

Civic Conscience Workbook

Revision 1, 11/2025

DISCLAIMER

This assessment is a voluntary tool for personal reflection, civic clarity, and community engagement. It does not constitute legal advice, psychological evaluation, or professional guidance. The questions and definitions provided are intended to help individuals understand their own motivations, strengths, values, and potential roles in public life. Decisions regarding activism, community involvement, or pursuit of public office should be made with full consideration of personal circumstances, family commitments, legal obligations, and professional counsel where appropriate.

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Use this tool responsibly, with honesty, and with respect for lawful authority, community well-being, and the moral duty to pursue truth.

Jeff Pierson

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INTRODUCTION

A free society does not survive on autopilot. It survives when ordinary citizens recognize that liberty is not inherited automatically. It is defended by choice, by conscience, and by people who are willing to know themselves well enough to take responsibility for their community. This self-assessment is designed to help you understand what shaped you, what you value, what you are prepared to defend, and where you can be most effective.

This is not a personality test and it is not a political questionnaire. It is a private tool for clarity. The goal is simple. When you know who you are and what you stand for, you can act with conviction instead of hesitation. The future belongs to people who understand their duty and embrace it.

This booklet guides you through four stages.

1. Discovery
2. Reflection
3. Aptitude
4. Direction

When you finish, you will have a personal profile, a clear sense of the issues that matter most to you, and a practical map for taking your place in your community.

HOW TO USE THIS ASSESSMENT

Answer each question with complete honesty. Write your answers in full sentences. Do not give the safe answer or the polite one. Give the truth. What you write becomes the building material for your Liberty Profile.

After answering everything, read your responses again and pay attention to patterns. Repeated words, repeated concerns, repeated frustrations, and repeated hopes all reveal your priorities and strengths. The profile you build at the end is your blueprint for civic action.

SECTION ONE: PERSONAL STORY AND MOTIVATION

These questions uncover the moments that shaped you, the issues that awakened you, and the experiences that formed your view of liberty, responsibility, and community.

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1. What first made you care about what happens in your community?
2. When did you realize that government decisions could affect your family or your daily life?
3. What moment or issue pushed you to speak up or get involved for the first time?
4. What part of your community do you feel personally responsible for and why?
5. What do you believe is being lost in America that matters most to you?
6. What experiences shaped your beliefs about individual liberty and limits on government?
7. What do you think your children or grandchildren will face if things do not change?
8. What kind of future do you want your community to move toward?
9. What makes you believe your involvement would make a difference?
10. What keeps you from being more involved and what would help you overcome that barrier?

Write additional thoughts below.

HOW TO INTERPRET YOUR ANSWERS

Look for origin points. Most people awakened politically or morally because they witnessed dishonesty, overreach, injustice, or neglect. The details matter.

Your personal story reveals the moral stakes you feel most deeply. It also shows where your convictions come from and where they naturally point you.

If you emphasize land, family, schools, transparency, or fairness, that is not accidental. That is your starting point.

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SECTION TWO: VALUES, BELIEFS, AND PRINCIPLES

These questions uncover the philosophical structure beneath your civic instincts.

1. What does liberty mean to you in your daily life?
2. What responsibilities accompany liberty?
3. What role should citizens play when government grows beyond its limits?
4. What is the difference between authority that deserves obedience and authority that must be challenged?
5. Which principles of the Founders speak to you most and why?
6. What moral lines should government never cross?
7. Where should power rest in a healthy community?
8. What makes leadership legitimate in your view?
9. What forms of dishonesty or misrepresentation are intolerable to you?
10. What do you believe God, conscience, or history requires of you?

Write additional thoughts below.

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HOW TO INTERPRET YOUR ANSWERS

This section reveals your worldview. Some base liberty on natural law. Some base it on stewardship. Some base it on distrust of concentrated power. Once your values are written down, you can identify your core non-negotiables. These define your scope of action and your personal mission.

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SECTION THREE: STRENGTHS, APTITUDE, AND NATURAL ROLES

Freedom movements succeed when people operate in their natural strengths rather than forced roles. These questions identify how you work, how you lead, and how you solve problems.

