Reconstructing America:
Religion, American Conservatism, and the Political Theology of Rousas John Rushdoony

Dissertation

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Abstract

The late Reformed theologian Rousas John Rushdoony is widely credited as one of the fathers of the Religious Right. His ideas influenced such disparate figures as well-known televangelists Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell along with prominent Protestant authors such as Francis Schaeffer and Tim LaHaye. Further, Rushdoony’s unique contribution to American religious and political culture has been the concept of Christian Reconstruction, which calls for the radical reordering of American civilization according to the strictures of Old Testament Mosaic Law. While seemingly inconceivable within the context of the United States’ officially secular political system, Reconstructionism has had a profound impact on everything from the militia movement of 1990s to the curricula of major Christian colleges, and is one of the major ideological impetuses behind the emergence of Christian homeschooling in the last half of the twentieth century. Although widely cited and increasingly the focus of popular exposés of the influence of religion on conservative politicians, Rushdoony’s life and work remain largely unexplored by scholars of American religious history. Using a combination of archival research and interpretive strategies drawn from the interdisciplinary fields of religious and cultural studies, this project will provide an in-depth study of Rushdoony and his concept of Reconstructionism. Specifically, this project situates Reconstructionism within the wider context of the post-World War II American
conservative movement and explores how Rushdoony’s ideas simultaneously influenced
the use of religious rhetoric in contemporary American culture while also exploring how
those critical of religion use Reconstructionism to redraw the acceptable boundaries
between religion and politics in the U.S. Ultimately, this project uses Rushdoony as an
access node for entering the much larger discursive network that constantly draws and
redrew the boundary between the sacred and secular in late-twentieth century America
society. By drawing on the scholarship of Michel Foucault and Talal Asad, I trace the
fluid concepts of governance and secularism to explore how religion functions to create
the boundaries of acceptable religion within American culture. Finally, the project
questions basic assumptions about the nature of American conservatism and common
beliefs about the boundaries between “mainstream,” “marginal,” and “extreme”
conservatives.
Dedication

To my folks, Eldon and Keron Brown
Acknowledgements

This project would have been impossible without the kindness and openness of the Chalcedon Foundation in Vallecito, California. Special thanks is in order for Chalcedon’s current president, Rev. Mark Rousas Rushdoony, for allowing me access to his father’s papers. Without access to Rousas John Rushdoony’s personal correspondence and his unpublished writings, this project would have been impossible. Further, Mark Rushdoony provided thoughtful comments on drafts of this project and saved me from making significant errors regarding his father’s life and legacy.

Christopher J. Ortiz, Director of Communications of Chalcedon and editor of Faith for All of Life, gave generously of his time and resources to support this project. Chris helped me get this project rolling by suggesting numerous leads and ultimately helping make critical contacts with Christian Reconstructionists. Finally, Martin G. Selbrede, Vice-President of the Chalcedon, offered helpful feedback on aspects of this project.

While Messrs. Rushdoony, Ortiz, and Selbrede will probably find much in this project to disagree with, the errors are mine alone and much of the best material and insights belong to the staff at the Chalcedon Foundation.

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Institute for Humane Studies at George Mason University; the Intercollegiate Studies Institute; the Hagley Museum and Library; the American Jewish Archives; the Billy Graham Center in the Wheaton College Archives and Special Collections; and, the Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library at the University of North Carolina. Finally, thanks to the Public Research Associates in Medford, Massachusetts, for opening their library to me; to Chip Berlet for giving generously of his time; and, to Abby Scher for encouraging me to publish the results of my research in the PRA library.

To my committee I owe so much that I cannot do justice to it in a few short sentences. Hugh B. Urban taught me how to think about religion and he taught me how to teach. I wish I had the eloquence to articulate what the latter means to me, but I’m afraid I have neither the space nor ability to express it properly. Tanya Erzen helped convince me to pursue the topic of Christian Reconstruction and has proven to be a challenging and thought-provoking guide throughout this process. I love theory, but I’m not very good at thinking with it and applying it; Philip Armstrong has helped me clarify my thinking and refine my theoretical approach throughout this project.

I can’t say or do enough to thank the other members of the Comparative Studies family. The department, under the leadership of David Horn and Eugene Holland, gave the right mix of structure, freedom, and generous financial support to allow me to develop and (finally) finish this project. Wen Tsai and Lori Wilson helped me make it through this process with all sorts of timely guidance and help. Marge Lynd has always been far too patient with me and has helped me out of more jams than I care to list here. Dan Reff has offered me candid feedback and expert guidance at several critical junctures. Lindsay Jones refined my thinking on religion in so many helpful ways.
Finally, to my fellow graduate students, colleagues, and betters in Comp. Studies (especially the weird ones working in Religious Studies) I owe so much: Damon Berry, Keith Padgett, Beth Shively, Rita Trimble, and Lee Wiles-Op made an otherwise unbearable process much easier to tolerate.

To the wider OSU community, my must give my sincere thanks to Alan Beyerchen in History and John Champlin in Political Science. I would not have completed college without them.

Personal thanks goes to a rag-tag assortment of folks. To a group of Maniacs in Alfred, I feel compelled to say thanks. Deborah Rhea of Ashley McGraw Architects in Syracuse, New York, also deserves special commendation. Thanks are also in order to a street preacher in upstate New York who convinced me of the importance of this project when he threatened to beat me up for merely mentioning Rushdoony’s name. Special thanks are also due to my entourage of noble savages: Brandon Sutherland, Jeremy Hall, the Reverend James Dietzel, and Dr. Osgood.

To my folks Eldon and Keron Brown I offer my utmost gratitude. Without them I would have never embarked on a college career in the first place, and most certainly would have never finished graduate school without their help and support. Eldon, at this point, you can finally stop watering that tree in the back yard.

Finally to Mary, love of my life, source of endless support, and wife to be: she has my infinite gratitude.
Vita

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Introduction: Reagan’s Tears

Rousas John Rushdoony, Christian Reconstruction, and the Conservatism Milieu

“At present, by the grace of God, here and abroad some conservatives are beginning to rethink their position and to abandon antinomianism. As a result, a sound theology may again undergird politics. Until then, the conservative movement will continue to retreat because it has nowhere else to go.”


“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

– Matthew 6:33 (KJV)

In 1945, on the isolated Duck Valley Indian Reservation in Nevada, a young Presbyterian missionary named Rousas John Rushdoony had an idea. He believed that the troubles of the reservation’s Paiute and Shoshone inhabitants was directly linked to the poor education they received in the reservation schools. He called the church elders together to discuss the matter. During the meeting “[i]t was decided that the present government-controlled school board was highly unsatisfactory.” One of the church’s elders was “the sole Indian on the Board,” so Rushdoony suggested that another elder should run. But the reverend’s goals were more ambitious than simply placing another

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2 R. J. Rushdoony to Emil Schwab, January 15, 1945, R. J. Rushdoony Library, Chalcedon Foundation, Vallecito, CA (hereafter cited as the RJR Library).
Indian member of his church on the school board: “A Christian principal is our objective,” he told the meeting, “plus a Christian staff, all willing to work with the Church on a broad Christian communal program.” Rushdoony reckoned that education based on Christian principals would not only help save the children enrolled in the school but, over time, would change the culture of the reservation and lead to the redemption and regeneration of all Indians. Since the area was so isolated, Rushdoony knew that his mission did not face the “usual competition most Churches face” from non-Christian diversions. He also believed that federal officials would turn a blind eye to his proposed curriculum, which would include “temperance education, information against the strong peyote cult, facts on smoking, and the like.” On the reservation, he foresaw an opportunity to break down the boundaries between church and state and use education to raise up a generation of Godly men.

