we owe allegiance only to our “group.”

2 Political correctness is a second bad idea. It is controlling language to control people. Hate speech is a triumph for Stalin’s censorship. Power replaces truth.

3 Social constructionism is a third bad idea. Since there is no objective reality,