1. When you see a problem in your community, what is your first instinct?
2. Do you prefer research, persuasion, organizing, building relationships, or direct confrontation?
3. Do you tend to act publicly or behind the scenes?
4. Do you enjoy digging through documents or explaining the findings to others?
5. How comfortable are you speaking or presenting in public settings?
6. Do you thrive in small teams, large groups, or independent work?
7. What kind of task gives you energy rather than exhaustion?
8. What kind of task drains you even when you care about the issue?
9. What skills do people trust you with?
10. What skills do you avoid using even though others expect you to?

Write additional thoughts below.

SELF-SCORING LIBERTY APTITUDE INDEX

Rate each from 1 to 5.

1 means strongly disagree.

5 means strongly agree.

SELF-SCORING APTITUDE INDEX

Rate each from 1 to 5.

1 means strongly disagree.

5 means strongly agree.

1. I feel a duty to defend individual rights and local control.
2. I believe citizens should question authority when it exceeds lawful limits.
3. I try to stay informed about local decisions.
4. I am willing to speak up publicly when liberty or fairness is threatened.
5. I believe public officials answer to the people.
6. I trust individuals more than institutions to solve problems.
7. I believe sunlight is required for legitimate government.
8. I am willing to help others understand what is at stake.
9. I believe action matters more than complaints.
10. I believe the future depends on ordinary people doing uncommon things.

Scoring: 40 to 50 means high civic readiness. 30 to 39 means strong potential.
20 to 29 means motivated but unfocused. Below 20 means aware but hesitant.

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SECTION FOUR: ACTIVATION, RESPONSIBILITY, AND DIRECTION

These questions identify the moment when concern becomes commitment.

1. What issue makes you react instantly because it touches something essential in you?
2. If you could fix one problem in your community, what would it be?
3. What injustice or failure makes you say someone must act?
4. What would have to happen before you felt obligated to step forward?
5. What warning signs tell you that your community is moving in the wrong direction?
6. What kind of leadership would you follow willingly?
7. What promise about the future would inspire you enough to work for it?
8. What breaks your trust with an official or institution?
9. What issue would you defend even if you stood alone?
10. If you had ten people ready to help you, what would you lead them to do?

Write your plan below.

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How to Interpret Your Answers

Your threshold for action reveals your mission. Some people are activated by dishonesty. Some by threats to land. Some by loss of process. Some by harm to children. The answer tells you the battleground you were built for.

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BUILDING YOUR LIBERTY PROFILE

HOW TO TURN YOUR ANSWERS INTO A PERSONAL BLUEPRINT

After completing all sections, write a one to two page profile that summarizes the following.

What shaped me.

What I value most.

What I am prepared to defend.

Where I am strongest.

What activates me.

Where I can make the greatest impact.

What my community can count on me for.

What lines I will never allow to be crossed.

This becomes your personal declaration of duty. It is not for public display. It is for clarity and direction. It is the foundation you stand on before you attend hearings, speak publicly, join a group, start an effort, or defend a principle.

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Lined paper template with horizontal ruling lines.

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USING THE PROFILE IN COMMUNITY AND POLITICS

HOW THIS ASSESSMENT CONNECTS YOU TO REAL ACTION

Once you know your role, your strengths, your convictions, and your mission, you can place yourself exactly where you belong.

- Researchers plug into transparency and oversight work.
- Writers plug into narrative, public records, and communication.
- Organizers plug into events, petitions, procedural battles, and coalitions.
- Speakers plug into hearings, debates, and public representation.
- Strategists plug into planning, tracking, and exposing misdirection.
- Stewards plug into land use, water fights, school boards, and local control.

You stop guessing where you fit. You stop waiting for someone else to lead. You step into the arena with purpose.

FINAL ENCOURAGEMENT

Liberty survives when citizens understand themselves. This assessment gives you the clarity needed to act with conviction. You were not meant to be a spectator. You were meant to take responsibility for a place, a community, and a future.

When you know who you are, you know what must be defended.

When you know what must be defended, you know what must be done.

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GLOSSARY OF HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

These definitions strengthen clarity for anyone completing this assessment. They help readers understand core civic concepts, roles, and duties so their answers are grounded rather than vague.

ACCOUNTABILITY

The expectation that public officials answer for their decisions, follow lawful process, and correct errors when confronted with evidence.