Nearly four decades later in Dallas, Texas, in August 1980, the Religious Roundtable, a Christian organization that included prominent national Protestant leaders from the Campus Crusade for Christ and the National Association of Evangelicals, organized the National Affairs Briefing Conference. The conference organizers invited president Jimmy Carter and his Republican rival, former California governor Ronald Reagan, to address a group of politically and socially conservative clergy. Carter declined. Reagan accepted. When Reagan stepped to the podium at the seventeen-thousand-seat Reunion Arena, he told the non-partisan group of conservative pastors and

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3 Ibid.
4 R. J. Rushdoony to Chester A. Green, January 10, 1945, RJR Library.
5 R. J. Rushdoony to Emil Schwab, January 15, 1945, RJR Library.
clergymen, “I know you can’t endorse me, but I endorse you and what you are doing.” The arena went wild. Historians speculate that the statement helped turn the electoral tide in Reagan’s favor as evangelicals and conservative Protestants abandoned President Carter to vote for his conservative Republican rival.

During one backroom meeting at the conference, Gary North, a long-time conservative Christian activist, turned to Robert Billings and observed what a remarkable event the National Affairs Briefing was. North lamented the fact that his father-in-law, Rousas John Rushdoony, wasn’t among the speakers leading up to Reagan’s daring endorsement. Year later North recalled, “We agreed that it was unfortunate that Rushdoony was not speaking.” Billings, who would later help lead Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority and serve in the Reagan administration’s Department of Education, responded: “If it weren’t for his [Rushdoony’s] books, none of us would be here.” North replied, “Nobody in the audience understands that.” Billings reportedly responded, “True, but we do.”

North and Billings—two of the most inside of conservative insiders—both agreed: Rushdoony’s ideas helped make Reagan’s ascendancy to the Republican presidential ticket possible, and his election probable.

Five months later, the man who helped make a candidacy possible, helped make a president cry. In January 1981, Rushdoony attended a Council for National Policy (CNP)

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7 Martin, With God on Our Side, 214-218.

meeting in Dallas, Texas. The CNP, famous for its secrecy and political influence within conservative Republican circles, assembled many of the most prominent American conservative activists, politicians, and religious leaders of the late twentieth century. Those present at the Dallas meeting formed a who’s who of the leaders of the newly insurgent Christian Right: Howard Phillips, founder of the Conservative Caucus, a powerful conservative lobbying organization; Jerry Falwell, pastor of the Thomas Road Baptist Church and head of the Moral Majority; Connie Marshner, a veteran conservative activist generally counted as a pioneering leader in the “pro-family” movement; and, Paul Weyrich, co-founder of the Heritage Foundation and Free Congress Foundation, a highly successful political fundraiser, and all around “evil genius” of the American conservative movement. R. J. Rushdoony, the former Presbyterian missionary, was now president of the Chalcedon Foundation, a small religious think tank based in Vallecito, California, which Newsweek had recently declared the “think tank” of the “Religious Right.”

At about 5:00 p.m. on January 18, Phillips learned of a proposed bill that would allow federal regulators an inordinate amount of control over private Christian schools and colleges. Prompted by the collective outrage of those present at the CNP, Phillips phoned the White House and asked to speak to Reagan’s chief of staff Ed Meese about the bill. Meese immediately returned the call to the influential Phillips, but rather than berate Meese, Phillips promptly handed the receiver to Rushdoony. Rushdoony calmly

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outlined the legal and philosophical dangers of the bill. He questioned how the “conservative” Reagan administration could launch such a direct assault on its key constituents—religiously conservative Christians who wanted to educate their children outside of the boundaries of state-funded public schools. In response, Rushdoony recalled, “Meese claimed tax exemption is a subsidy which gives the state the right of control. I said, ‘You are trying to repeal 20 centuries of Christian history.’ [I then asked for a] meeting before [the] measure went to Congress; he said it was on its way. I asked for meeting anyway, and he said yes. Then Howard, Jerry Falwell, Connie Marshner, Paul Weyrich, Father Charles Fiore, and Dr. E. V. Hill also spoke.”

Eight days later, Rushdoony got his meeting. Phillips, Marshner, Weyrich, Rushdoony, and several other conservative leaders assembled in Meese’s office in the White House to discuss the implications of the new regulations. For his part, Meese assembled a team of Justice Department lawyers to defend the legislation. The lawyers argued that some Christian institutions hid behind their private, religious-exempt status to racially segregate their classrooms by denying admission to various minority groups. The suggestion that the justice department might leverage a school’s tax-exempt status as a means of combating racism sent Rushdoony and the others into a fury. One Christian lawyer present argued that the administration was using tax policy to trump a religious institution’s first amendment right to both practice religion freely and peaceably assemble. During his time to speak Rushdoony insisted that the law would allow the “federal government to require women priests, pastors, and homosexual ones, as public


12 For a full discussion of the legal fight to desegregate “racist” Christian private schools, see chapter 5 of this dissertation.
policy.\textsuperscript{13} Meese’s lawyers agreed with the statement, but insisted, “it is within the legitimate power of the federal [government] if it so chooses. This administration will not so choose.”\textsuperscript{14} Meese agreed to consider some amendments to the bill, but made it clear the bill was a top priority for the Reagan administration and it was on its way to passage through congress. Phillips and Richard Viguerie, a prominent conservative activist and fundraiser, responded angrily to Meese’s unwillingness to compromise and made a public statement on the nightly news attacking the bill and insinuating that President Reagan had betrayed his most important political supporters.

That evening, following the meeting and the media hoopla, Rushdoony dined with conservative pundit Patrick J. Buchanan and his wife Shelley, Howard Phillips and his wife, and John Lofton, a conservative cable news pundit and syndicated columnist for the \textit{Washington Times}. During dinner, news arrived “that Reagan had tears in his eyes watching Howard Phillips [and] Richard Viguerie’s TV comments.”\textsuperscript{15} Without a trace a pity, Rushdoony sarcastically summed up the entire event in his personal journal with a harsh assessment of Reagan’s political trustworthiness: “As in California, he expects loyalty while giving none, and he works to please his critics.”\textsuperscript{16}

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This dissertation searches for the source of Reagan’s tears. How did an obscure Presbyterian missionary progress from making plans to take over a school board in Nevada to ultimately organizing a conservative Christian movement that made

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\item[14] Ibid.
\item[15] Ibid.
\item[16] Ibid.
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education—specifically *Christian* education—a national issue in the United States? What historical and cultural contingencies were necessary for the emergence of a movement of activists and religious leaders to invest so much hope in the power of education to reconstruct the United States into a Christian republic? What were the intellectual developments and political mechanisms that made organizations like the Council for National Policy and the Chalcedon Foundation central components in U.S. public policy? How did America’s most conservative president since World War II come to at once endorse and bemoan the very cultural and political forces that elevated him to the presidency? Finally, what does it mean to be “conservative;” is conservatism a political movement synonymous with Republican policies and predicated—as Reagan’s tears suggest—on the orderly development of party unity, the careful discipline of movement insiders, and the cultivation of a mobilized constituency? Or does American conservatism, as I will suggest in this project, resonate with much larger set of questions related to the broader and more problematic issue of the governance of human beings in all spheres of life (and death)?

To answer these questions, this dissertation follows the career of Rousas John Rushdoony from a reservation in Nevada to the halls of the White House and tells the story of the rise and fall of one of the most controversial and poorly understood religious and political movements to emerge in the United States during the twentieth century: Christian Reconstruction. Through the study of primary sources drawn from Rushdoony’s personal library and other archives from around the U.S., I tell the previously undocumented history of Christian Reconstructionism and its relationship to American conservatism.
This project details the intellectual and organizational history of Reconstructionism, a theological project situated at the juncture of religious practice and political action. Christian Reconstruction posits a radical reordering of the relationship between human beings and the Christian God. It seeks to “reconstruct” individual men through a form of Christian governance that, if implemented in the daily lives of U.S. citizens, would fundamentally alter the shape of American society, culture, politics, and economics. This dissertation explores the ways in which religious conservatives construct oppositional religious identities rooted in “conservative” Christian modalities of conduct and governance. It uses Rushdoony and his project of Christian Reconstruction to explore the ways in which certain forms of religiosity became central aspects of the conservative revolution of the late twentieth century at once endorsed and decried by America’s political and cultural elites.

Christian Reconstruction

The political and social theology of R. J. Rushdoony has become a hot property in recent years. For decades Rushdoony was largely unknown outside of small but highly influential circle of Protestant theologians, professors, political activists, and lawyers. But since the mid-1990s a growing body of scholarship and popular media sources have made Rushdoony notorious for his alleged influence on everything from the rise of the Religious Right to assassination of abortion doctors\(^\text{17}\) to the presidency of George W. Bush.

