

Thanksgiving, 2006 Stan Stahl, Ph.D.

The spirit of liberty is the spirit which is not too sure that it is right; the spirit of liberty is the spirit which seeks to understand the mind of other men and women; the spirit of liberty is the spirit which weighs their interests alongside its own without bias.

*Learned Hand
U.S. Judge*

The third phase of America's culture wars has begun. As in phases one and two, the religious right and the secular left will continue to battle for what each believes is the soul of America. But in this new third phase, we are already seeing more battlegrounds opening up.

As this third phase of America's culture wars commences, we are seeing the Democratic party pulled between their liberal left and their more pragmatic center. Republicans as well are being pulled between their fundamentalist Christian base and their more tolerant wing.

Under attack by *intelligent designers*, scientists have launched a counter-attack. Scientists like Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris have called attention to the evils of fundamentalist beliefs of all kind. They see blind faith—faith in contradiction to the empirical evidence that science provides—as the great moral challenge of our time. Blind faith, they argue, leads directly to suicide bombers. And they hold every person of faith accountable. To them, like to George W., “You're either for us or against us.”

We see cultural fragmentation occurring everywhere we look. Evangelical Christians are being torn between the Jesus of Jim Wallis and the Jesus of James Dobson. Jews have always been split over Israel and, as tension in the Middle East continues, this split is likely to grow wider.

Cultural chaos is our most likely future. But, as the Chinese discovered at the dawn of writing, in chaos lies not only danger, but also opportunity.

As Phase 3 of the culture wars heats up, there is now the opportunity for a new center to emerge. Unlike the wedge politics—designed to separate Americans into extremist camps—which characterized Phase two of the culture wars, this next phase is an opportunity to unite the majority center around basic American values of mutual tolerance and respect.

And unless we succeed in doing so, the danger is likely to be grave. Unless we unite the center—both in America and throughout the world—we put in jeopardy humankind's very future on this planet.

Even as a secular Jew, I've learned to appreciate the wisdom in the ancient texts of our species. Written down during a period of earlier chaos, they reflect an appreciation of the human spirit, both those things that divide us but also those things that connect us ... one human to another.

One of those pieces of wisdom is the concept expressed by Jesus that "My Father's mansion has many rooms."

I don't pretend to know all of the theological ins and outs of this seemingly simple statement, so for me, I just think about all the rooms in the human universe as places where we can live our lives. That's the Mansion—this human universe.

There is an entire wing of the Mansion where Christians can live inside their faiths, another for Moslems, a third for Buddhists, another for Jews, and so on, through all the religions of mankind. There are rooms for capitalists and communists, gays and straights, scientists and mystics, Christian evangelists believing in evolution, Jews opposed to the State of Israel, even atheists and agnostics. In the Mansion, pretty much anything is possible.

All you need is the price of admission.

The price of admission to the Mansion ... it's something we can all afford. All we have to do to gain access to the Mansion is live our lives in accord with another piece of wisdom from "the ancients."

Every religion on Earth places the same price of admission to the Mansion. It's called the Golden Rule.

*Not one of you is a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.
Hadith, Islam*

The Golden Rule is even finding its way into science as *evolutionary anthropologists* are studying the forces that shape the evolution of cultures. They are discovering that the Golden Rule can have strong survival value to a culture that practices it.

So it seems to me that, *we, the people*, can resolve the culture wars by following the dictates of our own belief system, whether faith-based or secular. We just have to *apply the golden rule*.

It seems to me only reasonable that I have the right to decide for myself what rooms I want to hang out in. So, if I want this right for me, by the Golden Rule, I must grant you the same right. Since I don't want you telling me what to do, I can't tell you what to do.

If others see different truths in their rooms, it doesn't mean one's wrong and the other's right. It means that here is an opportunity to learn from each other, an opportunity to get to know more of this divine Mansion we live in, an opportunity to enhance the miracle of our existence.

And, as the founders understood, when we do learn from each other, when we share the truths we find in the Mansion, that it is in these magical moments that we secure the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our posterity,

It is this spirit that the Pilgrims brought to America in the Mayflower Compact when they committed to each other *a civil body politic*, the magic of *win-win-win*.

This is the spirit of liberty that can bring forth a new center in American politics, a center dedicated to working together with our hearts and our passions, applying our collected knowledge and wisdom to the great tasks that lie ahead of us ... to heal the sick, to raise the poor, to put an end to war, and to protect the planet.

Thank you to all who have come before, on whose shoulders we stand, for securing the blessings of liberty to us. May our wisdom and spirit be up to the task of securing these blessings for our children and our children's children.

Let Freedom Ring.