ACTIVISM

Legal, visible, direct engagement that draws attention to an issue, including speaking at hearings, organizing groups, or confronting violations.

ADVOCACY

Any action taken by individuals or groups to influence public decisions, educate the community, challenge wrongdoing, or defend rights.

CANDIDATE READINESS

The level at which a person has the time, resources, temperament, and support network to seek elected office.

CIVIC DUTY

The moral responsibility of every citizen to uphold lawful authority, challenge unjust authority, and participate in decisions that affect the community.

CIVIC IDENTITY

A citizen's understanding of their place, responsibility, and potential role within the community and broader system of self-government.

CIVIC READINESS

The level of clarity, confidence, and competence a citizen has in understanding issues, identifying threats to liberty, and acting with purpose.

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COMMUNITY STEWARD

A citizen who prioritizes local health, land, culture, and long-term welfare of their town or county.

CONFLICT TOLERANCE

A person's ability to remain steady, principled, and effective during disagreement, criticism, or institutional resistance.

CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER

The framework of laws, limits, and rights designed to prevent concentration of power and protect individual liberty.

LIBERTY

The condition in which individuals live free from arbitrary or excessive government control, rooted in natural rights and moral responsibility.

LOCAL CONTROL

The principle that decisions should be made as close to the people as possible, where those affected can hold decision makers accountable.

NATURAL ROLE

The type of civic engagement a person is best suited for based on instinct, skill, and temperament, such as researcher, communicator, organizer, or strategist.

OVERREACH

When government institutions or officials exceed their lawful authority, restrict rights without justification, or bypass required public processes.

PUBLIC OFFICE

Any role in which a citizen is entrusted with decision-making power on behalf of the community, including boards, commissions, local offices, or state-level positions.

PUBLIC PROCESS

The legally required steps that government bodies must follow when making decisions, including notice, hearings, minutes, disclosures, and opportunities for public participation.

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SELF-GOVERNMENT

The idea that citizens, not distant authorities, hold primary responsibility for shaping their community, enforcing accountability, and directing public policy.

STEWARDSHIP

The responsibility to protect land, resources, community traditions, and public institutions for future generations.

THRESHOLD FOR ACTION

The point at which a concern becomes a conviction strong enough that an individual feels obligated to step forward.

TRANSPARENCY

The requirement that government actions, records, budgets, contracts, and communications be accessible and understandable to the public.

WATCHDOG ROLE

Citizens who investigate, monitor, document, and expose government behavior to ensure lawful and honest conduct.

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ESSAYS AND EXCERPTS

THE DUTIES THAT ANCHOR LIBERTY

Natural law does not speak only of rights. Rights without duties become hollow claims, easily twisted into excuses for selfishness or tyranny. As Locke observed, “the state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one” (Second Treatise of Government, §6).

Rights without duties become hollow claims, easily twisted into excuses for selfishness or tyranny. The same moral order that grants liberty also binds man to responsibility. *Duties are the obligations written into human nature, discoverable by reason, and essential for sustaining freedom.* They call rulers and citizens alike to conscience, justice, fidelity, and vigilance. Without them, liberty collapses. Liberty cannot survive without the discipline of duty, and duty cannot be dismissed without betraying liberty itself.

These duties include ***prudence, conscience, justice, fidelity, stewardship, defense, charity, scrutiny, and dissent.*** Each protects liberty from erosion, and together they form the moral structure that makes a free republic possible.

DUTIES DEFINED

DUTY OF PRUDENCE

“Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed” The Declaration of Independence

Prudence is the habit of foresight and discipline. It balances liberty with responsibility, ensuring freedom is not wasted through recklessness. Prudence calls for careful weighing of actions, consequences, and timing. In natural law, it governs all other duties, making justice wise, defense measured, and conscience consistent.

DUTY OF CONSCIENCE

“Our rulers can have authority over such natural rights only as we have submitted to them. The rights of conscience we never submitted, we could not submit. We are answerable for them to our God.” Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia (1782)

Conscience is the inner tribunal of natural law. It binds the individual to act according to truth, even when outward authority commands otherwise. This duty means refusing to silence that inner voice for convenience, fear, or gain. A society that neglects conscience becomes one where obedience to man replaces obedience to truth.