\(^{17}\) Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) discusses Christian Reconstruction’s influence on anti-abortion activist Michael Bray and Bray’s follower, Paul Hill. Similarly, in May 2009, Rushdoony’s name frequently circulated in blog discussions of Scott Roeder’s murder of a Wichita physician who performed abortions although there was no clear connection between Roeder’s actions and Rushdoony’s ideas.
Bush. Oddly enough, however, few scholars and even fewer of his media critics have bothered to take his ideas seriously. The result of this oversight is that too many of his critics—both scholarly and journalistic—have generally misunderstood Rushdoony’s ideas and, more importantly, have largely misrepresented his influence on contemporary religion and politics.

This dissertation offers an extended study of Rushdoony’s unique contribution to American culture, Christian Reconstruction, a project of social reorganization that advocates for the continuing relevance of Old Testament Biblical law to contemporary American society. Rushdoony’s now famous (or perhaps infamous) statement of this position, The Institutes of Biblical Law, appeared in1973. In the Institutes, He notoriously insisted that “a Godly order” would enforce the death penalty for a myriad of lawbreakers, including homosexuals, Wiccans, and incorrigible children. While the massive book was never a best seller, it did become a staple on reading lists for theologically conservative Protestants in the U.S. No less a publication than Billy Graham’s Christianity Today declared, “Without a doubt, the most impressive theological work of 1973 is Rousas J. Rushdoony’s Institutes of Biblical Law, a compendious treatment of a whole gamut of questions in governmental, social, and personal ethics from the perspective of the principle of law and the purpose of restoration of divine order


in a fallen world.”

By the end of the 1970s other works by Rushdoony and those he inspired were widely available in Christian bookstores throughout the U.S. Within two decades of its publication, law school faculty at Pat Robertson’s Regent University and Jerry Falwell’s Liberty University regularly assigned the Institutes and professors asked students to argue cases based on the precedents set in the Old Testament.

The Institutes introduced “dominion theology” to a generation of Christian activists hungry for a theological foundation for their political activism. Rushdoony’s Christian Reconstructionism appeals to Genesis 1:26-28 to establish the role a Christian must play in governing other human beings and in ruling the earth: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’” This passage amounts to a “creation mandate,” Rushdoony argued, which is a “requirement that humankind subdue the earth and exercise dominion over it.”

While many Christians today might interpret this Genesis “mandate” as either nullified by mankind’s fall into sin or as a command for humans to serve as benevolent stewards of the earth, Rushdoony argued that it is actually a commandant to “subdue all things and all nations to Christ and His law-word.” He argued that Biblical law and the sacrifice of Christ provide the means to allow Christians to abrogate the curse of the Fall. Through the law, the reconstructed Christian, or “dominion man,” as Rushdoony fondly

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22 Genesis 1:26-28 NIV.

23 Rushdoony, Institutes of Biblical Law, 1:14.

24 Ibid.
called him,\textsuperscript{25} could “take dominion” over the planet and “reconstruct” all of life in Christ’s image. Ultimately, as these reconstructed dominion men fill the planet, they will replace ungodly, secular forms of governance with theocracies and rule as Christ’s vicegerents. Because of this focus on dominion, theocracy and Biblical law, Rushdoony referred to his ideas synonymously as \textit{dominion theology}, \textit{Christian Reconstruction} or \textit{theonomy}, from the Greek \textit{theos} (God) and \textit{nomos} (law).

Not surprisingly, Rushdoony’s open call to conquer the world for Christ and execute evildoers is highly controversial. Even among socially and theologically conservative Protestants, the writings of Rushdoony and his myriad disciples cause a significant amount of nervous handwringing. As one anonymous activist confided to an interviewer, “Though we hide their books under the bed, we read them just the same.”\textsuperscript{26} This closeted, sometimes deliberately secretive adoption of Reconstructionist ideas has prompted nearly obsessive attempts on the part of some to uncover links between Rushdoony and current political realities, especially by observers who identify Rushdoony not only as a major influence on the Christian Right but also as the movement’s most dangerous patriarch. In fact, most accounts of the connections between the Christian Right, Christian Reconstruction, and dominion theology brusquely document its ties to Rushdoony’s political theology only to move on to allege that more prominent evangelicals such as Pat Robertson, D. James Kennedy, Tim Lahaye, and

\textsuperscript{25} Rousas John Rushdoony, “Dominion Man,” MP3, Contemporary Cultural Ethics, n.d.

Marvin Olasky, the guru behind Bush’s “compassionate conservatism,” are dominionist or Reconstructionist in their theological and sociological aspirations.

Rushdoony, however, was the first self-conscious “dominion” theologian whose work provided the systematic framework behind all subsequent manifestations of Protestant dominionism. In the last decade, he has become one of the most frequently cited intellectuals of the American rightwing, and yet he remains an understudied and fundamentally underappreciated figure in the religious, political, and cultural history of the twentieth century in the United States. This dissertation seeks to fill this void in the literature about the “Christian Right,” and also to document a small but important aspect of the recent history of the relationship between religion and politics in the United States. My central thesis is neither that Christian Reconstruction represents the dominant ideology of the so-called Religious Right, nor that Rushdoony was the father some theocratic conspiracy to usurp the power of the federal government for dominionist purposes. Instead, in the next six chapters, I explore the history of Christian Reconstruction and suggest that it is best understood as a theological movement that closely paralleled and resonated with the rise of the contemporary American conservative movement. Like the so-called “New Right,” Christian Reconstructionism was born in

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27 The “New Right” is usually contrasted with the “Old Right” that emerged in the 1930s as a response to the Roosevelt New Deal. Generally speaking the “New Right” was a grassroots, middleclass movement dominated by social conservatives who were comfortable with America’s position as a global power (as opposed to the economic protectionists and anti-interventionists of the Old Right who rejected American imperialism). The phrase has a longer history than is often noted as its usage long predates its popularity during the 1970s and 1980s. For example, Peter Viereck, a conservative critic of McCarthyism, used the phrases the “new conservatism” and the “new right” as early as 1955 to condemn the populist, anti-elitist tone of McCarthy’s anti-communist crusade (“The Revolt Against the Elite,” and “The Philosophical ‘New Conservatism,’” in Daniel Bell, ed., *The Radical Right* [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964], 161-208). Following Viereck, historian George Nash dates the rise of the New Right to post-World War II era of the early-1950s as a populist response to America’s new global power (*The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America, Since 1945* [New York: Basic Books, 1976], 112). The sociologist Sara Diamond situated the New Right coalition in the post-Goldwater context of 1964 (*Roads to Dominion*;
the traumatic aftermath of the Great Depression and World War II and it came of age during with the radical social changes of the 1960s. At its zenith during the 1970s and 1980s, Reconstructionism played an important role as an intellectual foundation for many socially conservative Christians who sought to reconcile their private faith with their public desire to affect public political action. In the 1990s, we’ll see that the movement entered a period of slow but obvious decline even as it became the whipping boy of many who sought to roll back the political gains made by conservatives in the 1970s and 1980s. Today, the ideas popularized by Rushdoony can be found everywhere, even though the institutional foundation of Reconstructionism has crumbled.

*The Conservative Milieu*

This dissertation situates Christian Reconstruction within the wider context of America’s perennial political philosophy: conservatism. I am interested in the problem of conservatism as it emerged in the wake for World War II, blossomed in the age of Reagan, only to wither in the Clinton interregnum and flower anew under Bush forty-three. This project is inseparable from problems raised for conservatism in a post-9/11 and post-George W. Bush America. Suddenly in 2010 the perennial power and fluid adaptability of American conservatism is on full display and the movement looks to be oddly resilient and perhaps resurgent as not only a philosophy of federal governance but...
as a philosophy of life in the aftermath of the election of the first black president of the American Republic, Barack Hussein Obama.

Indeed, in the age of Obama public commentators wrangle over conservatism’s status in contemporary American life. *New York Times* commentator Sam Tanenhaus says conservatism is dead,28 conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh is positive that conservative principals are again on the ascendancy29 and can guarantee the failure of the “far-left collectivist” agenda of Obama.30 On the fringes, activists and cranks grab major headlines: T.E.A. Partiers hope to “redeem the constitution”31 while Birthers seek to prove that the forty-fourth president of these United States is nothing less than a Kenyon-born sleeper agent determined to help establish a global Muslim caliphate.32 And the militias, once seen as a dangerous but passing fad of the 1990s, are back to defend the constitution at any cost.33 Meanwhile, Republican politicians find themselves in an awkward position, simultaneously defending “conservative” American principals of a strong national defense and fiscal responsibility while ducking questions of how their


management of the federal government during the George W. Bush era produced two problematic foreign wars and generated massive federal budget deficits.

As a consequence of the national and international political implications of conservatism, for about two decades scholars in the humanities and social sciences have paid close attention to the rise of conservatism as a political, social, and cultural force in the United States. Since conservatives successfully took over the Republican Party in 1964, conservatism has influenced every facet of American political life. Because of the resonance of conservatism with the Republican Party, scholars tend to focus on the electoral implications of conservatism. My argument is this project, however, is that the “real” story of American conservatism does not lie in its political influence, in its elite manifestation in Washington think tanks, or in its grassroots activism. Such analytical frameworks, while valuable, help to cultivate the image of a movement dominated by powerful, moneyed interests who exploit rank and file conservatives in order to get out the vote. That is, we find ourselves dealing with contemporary conservatism as a base and basic expression of one ideological smokescreen or another—an inverted reality that operates as a disguise for class interests, patriarchy, racism, heteronormativity, etc.

My intention in this project is to side step this marcopolitical perspective through which so-called “conservatives” are always-already articulated in terms of readymade, freestanding critical categories and instead focus on the nitty-gritty fights, controversies,

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34 For a survey that traces the relationship between conservatism and the GOP in immediate from the 1920s to 1970s, see Michael W. Miles, The Odyssey of the American Right (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980). Niels Bjerre-Poulsen, Right Face: Organizing the American Conservative Movement 1945-65 (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum, 2002) and Mary C. Brennan, Turning Right in the Sixties: The Conservative Capture of the GOP (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995) also provide thorough histories of the post-World War II formation of the conservatives movement and its transition from an intellectual movement into a political powerhouse.
and compromises that led to the emergence of certain forms of American conservatism. As such, I’m interested in the problem of “conservatisms;” the multiplicity of messy political, social, religious, and cultural philosophies that have mixed, melded, disintegrated, and warred throughout the twentieth century. My concern for the inherent plurality of American conservatisms is rooted in the basic fact that “conservatism” is a notoriously difficult concept to define; yet, like pornography, observers can identify it when they see it. For definitional clarity, I should note up front that I have a very specific and temporally bound form of conservatism in mind. This project documents the relationship between Christian Reconstruction and the post-World War II rise of what many observers now call the “American conservative movement.” As historian Patrick Allitt observes, “Before the twentieth century, it was unusual for Americans to refer to themselves politically as conservative, though many used the term as an adjective (as in ‘I take a conservative view on this issue’).” This adjectival use of conservative to modify a position implies an attitude or disposition toward “social and political change that looks for support to the ideas, beliefs, and habits of the past and puts more faith in the lessons of history that in the abstraction of political philosophy.” My focus is not on the emergence of the attitude of conservatism, but instead on the instantiation, cultivation, and refinement of this attitude into a proper noun used to identify several competing abstract political philosophies that coalesced in the 1950s and 1960s.

36 Ibid. In this sense, Allitt more or less accedes to Samuel Hunington’s definition of conservatism as a “situational” political philosophy that has as it “essence” the “passionate affirmation of the value of existing institution. Samuel P. Huntington, “Conservatism as an Ideology,” The American Political Science Review 51, no. 2 (June 1957): 456.
As historian George H. Nash argues, 1945 marks the moment when conservatives became “identifiable as resistance to certain forces perceived to be leftist, revolutionary, and profoundly subversive of what conservatives… deemed worth cherishing, defending, and perhaps dying for.”

In the decade following the war Nash argues that conservatives ceased to be “scattered voices of protest” as they coalesced into a unified intellectual movement organized around a more or less coherent core of shared values. These values—skepticism of centralized bureaucracy, support of free market economics, adherence to traditional moral standards and religious teachings, and deep unease with the newly emerging global order organized by the bipolar international structure of the Cold War—coalesced around an assemblage of individuals and organizations seeking to develop a philosophical order capable of making sense of a rapidly changing United States. But rather than foregrounding the commonalities and unity of this conservative movement, I’m most interested in the discordant figures that, by their actions and in their ideas, formed the limits and boundaries of conservatism.

This study of R. J. Rushdoony and the political theology of Christian Reconstruction explores the transition of conservative from an adjective to modify a political position to a noun labeling a vast and complex assemblage of political, social and cultural movements. Specifically, I’m interested in decentering the whole notion of American political conservatism to refocus on the broader problem of governance. My central argument in is that Rushdoony’s Christian Reconstruction resonates with a wider conservative milieu determined to address the interconnected problems of religion and

37 Nash, Conservative Intellectual Movement, xii.
38 Ibid.

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the governance of the conduct of human beings. This is my project in a nutshell, and I need to unpack this statement in order to designate the boundaries of the project that followings this introduction.

Following Linda Kintz, I use the concept of *resonance* to refer to the “intensification of political passion in which people with very different interests are linked together by feelings aroused and organized to saturate the most public, even global issues. Resonance is the almost ineffable element that constantly threatens to collapse church and state.”\(^3^9\) I have termed the medium of this resonance, the *conservative milieu*. I adopt this term milieu for two reasons. First, as French philosopher Michel Foucault noted, a milieu is “what is needed to account for action at a distance of one body on another. It is therefore the medium of an action and the element in which it circulates. It is therefore the problem of circulation and causality that is at stake in this notion of milieu.”\(^4^0\) Foucault’s definition of a milieu as a “phenomenon of circulation of causes and effects”\(^4^1\) nicely captures the medium through which the complex, reflexive intensifications of emotions, ideas, and bodily practices resonate in Kintz’s work.

Second, in the 1970s sociologist Colin Campbell suggested the phrase “cultic milieu” to capture the intricacies of the emergence, proliferation, and disintegration of New Religious Movements, which he characterized by their deviation from the dominant

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\(^4^1\) Ibid., 21.
Since Campbell first posited the phrase, numerous scholars have adopted his broader conceptualization of the term “milieu” in order to capture the complexities of a “world of persons, organizations, social interactions, and channels of communication, that makes the… milieu a genuine subculture rather than a mere intellectual or religious phenomenon.” So, for instance, Bron Raymond Taylor, in his study of the intersection of religion and the environmentalist movement, uses the phrases *environmental milieu* and *environmentalist milieu* to discuss “contexts in which environmentally concerned officials, scientists, activists, and other citizens connect with and reciprocally influence one another.” He goes on to liken the milieu to a “an eclectic *bricolage,*” by which he means “an amalgamation of bits and pieces of a wide array of ideas and practices drawn from diverse cultural systems, religious traditions, and political ideologies” which “are fused together, like a bricklayer or mason piecing together a wall or building.”

Rather than use Taylor’s mechanical metaphor for the milieu, I instead adopt the concept of the *assemblage* from the French thinkers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. As the American political scientist William E. Connolly helpfully glosses, an assemblage is “composed through relations of imbrications, infusion, and intercalation between

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43 For a sample of this research see the other essays in Jeffrey Kaplan and Hélène Lööw, eds., *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2002).


46 Ibid., 14.

heterogeneous elements that simultaneously enter into one another to some degree, and affect each other from the outside, and generate residual or torrential flows. An assemblage is composed of such complex temporal movements. Complexity, interactivity, and an uncertain degree of temporal openness compose its mode of being. Thus, I adapt the phrase conservative milieu to specify the subcultural assemblage that I focus on in this project. My goal is to use Rushdoony’s Christian Reconstruction as an opening or point of departure to explore the complex ways theologically conservative interpretations of Christianity resonated with a much larger assemblage of political, religious, and heterogeneous cultural elements that we now for the purpose of convenience refer to as the American conservative movement.