DUTY OF JUSTICE

“Remove justice, and what are kingdoms but great robberies?” St. Augustine, City of God (Book XIX, Ch. 21)

Justice is the first requirement of natural law: giving to each what is rightly theirs. It is more than a court procedure; it is the moral discipline that respects life, property, promises, and reputation. Injustice arises when rulers deny equal protection or when individuals cheat their neighbor. Without justice, rights collapse into claims without meaning.

DUTY OF FIDELITY

“The obligation to fulfill promises derives from the law of nature itself; without fidelity to covenants, there can be neither justice nor society.” Hugo Grotius, On the Law of War and Peace (1625), Bk. II, Ch. XI, Sec. 1

Fidelity is the duty to keep one’s word, honor contracts, and respect covenants. Natural law demands truthfulness because trust is the foundation of society. When promises are casually broken — by leaders, institutions, or citizens — the fabric of liberty unravels. Fidelity binds words to deeds and protects community from corruption.

DUTY OF STEWARDSHIP

“Nothing was made by God for man to spoil or destroy.” John Locke, Second Treatise of Government §31

Natural law teaches that life, power, and resources are entrusted, not owned absolutely. Stewardship means exercising responsibility toward family, community, and creation, mindful that misuse or waste injures others. This duty denies both reckless exploitation and neglectful apathy, insisting that what is given to one must be cared for on behalf of all.

DUTY OF DEFENSE

“The state of war is a state of enmity and destruction... and therefore it is lawful for a man to kill a thief, because he has put himself into a state of war with me.” John Locke, Second Treatise of Government §16

Every person has the right and responsibility to protect life, liberty, and the innocent from unjust harm. This duty extends from self-preservation to the defense of neighbors, and even to resisting tyranny. Natural law does not sanctify passivity in the face of evil; it commands proportionate action to shield what is good.

DUTY OF CHARITY

“Nature ordains that men should wish to promote the common good of mankind. Whatever is contrary to this is opposed to nature.” Cicero, On Duties (De Officiis), I.42

Charity is the moral obligation to love one’s neighbor, not through compulsion but through free will. It relieves suffering, strengthens community, and reflects the truth that rights and duties exist for more than self. Natural law does not command forced redistribution; it calls for voluntary generosity rooted in love.

DUTY OF SCRUTINY

“Ambition must be made to counteract ambition” Federalist No. 51 (Madison)

Authority is never exempt from judgment. The duty of scrutiny means citizens must examine policies, test claims, and question leaders in light of truth. This is natural law applied to civic life: reason and evidence must govern, not propaganda or fear. Scrutiny protects the people from deception and prevents rulers from becoming untouchable.

DUTY OF DISSENT

“--That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.” The Declaration of the United States

When authority becomes unjust, silence is complicity. The duty of dissent commands resistance against laws, decrees, or orders that violate natural law. It is not rebellion for its own sake but fidelity to a higher order of justice. Dissent is the conscience of a free people, and without it, liberty perishes.

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LEGITIMATE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

**“To be considered legitimate, civil disobedience must meet the following conditions... *Most (if not all) modern acts of protest fail this test...*”
(JAP2025)**

Violent defensive resistance is only justified in the narrowest and most extreme cases when all lawful means have failed, when the threat is direct and unlawful, and when the response is restrained, principled, and transparent.

MOST MODERN ACTS OF PROTEST FAIL THIS TEST, PARTICULARLY WHEN:

- Conducted on behalf of those who are not innocent under the law.
- Directed against lawful institutions executing duly enacted authority.
- Motivated by ideology, not conscience.
- Aimed at subversion, not redress.

The moral foundation of protest, civil disobedience, and resistance lies in the inseparable bond between liberty and law. Ordered Liberty requires that every act of defiance, from the spoken protest to the final line of defense, remain governed by conscience, disciplined by justice, and measured by restraint. When citizens act within these bounds, they do not oppose authority; they restore its rightful order. When government honors these same bounds, it preserves its moral legitimacy.