Preparation for the Future

The dissertation that follows is organized thematically and chronologically. Chronologically, each chapter roughly documents a decade in the intellectual and religious career of R. J. Rushdoony. Thus, chapters 1 and 2 situate Christian Reconstruction within the context of the emergence of the mid-century conservative milieu following World War II and social upheavals of the 1950s and sixties. Chapters 3 and 4 cover the sixties and seventies. Chapters 5 and 6 close with the conservative revolution of the 1980s and setbacks and disintegration of the nineties.

Thematically, the six chapters of this project form coherent pairs. Chapters 1 and 2 detail Rushdoony’s apprenticeship in the mid-twentieth century American conservative movement. They focus on his convergence with “mainstream” conservatism and discuss

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the confluence of this “mainstream” at some length. These first two chapters highlight the religious issues that grounded many on the American right, and demonstrate how these theological considerations eventually fractured the movement and led to the creation of the “secular” conservative movement and its “religious” parallel. Next, chapters 3 and 4 are organized around the theme of divergence. They focus on Rushdoony’s attempt to implement his unique social and cultural project, Christian Reconstructionism. They form the conceptual and theoretical core of this project by documenting how Rushdoony systematically and purposefully used his religious ideas to separate himself from the conservative mainstream discussed in chapters 1 and 2. Further, these two chapters move away from a focus on the life of Rushdoony to open a wider window on the social and political implications of Reconstructionism. Finally, chapters 5 and 6 explore the complex ways that Reconstructionism ultimately reentered the mainstream of American conservatism while remaining at odds with it.

Moving beyond generalities, each chapter homes in on specific moments of Rushdoony’s career and explores their interrelationship with and interpenetration of the wider American conservative movement. Thus, chapter 1 explores Rushdoony early ministry. It profiles the ambitious young missionary presented at the beginning of this Introduction and explores his early theological and intellectual development. The chapter also introduces the nascent conservative and libertarian movements that Rushdoony became invested in during his early years. It sets the tone for the chapters that follow by introducing the reader to the critical theological issues that dominated Rushdoony’s later political activism. Specifically, it outlines the importance of Ernst H. Kantorowicz’s concept of political theology and the Christian epistemology of Cornelius Van Til to
Rushdoony’s later ministry. It also sketches the broader contours of the conservative milieu that emerged conterminously with Rushdoony’s concerns about the power of Christianity to limit the size and scope of a governmental bureaucracy.

Chapter 2 focuses more narrowly on the conservative milieu of the mid twentieth century. Here I pay particular attention to the emergence of the “mainstream” of the American conservative movement, and study how it coalesced at the expense of religious conservatives such as Rushdoony. The chapter is organized into three parts. The first is a general exploration of the discourse of post-War conservatism. It considers how conservatives during the 1950s and sixties defined the limits of their movement: What do conservatives conserve? How are they different from “liberals”? And, what is the proper place of religion in the conservative movement? The next two sections of the chapter move away from these broader questions to consider how they played out in two specific contexts: the William Volker Fund and the Center for American Studies. Rushdoony was an important figure in these largely unknown, but highly influential mid-century organizations. Ultimately, I explore how his different definition of “conservatism” eventually cost him a potentially lucrative position at the heart of the emerging mainstream of American conservatism.

Chapter 3 focuses specifically on the problem of the “remnant,” an important theoretical issue for mid-century conservatives who sought to explain how a tiny minority of right-thinking men might retake the United States from it ruling liberal cabal. The chapter also introduces the much larger problems of governance and the secular, two concepts which I draw from the later lectures of Michel Foucault and the writings of anthropologist Talal Asad. Here I argue that Rushdoony used his new non-profit
organization, the Chalcedon Foundation, to popularize a new form of Christian governance. Chalcedon cultivated this form of governance through a public educational campaign similar to the one developed by Robert Welch and his John Birch Society (JBS). In the end I suggest that the goal of Chalcedon and the JBS was nothing less than the creation of a “remnant” of conservative women and men who could use education to rebuild the American Republic in the wake of the chaotic rule of a “liberal” elite.

Chapter 4 continues these themes of governance and education to focus on how Christian Reconstruction seeks to relocate the discipline and governance of human beings from the state to the family. I spend a considerable amount of time exploring the familial implications of Rushdoony’s political theology: How does Christian Reconstruction formulate the “proper” relationships between women, men, and children? Further how are these familial structures cultivated as an alternative to bureaucratized forms of state governance? I address each of these questions by exploring the relationship between what I call Rushdoony’s familialized form of governance and its relationship to the epistemological problem posed by homosexuality. Ultimately, I close the chapter by arguing that Rushdoony’s project of Christian Reconstruction is neither archaic nor timeless, but is instead very much a product of the modern and post-modern intellectual trends of the post-war United States.

Chapter 5 documents the growth of Christian Reconstruction into an intellectual and political movement that helped lay the foundation for the rise of the Christian Right in the 1970s and eighties. It details the relationship between Rushdoony’s work as an education and legal reformer and a wider trend on the part of evangelical Protestants to engage in direct political activism. At no point does this chapter suggest that Rushdoony
typified the Christian Right or was a singular influence on the movement. Instead, it
dокументs what is actually known about Rushdoony’s relationship to the Christian Right
and clarifies some of the more absurd claims made by his supporters and many
vociferous critics. This chapter expands beyond my narrower focus on Rushdoonian
Christian Reconstruction to explore rival forms of the movement started by his son-in-
law, Gary North, and other individuals influenced by Rushdoony.

Chapter 6 continues this discussion by highlighting the differences and
similarities between Christian Reconstructionists and the Christian Right while also
discussing how Rushdoony became a target of derision for pundits and journalists
seeking to dismiss or attack the Christian Right. The first section of the chapter explores
how Rushdoony became a target of suspicion for American evangelicals—especially
those associated with Billy Graham and the publication Christianity Today. I outline how
Christian Reconstruction created deep tensions between Protestants who otherwise shared
many of the same political and intellectual goals but disagreed on significant theological
issues. The second section illustrates how these theological differences concretized into
institutional differences. The third section closes with a review of coverage of Christian
Reconstruction in the popular media.

In the end, this project illustrates how Rushdoony’s vision of Christian
Reconstruction resonated with the deepest anxieties of post-World War II American
culture. From Rushdoony’s earliest warnings about the growing danger of the centralized
federal government to his current excoriation as a hate-filled theocratic homophobe,
Christian Reconstruction cuts straight to the heart of a century bedeviled by questions of
religion and its proper relationship to American society. In the 1950s and sixties, men
like Rushdoony created an alternative to “liberal” American culture. They shaped a conservative milieu assembled from a diverse set of interests, ideas, and organizations. In the 1970s and eighties, Christian Reconstruction emerged simultaneously with and was reinforced by the emergence of the Christian Right. By the 1990s, Reconstructionism was a Rorschach test for the social anxieties of any number of progressives, conservatives, secularists, and Christians. No longer simply a prominent reflection of far-right anxieties, Reconstructionism has become a screen on which critics and supporters project a myriad of competing interpretations about the place of religion in American society and its relationship to “conservative” ideas.

This study of Christian Reconstruction provides a unique opportunity to map these complex screenings. It allows one to reinterpret the recent history of the politics of religion in United States. It begs serious questions about the limits and value of secularization theory in sociology and this theory’s popular reconceptualization as a political ideology of progress, pluralism, and as the very foundation of modern democracy; it challenges many of the assumptions scholars hold about socially conservative, politically active Protestants and their relationship to capitalism and the state; and, finally, it provides an occasion for reflecting on the ways that scholars, journalists, and average Americans conceptualize the boundaries between religion and politics in U.S. Finally, as Reagan’s tears suggest, this project emphasizes the inherent complexity of the American conservative movement and highlights the complex interpenetrations and disjunctions between Christian Reconstruction, the Christian Right and the victorious Reagan Revolution of 1980. It unsettles the history of American
conservatism by highlighting the complex milieu from which it emerged and provides some provisional insights about how the conservative milieu may evolve.
Chapter 1: The Early Ministry of Rousas John Rushdoony

Political Theology, Sovereignty, and Christian Epistemology

“... Turn in your crown, vacate that throne/ By usurpation seized from Him./ Let the Lord reign, and be no counselor of state to Him./ God is the one true circumstance of faith/ Whom rebel man deserting/ Falls headlong into time and time’s own circumstance./ This road to hell is paved with circumstance that is not God./ And so, please God, I shall not walk this way again.”

– R. J. Rushdoony, poem dated February 25, 1948

“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

– 2 Corinthians, 10: 5 (NIV)

On April 20, 1915, Ottoman forces laid siege to Van, an ancient walled city of some 80,000 Muslim and Christian Armenian residents. Situated in the shadow of snow-capped mountains on the shore of Lake Van, the city had long been a hotbed of Armenian nationalism and revolutionary anti-Ottoman sentiment. For much of the late 1800s and early 1900s, Van and its surrounding countryside were plagued by brutal tit-for-tat outbreaks of violence as the local Turkish, Kurdish, and Armenian populations vied for political and cultural control over the region. With the onset of World War I,

1 Rousas John Rushdoony, “(The Road to Hell),” in The Luxury of Words: The Poems of Rousas John Rushdoony (Vallecito, CA: Dorothy Rushdoony and the Rushdoony Irrevocable Trust, 2003), 8. Portions of this chapter appeared as “

2 Justin McCarthy et al., The Armenian Rebellion at Van, Utah Series in Turkish and Islamic Studies (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2006), 6-7.

3 See chapters 4 and 5 in McCarthy et al., The Armenian Rebellion at Van.
Armenian separatists turned to Russian support for their cause, while Turkish officials looked for an opportunity to settle the Armenian problem once and for all. With the subsequent outbreak of ethnic, religious, and nationalistic violence, the Armenian population paid a heavy price.

Present during the eruption of the violence was one Yeghiazar Khachadour Rushdouni, the future father of Rousas John Rushdoony. Y. K. Rushdouni could, according to family lore, trace his descent back through the ages to the first Armenian noble families to convert to Christianity after Gregory the Illuminator evangelized the area in A.D. 301. From that date onward, it was traditional for noble families such as the Rushdounis to send at least one son into the priesthood, thus creating a more-or-less unbroken priestly succession within the Rushdouni line until the late 1800s. For Y. K. Rushdouni, his connection with the ancient Armenian Apostolic Church ended abruptly in the late 1800s when Turkish forces killed most his family in 1896. The violence left Y. K. orphaned and homeless. He found refuge in the city of Van in an orphanage established by an American Presbyterian missionary, Dr. George C. Raynolds. Under the influence of the American Protestant, Rushdouni converted from Armenian orthodox Christianity to Presbyterianism. Raynolds sent the young Armenian to the University of Edinburgh and New Mound College in Scotland to study. After completing his studies in 1914, Rushdouni returned to Van to aid Raynolds in his missionary work and wedded

4 Y. K. Rushdouni did not standardize and simplify his surname until he and his family immigrated to the United States of America in 1916. I retain the original spelling of “Rushdouni” for my discussion of the Rushdouni in the Armenia.


Vartanoush Gazarian, the daughter of a local merchant. Their first child, Rousas George, was born at Raynolds’s mission hospital in the same year.\(^7\)

With the outbreak of violence in Van, Rushdouni wrote vivid eyewitness accounts for newspapers in England and the United States. He reported that tensions between Turkish soldiers and the Armenian residents of Van turned violent on April 20\(^{th}\) when a group of Turkish soldier “tried to seize some village women on their way to the city” of Van.\(^8\) When two Armenian men came to the women’s rescue, the response, according to Rushdouni’s accounts, was immediate: “The Turkish soldiers fired on the Armenians and killed them. This served as a signal. The booming of cannons and rattle of rifles began from every side, and it was realised that the Armenian quarter [of Van] was besieged. In the evening houses in the Armenian quarter could be seen burning in every direction.”\(^9\) Turkish artillery devastated the wood and mud brick homes of Van, while Armenian men took to the city walls and began digging trenches and building other makeshift fortifications in the city’s Armenian neighborhoods.\(^10\) Rushdouni’s accounts attest to the Armenian’s stubborn defiance: “The spirit of the fighters was enough to inspire those that were in despair. I have seen young men who had fought the enemy day and night, without sleeping. … While the shrapnel was raining down upon Van, the Armenian

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\(^7\) Ibid.


\(^9\) Ibid.

\(^10\) McCarthy et al., Armenian Rebellion at Van, 200-206.
children were playing soldiers in the streets.”\textsuperscript{11} Unfortunately for Rushdouni and his wife, baby George did not survive the siege; three days before Turkish forces lifted the siege in order to resist a Russian offensive, Rousas George succumbed to measles and whooping cough, the consequences of the squalid conditions in the besieged city.\textsuperscript{12} He was eleven months old.

When the Russian army entered Van in May 1915, they requisitioned Rushdouni’s house and, in kind, gave him a lame cavalry horse that he could use to transport his family from the besieged city to safety behind Russian lines. Rushdouni used the horse to ferry his wife, family members, and the aged and infirmed out of the city and to safety. Once safely away from Turkish forces in Russian territory, Y. K. used the remainder of his wife’s dowry to secure passage first to the port city of Archangel in northern Russia and then finally to New York City. In the United States, Y. K. entered the clergy and adopted “Rushdoony” as the standardized anglicized spelling of his family’s surname. Shortly after their arrival in New York, Vartanoush, now known by the English translation of her name, Rose, gave birth to the Rushdoony’s second son, Rousas John in 1916. The Rushdoony family then moved to Kingsburg, California, a small farming community south of Fresno, where Y. K. started the Armenian Martyr’s Presbyterian Church. His son was baptized in Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{13}

As a boy in Kingsburg, Rose and Y. K.’s second son learned to read English and spent hours reading the Bible under the kerosene lamps of his family’s old farmhouse.


\textsuperscript{12} Rushdoony, “A Biographical Sketch of My Father,” 22.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 23.
Years later, R. J. recalled, “By the time I reached my teens, I had read the Bible through from cover to cover, again and again and again, half a dozen times and more.” When Y. K. told a local Congregational minister of his son’s singular reading habits, the minister quizzed the boy on some of the racier parts of scripture and confirmed that the child had read them. In response, the minister wondered aloud, “What’s going on in that little head of yours? Can you be trusted to be loose in society?” For his secular education, Rousas John attended public elementary schools in Kingsburg and Detroit, where his father accepted another Armenian congregation in 1925. Y. K.’s bad health forced the Rushdoony family to return to California in 1931 where Rousas completed his schooling in Kingsburg and eventually enrolled at the University of California at Berkeley. During his university years Rushdoony resolved to put all of his intensive Bible reading to good use and follow his father’s example to become a Presbyterian minister.

On May 14, 1944, after several years of undergraduate and graduate study, Rev. George Huntston Williams (1914-2000) delivered an ordination sermon in honor of his friend, Rousas John, at the Chinese Presbyterian Church in San Francisco. As Williams preached, he noted Rushdoony’s Armenian heritage and his ties to an ancient family of priests and churchmen. Williams connected Rushdoony’s ancient lineage to his current calling as a missionary, noting, “It is thus a moving and very fitting gesture, that you of this congregation… should provide the setting and occasion for the ordination of this scion of an ancient Christian house as an Evangelist, to be sent forth to still another

people, the Paiute and Shoshone Indians in the mountains of Nevada.”

In Rushdoony, Williams saw an “heir of a great national Christian heritage” who would “enunciate anew the Gospel which seems to have been forgotten for a season.”

Williams, who went on to teach at Harvard and author the now-classic text *The Radical Reformation*, met Rushdoony at the University of California at Berkeley, where the two studied under the medievalist Ernst H. Kantorowicz. There they formed a fast friendship that served as the foundation for William’s highly personal sermon.