A free people must therefore remember that the power to resist is not the power to destroy. It is the power to recall the nation to its first principles. The highest form of resistance is not violence, but virtue. The greatest act of protest is not rebellion, but remembrance of the laws of nature and of nature's God. Ordered Liberty endures only where both rulers and the ruled are governed by truth, conscience, and the courage to do what is right, even when obedience is easier.

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DESPAIR AND FRUSTRATION

Despair and frustration are not just emotions; they are moral saboteurs. They whisper that truth no longer matters, that corruption is inevitable, that resistance is pointless. Once you believe that, the tyrant no longer needs chains; the defeat is internal.

Solzhenitsyn understood that freedom begins not in the ballot box or the battlefield but in the conscience. Moral courage allows a person to stand when everyone else bows. Repentance keeps courage from curdling into pride. Together, they are the disciplines that preserve the soul of a free people. Without them, liberty becomes license, and resistance becomes rage.

Despair, on the other hand, disguises itself as realism. It says, “Be practical, accept the system.” But in truth, despair is moral surrender dressed as wisdom. The antidote is not blind optimism; it is remembrance, of what is right, of who you are, and of the cost others have already paid to keep freedom alive.

When you feel the pull of frustration, remember Solzhenitsyn’s choice: he refused to let evil define his response. He chose to bear witness. Moral courage and repentance did not make his suffering disappear, they made it meaningful. And that meaning is what keeps despair from winning.

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IDEOLOGICAL CONDITIONING: HOW NO KINGS AND INDIVISIBLE MIRROR CULT RECRUITMENT DYNAMICS

Both rely on identity formation, emotional activation, and group reinforcement to convert passive supporters into committed participants. The structure is secular and political rather than spiritual, yet the underlying dynamics are similar.

1. **Emotional triggering** – Cults often begin recruitment through emotional events that create outrage or fear, followed by offering belonging as the antidote. No Kings uses moral crisis language such as “authoritarianism” or “democracy under attack” to generate urgency and vulnerability that primes recruits for ideological adoption.
2. **Moral absolutism** – Indivisible’s messaging divides politics into “good” and “evil,” “democracy” and “fascism.” This moral binary discourages dissent and encourages conformity to the movement’s values, a hallmark of high-control groups.
3. **Onboarding and conditioning** – Leah Greenberg describes protests as “onboarding moments.” This is direct acknowledgment of psychological conditioning. Participants are drawn into a “cycle of action” that builds loyalty and identity, similar to incremental involvement used by cults.
4. **Language control and framing** – Both cults and ideological movements manipulate language to frame the world in ways that reinforce loyalty. Indivisible uses moral euphemisms like “resistance,” “equity,” and “justice” that reshape meaning while enforcing ideological alignment.
5. **Community dependency** – Like cults, Indivisible promotes intense social belonging. Participants are encouraged to stay in continuous contact through digital networks, events, and meetings, reducing outside influence and reinforcing group identity.
6. **Centralized moral authority** – Although No Kings presents itself as decentralized, the real moral authority lies with Greenberg and Indivisible’s leadership. This mimics the hidden hierarchy typical of ideological cults.

7. **Enemy creation** – High-control movements sustain energy by defining an external enemy. Indivisible frames political opponents not as citizens with different views but as existential threats to democracy. This fosters hostility and discourages critical thinking.
8. **Narrative immersion** – Both cults and radical groups sustain participation by immersing followers in a continuous moral narrative. The constant stream of coordinated messaging keeps members emotionally charged and ideologically aligned.
9. **Recruitment through crisis** – Cultic groups often expand rapidly during times of social stress. Indivisible grew after 2016 by channeling fear and uncertainty into organized activism. No Kings repeats that formula by turning political anxiety into participation.
10. **Moral substitution** – Both cults and ideological movements replace individual moral reasoning with collective righteousness. The result is obedience framed as virtue.

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FRANCIS SCHAEFFER'S WARNING: "POLLUTION AND THE DEATH OF MAN" AND THE AGE OF MEGA PROJECTS

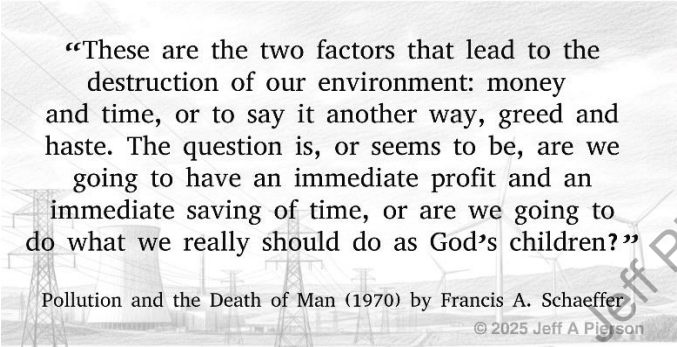
In 1970, Francis Schaeffer wrote *Pollution and the Death of Man* as a moral wake-up call, not just about pollution but about the spiritual sickness behind it. He argued that modern society treats creation as raw material instead of sacred trust. The crisis, he said, was not technological but theological. Once man saw himself as autonomous, master rather than steward, he began to exploit the world he was meant to care for.

Schaeffer warned that two forces drive environmental destruction: greed and haste. The rush for profit and efficiency destroys not only landscapes but reverence. He said the real question is not "Can we?" but "Should we?" That question is one modern technocracy has largely forgotten.

His warning speaks directly to our era of so-called clean mega projects. Data centers, solar arrays, and transmission corridors are praised as progress, yet they often consume entire aquifers, flatten farmland, and drain communities of quiet and identity. The moral logic has not changed since Schaeffer's day. Efficiency has replaced ethics, and metrics have replaced meaning.

Schaeffer's message cuts deeper than environmentalism. He insisted that the created world reflects the Creator, and when man desecrates it, he desecrates himself. The issue is not technology but theology, whether human reason rules alone or whether man still answers to something higher.

In the rush to build the digital future, we are repeating the same sin Schaeffer exposed, pursuing mastery without humility. Stewardship asks for restraint. Technocracy rewards ambition. The question remains the same half a century later: will we build as caretakers of creation or as conquerors of it? One choice sustains life. The other erases it.



"These are the two factors that lead to the destruction of our environment: money and time, or to say it another way, greed and haste. The question is, or seems to be, are we going to have an immediate profit and an immediate saving of time, or are we going to do what we really should do as God's children?"

Pollution and the Death of Man (1970) by Francis A. Schaeffer

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LEADERS HAVE STORIES AND PURPOSE

A leader carries a story that explains who they are and why they lead. Their purpose is born from experience, shaped by struggle, and tested by sacrifice. Their vision is not a slogan but a conviction that guides both words and actions. You can see their integrity in the way they treat people who cannot help them and in how they carry weight that others ignore.

The false leader projects depth but possesses none. They rely on charisma instead of character, image instead of substance. They polish their presentation, but it hides the absence of principle. They speak of vision but cannot endure labor, and their confidence is built on applause rather than conviction.

In the end, leadership is not about ability but motive. If a person's story lacks service, if their purpose points only to themselves, if their shine is brighter than their substance, they are not leading, they are performing.

I am not called to office, but I am called to serve. With the time and resources I have, I cannot afford to spend them propping up leaders in search of a cause. Service, to me, means action rooted in purpose, not promotion. If the work does not serve people, it serves pride, and I have no interest in that.

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AMBITION THAT OUTFRONS VISION - WHAT IS A CALLING?

Most of my adult life, I have kept my distance from people, especially politicians and those in “ministry”. I would avoid actors and so-called cultural icons as well, but living in Jerome spares me from most of that noise. I have watched too many people with glaring personality disorders rise to influence without merit, gaining authority they neither earned nor understood. In politics and the church alike, many of these individuals seem to care little for those they claim to serve. They do not grasp what service actually means.

Speaking out against them rarely ends well, and it often takes years for the truth to surface and for others to see what I saw from the start. I know that kind of observation can sound arrogant, and that is precisely why I often choose to live quietly and somewhat apart. It is not contempt for people, but exhaustion with pretense.

The difference between poor leaders and good ones is simple. Poor leaders seek office. They chase position and title without ever clarifying purpose. Their ambition outruns their vision. Good leaders, by contrast, rise through labor and sacrifice. They do not seek office; they are called to it by those who have witnessed their character and their work.