Williams’s address captured the complex ethnic and national identity of the young, ambitious clergyman at the outset of his long, prolific career. At twenty-eight, Rushdoony was the product of the Old and New Worlds. His parents had suffered greatly at the hands of a Muslim ruling elite in a country riven by political and religious upheaval as it transitioned from a medieval religious empire into a secular, democratic state. His brother was dead, a tragic human sacrifice to these sweeping social and cultural transformations. Yet Rushdoony and his family survived precisely because of these very changes: revolutions in transportation, industry, and political freedom allowed a generation of Armenians to flee the Ottoman Empire and thrive in the United States. With his birth in New York, Rushdoony retained his father’s faith in the almighty power of Christ and longed to serve in the priesthood as generations of Rushdoony men had

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15 George Huntston Williams, “The Ordination Ceremony of Rousas John Rushdoony,” May 14, 1944, RJR Library. Years later, after glimpsing Rushdoony on a PBS special hosted by Bill Moyers, in which Rushdoony defended, among others things, his support for the death penalty for many of the offenses listed in the Old Testament, Williams wrote to Rushdoony: “It seemed last night utterly implausible that it was I whom you asked to preach the ordination sermon for you in the Presbyterian Church in Chinatown in S.F.” (George Huntston Williams to R. J. Rushdoony, December 30, 1987, RJR Library). Williams was likely more theologically liberal than Rushdoony in the 1940s, but he definitely was by the 1980s.

16 Ibid.

before him. Also like his father, Rushdoony aspired to missionary work where he could similarly focus his attention on political and culturally marginalized populations. But where Y. K. sought to bring Protestantism to his own oppressed people in Armenia and to their diasporic communities in the United States, R. J. spent his college years working with Chinese immigrants in the slums of San Francisco. With his ordination, Rushdoony resolved to turn his religious energies to two of America’s most marginalized populations, the Paiute and Shoshone Indians of Nevada.

Thus, the very man who, as I indicated in the introduction, would decades later help orchestrate a revolt of conservative politicos and manage to make a president cry, began his career by aspiring to be a spiritual leader of the very least of Americans. This chapter traces the development of Rushdoony’s theological and political ideas from their earliest manifestation in the classrooms of Berkeley to a reservation of in Nevada. It seeks to document how his status as a political and religious refugee from Ottoman Turkey informed his perceptions of the United States’ federal government’s systematic attempt to conquer a people through violence and the soft brutalities of cultural warfare. Further, it explores how Rushdoony became convinced that only a rigorous, epistemologically self-aware Christianity could provide a viable response to such oppressive state actions. Broadly, the purpose of this largely biographical chapter is to lay a foundation for understanding how Rushdoony and his ideas would later play a small but important role in the revolution of governance that I cited in my introduction to this project. While Rushdoony’s precise formulation of this new form of Christian governance—Christian Reconstruction, as he would later name it—would not come until the 1960s, its broad outlines will be sketched in this chapter (readers will have to wait
until chapters three and four for a full reckoning of Rushdoony’s theory of Christian governance).

Whittling down this broader context, this chapter also seeks to expose the contours of specific moments in Rushdoony’s intellectual development. Specifically, I seek to describe how Rushdoony seamlessly integrated his secular education at Berkeley with his conservative theological perspective to create a political philosophy that resonated with some of the earliest rumblings of what we now call the American conservative movement. First, at Berkeley Rushdoony encountered the “political theology” of Ernst Hartwig Kantorowicz. Kantorowicz’s lectures exploring the relationship between specific legal and constitutional forms and divine revelation convinced Rushdoony that the political is always and essentially religious. Second, through a chance encounter with the writings of Cornelius Van Til, a Reformed theologian teaching at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Rushdoony became convinced that Christian epistemological positions are antithetical to all other means of knowing and he set out on a mission to carry this insight to the entire church. Next, Rushdoony linked efforts to know and understand the world with efforts to control it. The growth of state-centered solutions for social problems was grounded on a faulty understanding of humanity’s relationship (or lack thereof) with God, he argued. A proper epistemology would ultimately lead to a limited—even libertarian—view of the state. Finally, his concern with Christian epistemological self-awareness led to the development of a program for reforming Christian education starting with the church and expanding to

I. **“First Owyhee and Then the World”**

During his tenure as a university and divinity school student, R. J. Rushdoony developed into a determined political and theological conservative while completing an indisputably “liberal”—even leftist—education. Before his ordination in 1944, he had graduated with an undergraduate degree in English and a master’s degree in education from Berkeley. His time at Berkeley exposed him to modernist trends in literature, philosophy, historiography, and educational theory. Even as he worked to understand the ideas presented to him, Rushdoony recoiled from what he saw as a degenerate and dangerous anti-Christian humanism lurking in the texts encountered. He would enroll in classes and then drop out, “with or without a grade,” after he learned what he wanted. Even with this “rebellious” and “independent attitude” he managed to graduate with honors and then turned his attention to divinity school. He took his divinity degree from the Pacific School of Religion (PSR) in Berkeley, a theologically and politically left-leaning institution far removed from the orthodox centers of American Presbyterianism, whose faculty, Rushdoony believed, had more interest in Karl Marx than Jesus Christ.

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19 This section is based on the extensive revision, expansion, and reworking of Michael J. McVicar, “‘First Owyhee, and then the World:’ The Early Ministry of R. J. Rushdoony,” *Faith For All of Life* (November/December, 2008): 18-22, 33.

20 Rushdoony graduated with his bachelor’s in 1938, his master’s in 1940, and his divinity degree in 1944, see Larson, “Oral History Interview,” 36.

21 Ibid., 32.

22 Ibid., 48.
While at PSR, Rushdoony sought refuge from the modern theological liberalism of the seminary by cultivating friendship with students, faculty, and laymen who shared his conservatism. After leaving the bay area for the reservation, Rushdoony maintained these friendships—most notably with former PSR students Orval Clay and David Stowe and Williams from Berkeley—via a series of letters that still survive in his library. This correspondence provides an important record of Rushdoony’s difficult growth from an obscure missionary into the founder of the Christian Reconstruction movement. By focusing on this correspondence, I trace many of the key ideas that ran through Rushdoony’s entire ministry and try to map the history of these ideas and more clearly understand why they were important to the young minister.

A Harsh and Ruthless Ministry

Shortly after his ordination, Rushdoony and his wife Arda packed his “considerable and well-mounted library” into a large truck and moved to Owyhee, Nevada, to serve as Presbyterian missionaries on the Duck Valley Indian Reservation. Owyhee, located in northeastern part of the state, just south of the Idaho border, was a tiny isolated community of Paiutes, Shoshones, cowboys, and miners. Rushdoony found himself in a land of extremes: harsh weather, lawlessness, and, paradoxically, constant government intervention in the day-to-day life of the reservation community. In his early correspondence from Owyhee, Rushdoony often commented on the stark splendor of the isolated mission. “We are beautifully situated here,” he wrote to one of his former

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23 At this point in his pastoral and scholarly career, Williams had ties with both Unitarianism and Congregationalism and Rushdoony had yet to develop into a Reformed conservative. Williams and Rushdoony would eventually diverge both theologically and politically, but in the 1940s the two still had much in common.

professors at Berkeley, “surrounded by high mountains and cradled in a small high valley.” The beauty enchanted Rushdoony, a young man who had grown up in a rural farming community, but who had also spent much of his later childhood in urban Detroit and his college years in the San Francisco area. The former seminarian and philosophy student took up hunting and fell in love with fishing, often wandering off alone on lengthy, isolated fishing trips. The rural setting of Owyhee, prompted him to conclude, “I love it here and would gladly remain all my days if God so wills.”

For all of its physical beauty, Owyhee also brought severe hardship. Heavy snow and frigid temperatures dominated from fall until spring. During his first fall in Owyhee, the snows began in November and continued until Christmas. “We have had snow for a month and half now,” Rushdoony wrote in December 1944. “Our hills and mountains are wonderfully white…. On Sunday mornings I track through the clean snow to the Church to tug at the bell rope, with the joyous anticipation of hearing the clear ringing of the bell blend in to the frosty stillness.” These harsh winters limited travel while spring thaws unleashed torrents of water that destroyed bridges and turned roads into an impassable, muddy soup. Mail was always delayed for one reason or another and electronic communication—telephones and telegrams—operated at the whims of the weather and the hapless bureaucrats in Owyhee and nearby Mountain City, Nevada. Only summers allowed for free travel and easy communication.