That calling is not some vague, self-actualized feeling. It is clear, specific, and visible. A true calling is preceded by a story, a history of effort, endurance, and purpose that compels others to recognize it. A real leader does not have to announce their calling. The evidence of their life makes it obvious.

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CIVICS: DUTY OF SCRUTINY

A free people must keep watch over those entrusted with authority. Public officials, judges, administrators, educators, and others in positions of trust are not masters but servants of the people. The Founders knew that power is always tempted toward corruption. Jefferson put it plainly: “The price of freedom is eternal vigilance.” Scrutiny is not optional. It is the safeguard against the quiet creep of tyranny. To question, investigate, and demand transparency from leaders is not a mark of disloyalty but of loyalty to the republic.

Scrutiny in a free republic cannot remain polite or superficial. At times it must press into uncomfortable extremes. That is part of the cost of liberty. Here are the kinds of extremes that duty of scrutiny sometimes demands.

PUBLIC EXPOSURE

When officials or trusted figures fail in their duties, citizens may have to expose those failures publicly. That means publishing names, documenting errors, and insisting on accountability in the open. It is never comfortable to see a neighbor, a school board member, or a judge criticized in public, but silence is worse because it permits quiet decay.

RELENTLESS QUESTIONING

Leaders often resist being asked hard questions. The duty of scrutiny means not letting the subject drop, even when officials bristle or community members accuse questioners of being negative. Repetition, persistence, and refusal to be pacified by vague answers are sometimes the only way truth surfaces.

MORAL JUDGMENT

Scrutiny involves more than reporting facts. It also includes calling wrongdoing what it is. Corruption must be called corruption. Cowardice must be called cowardice. This can feel harsh, but it prevents euphemisms from covering sin. Making people uncomfortable in this way is part of restoring moral clarity.

REFUSAL TO APPEASE

At times citizens must endure accusations of being divisive, unkind, or even disloyal simply because they demand accountability. The Founders endured the same charges when they scrutinized the Crown. Appeasement is the temptation of every age, but it always leads to decay.

THE REALITY OF BACKLASH

Citizens who question authority will be accused of being troublemakers, divisive, bitter, or unpatriotic. Neighbors may turn cold, churches may urge silence, and institutions may retaliate. The aim is always the same: to isolate the scrutinizer so that others are deterred from speaking.

THE MORAL BURDEN

Enduring this treatment is heavy, but it is also a test of courage. If scrutiny collapses under social pressure, corruption wins without a fight. The prophets of Israel were attacked by their own people more than by foreign kings. Early American patriots were slandered as rebels and ingrates. Scrutiny always carries the weight of being misunderstood and misrepresented.

THE DUTY TO PERSEVERE

Citizens must not shrink back when marginalized. Silence in the face of pressure is surrender. Scrutiny has meaning only if it is carried through to the end, even when the crowd turns against the one speaking. Liberty dies not just when leaders are corrupt, but when citizens are too afraid of unkind words to hold them accountable.

SUMMARY

The duty of scrutiny sometimes requires actions that make others feel bad because truth itself is often unwelcome. Public exposure, relentless questioning, moral judgment, and refusal to appease are not expressions of cruelty but of stewardship. Citizens who fail to accept these extremes abandon their role as guardians of liberty.

Jeff Pierson

THE TROJAN HORSE OF HIGHER CRITICISM

Original and compiled work by Jeff Pierson. This is part of a series based on The Four Trojan Horses of Humanism, written by Harry Conn

HIGHER CRITICISM

To understand why our culture has grown dismissive of the Bible, you must first understand the rise of higher criticism and the role it played in reshaping Christianity in the United States.

Higher Criticism, birthed in 18th and 19th-century German rationalist universities, did not merely analyze Scripture, it deconstructed it. What began as a seemingly academic effort to examine biblical texts “objectively” quickly mutated into a campaign to sever the Bible from its divine origins and reframe it as myth, metaphor, or merely moral folklore. Behind the veil of scholarly inquiry was an agenda: to replace divine revelation with human reasoning.

Originating with figures such as Julius Wellhausen and the Tübingen School, higher criticism employed historical and literary methodologies to question the authorship, unity, and authority of biblical texts. The Pentateuch, for instance, was no longer the inspired work of Moses but a patchwork of anonymous redactors. Isaiah became multiple authors. Miracles were dismissed as legends. Prophecy became a retroactive history. The supernatural was edited out with the stroke of a pen.

From the classroom, these corrosive ideas spread. First through elite European seminaries, then into American theological institutions like Union Theological Seminary, Harvard Divinity, and the University of Chicago. Future pastors, professors, and denominational leaders were indoctrinated to read Scripture not as God’s Word, but as man’s evolving religious expression.

THE EFFECTS WERE DEVASTATING.

In Churches: Doctrinal preaching gave way to moral platitudes. The cross became a metaphor. Hell became an allegory. Virgin birth and resurrection became optional. Denominations once grounded in Scripture split or died.

In Universities: Bible classes morphed into sociological dissections. Once-Christian colleges became hubs for relativism. Faith was rebranded as subjective experience rather than historical truth.

In Government and Law: The moral authority once rooted in biblical law was replaced by case law and utilitarian ethics. The Ten Commandments

disappeared from courthouses. Legislators now draw from critical theory more than Scripture.

In Media and Popular Culture: The Bible is mocked or sentimentalized. Its moral clarity is viewed as intolerant. Jesus is portrayed not as Savior but as a misunderstood social reformer.

THE GENIUS OF HIGHER CRITICISM

The genius of higher criticism as a tactic was its disguise. It never needed to burn Bibles; it only needed to cast doubt. Once the foundation cracked, the structure of belief began to crumble from within.

Make no mistake: higher criticism is not merely a method, it is a worldview, a Trojan Horse that has infiltrated not only the church but the soul of the West. By dismantling the authority of Scripture, it paved the way for moral relativism, theological confusion, and spiritual apathy.

Without the authority of Scripture, faith drifts into relativism and the church mirrors the culture instead of transforming it. Renewal, whether personal, ecclesial, or cultural, will never begin with politics or policy because those flow downstream from belief. It must begin with repentance, a humble return to God's Word, and the reestablishment of biblical authority in culture.

CHRISTIANS MUST STAND

Conservative Christians must stand and not shrink, refusing to reduce the Scriptures to myths or inventions. As Peter declared, "we did not follow cunningly devised fables" but bore witness as eyewitnesses of Christ's majesty. That testimony demands our defense of biblical inerrancy, our affirmation of Mosaic authorship, our trust in the apostolic record, and our fidelity to the historic doctrines of Christ. To reach that end, Christians must treat Scripture not as a set of fragments to analyze but as the living Word of God that speaks with power and truth.

The study of the original texts and history serves this goal because God chose to reveal His Word in real languages and real events. Understanding the original Hebrew and Greek words, their grammar, and the historical and cultural setting helps us hear the message as the first readers did, guarding against distortion and proving that faith is grounded in reality, not myth.

Jeff Pierson

AUTHORITARIANISM VERSUS CIVIC ANTI-AUTHORITARIANISM

I want to introduce a term I believe is unique to my writing: **civic anti-authoritarianism**. The principle itself is not new, but the label gives it fresh relevance. It stands in opposition to the liberal, authoritarian ideologies promoted by groups such as BLM, No-Kings, and—ironically—Antifa.

Authoritarianism is the concentration of power in groups or governments who demand loyalty, suppress dissent, and subordinate individual rights to the state. It thrives on control, surveillance, and the erosion of conscience in favor of obedience. The authoritarian state doesn't care whether a law is just but whether it can be enforced. It manufactures loyalty through fear and dependency, reducing citizens to subjects.

Civic Anti-Authoritarianism (CAA) rejects that bargain. It begins with the principle that liberty is the natural condition of man and that government exists only by consent, bound by law and morality. CAA calls citizens to vigilance, dissent, and resistance whenever rulers overstep just authority. It is not anarchy. It does not despise law. It insists that law must be rooted in principle, not decree, and that obedience must be freely given, not extorted. Where authoritarianism breeds submission, CAA demands responsibility. Where authoritarianism thrives on manipulation, CAA thrives on conscience.

In short, authoritarianism imposes order through control, while the idea of civic anti-authoritarianism establishes order through liberty. These terms are a framework for understanding the ideological and spiritual crisis facing our nation today.

Jeff Pierson