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25 R. J. Rushdoony to Kantorowicz, March 22, 1945, RJR Library.
27 R. J. Rushdoony to George Huntston Williams, February 26, 1945, RJR Library.
28 R. J. Rushdoony to George Huntston Williams, December 20, 1944, RJR Library.
Aside from the difficulties imposed by the severe climate, the young minister discovered that the mission posed challenges he had not anticipated. When Rushdoony arrived in Owyhee, he found a mission in “deplorable” condition: “a collapsing building, cracking walls through which snow drifts, and general disrepair with no prospect of financial assistance.” Worse still, he believed that the degradation of the mission served as an analogue for the moral condition of the locals. “Lawlessness prevails,” Rushdoony wrote a friend, reporting “extensive drinking, gambling (legalized), fornication, rape, adultery, and extremely widespread illegitimacy.” The “lawlessness” cited here is significant because many of the “crimes”—drinking, gambling, and illicit sex—were in fact legal on the reservation, yet Rushdoony was appealing to the higher demands of his religious office and saw it as his duty to enforce God’s laws, not man’s—a calling that would dominate his entire life.

The moment the Rushdoonies set foot in Owyhee they asserted themselves in this role as the moral and legal force in the community. Letter after letter from his time on the reservation tells of their combined efforts to turn the locals away from drink and fornication. In one compelling instance, Rushdoony summarized a particularly eventful Saturday night:

The gambling house is the center of all evil here. My wife was out until 9:30 p.m. clearing the girls off the streets and then I took over. We brought in one 7th grade boy, dead drunk, and laid him out in the front study for the rest of the night, sent a drunken 8th grader home in the care of an elder, slightly drunk but repentant boy. Others, very drunk, were carried off into the willows out of my reach. At midnight, I summoned the government superintendent to the manse, to burn his ears with an account of conditions. … At 2:30 [a.m.], a fierce fight broke out in

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29 R. J. Rushdoony to Orval Clay, December 15, 1944, RJR Library.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
the Owyhee Club (the gambling house), and knives were drawn. … At 5:30, another bad fight, in which two boys I covet for Christ were involved. … Then home for sleep from 6:00 to 7:00, dressed and lying on the day-bed.\textsuperscript{32}

He would preach his Sunday sermon in a few short hours.

Rushdoony reported that his Sunday sermons met this lawless environment with an uncompromising Gospel. To Orval Clay, a friend from his PSR days, he summarized the key themes of his reservation sermons as follows: “Atonement, justification by faith, the two natures of Christ and His virgin birth, the congenital evil inherent in all civilizations and culture, the despair of man, the Church Triumphant and the Church Militant.” It all added up, he told his friend, to “a harsh and ruthless ministry” that “wage[s] war in God’s name.”\textsuperscript{33} In short, Rushdoony saw himself as a holy warrior crusading on the very frontiers of Christianity and using as his weapon the most traditional and fundamentally orthodox Protestant message he could muster. If the Satanic evil of the reservation sought to grind him down with its harsh environment and ruthless lawlessness, then Rushdoony would respond with an unsparing gospel that laid bare the sinful depravity of man. Owyhee required the full attention of a young, hearty minister willing to endanger his family’s spiritual and physical wellbeing for the Gospel. If Rushdoony described his ministry as “harsh and ruthless,” then his message was perfectly suited for the natural and social realities of Owyhee.

Visible Sovereignty

As Rushdoony struggled to grow his outpost of the church, he also eagerly awaited word from the University of Chicago Press regarding his first major manuscript.

\textsuperscript{32} R. J. Rushdoony to Emil Schwab, January 15, 1945, RJR Library.

\textsuperscript{33} R. J. Rushdoony to Orval Clay, December 15, 1944, RJR Library.
While a student at Berkeley, Rushdoony studied under the great mediaevalist Ernst Hartwig Kantorowicz (1895-1963). Kantorowicz, who eventually left Berkeley for the Center for Advanced Study in Princeton after refusing to take an anti-Communist loyalty oath in 1950, encouraged Rushdoony to seek publication of a massive research project he completed for a class. The manuscript, *Visible Sovereignty*, studied Puritan government and its relationship to secular power in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England.

In Berkeley, Kantorowicz “had a small following of carefully selected, enthusiastic students, who were thoroughly aware of the uniqueness of their teacher’s qualifications and of their own unequaled opportunity” to study under his guidance. While it’s not clear if Rushdoony was among the elite of the Kantorowicz cult, he was certainly a hanger-on and close friend with George H. Williams, one of Kantorowicz’s

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34 The following biographical material about Kantorowicz is drawn from Norman F. Cantor, “The Nazi Twins: Percy Ernst Schramm and Ernst Hartwig Kantorowicz,” in *Inventing the Middle Ages: The Lives, Works, and Ideas of the Great Medievalists of the Twentieth Century*, (New York: W. Morrow, 1991), 79-117; and Yakov Malkiel, “Ernst H. Kantorowicz,” in *On Four Modern Humanists: Hofmannsthal, Gundolf, Curtius, Kantorowicz*, ed. Arthur R. Evans (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 146-219. As a matter of odd coincidence, Kantorowicz was born on the same day in the same year as Rushdoony’s other major intellectual influence, Cornelius Van Til. Kantorowicz once drily noted this fact to Rushdoony: Van Til, the medievalist wrote, “actually was born on the same day and in the same year as myself. I wonder whether a good astrologer could make something out of this coincidence” (Ernst H. Kantorowicz to R. J. Rushdoony, April 24, 1959, RJR Library).

35 The irony, of course, was that Kantorowicz was an arseconservative and rabid anti-Communist who in 1919 had served in the *Freikorps*, a Weimar-era paramilitary organization made up of German military officers eager to combat Communists. According to Norman Cantor, Kantorowicz “honestly insisted that in 1919 he had shot Communists” as a *Freikorps* assassin, “but signing a loyalty oath, he claimed, was a violation of academic freedom and would set the universities on the same downward slope toward what had happened in Germany” (Cantor, “The Nazi Twins,” 100). Beyond his association with the *Freikorps*, the German expatriate had been a member the Stefan George Circle, a literary group often associated with proto-Nazi sentiments. In part because of his Jewish ancestry and his refusal to sign a loyalty oath to *der Führer*, Kantorowicz was ultimately forced to flee Germany first for Britain in 1938 and then the for United States in 1939 (Malkiel, “Kantorowicz,” 193 and 200).

36 Ibid., 203.
elite protégées. It is clear, however, that Rushdoony and Kantorowicz were close enough for the two to discuss each others’ work in sufficient depth for Kantorowicz to guide the writing of Visible Sovereignty.

The inspiration for the project emerged from a discussion between Rushdoony and Kantorowicz regarding the latter’s recently published essay, “The ‘King’s Advent.’” As the two sat in the odd, locally-crafted rattan porch furniture with which Kantorowicz had furnished his bay-side apartment, Rushdoony pointed out an occasion in Cromwell-era England in which James Naylor, a Quaker, had used pageantry typically associated with a king’s advent to enter the city of Bristol and declare himself a messianic figure. The professor had been unaware of the event and was so delighted by Rushdoony’s account that he excitedly explained that would write a piece to demonstrate how this event marked the democratization of the king’s advent by expanding it into the realm of political protest against the king. Suddenly Kantorowicz paused and sighed, “Oh, but I can’t do it. This is outside my period.” Not concerned with such
disciplinary limitations, Rushdoony began researching the event and many others under Kantorowicz’s supervision. Rushdoony complied the research into a book and sent the resulting manuscript to Chicago.

Although his ultimate plans for the work are not clear, Rushdoony apparently saw it as his ticket to academia. Throughout his letters authored in 1944 and 1945 Rushdoony cited the “interim living” imposed on him by the press’s editors. He also suggested that if Chicago accepted the manuscript, he would need to leave the reservation to revise part of the text. At times he implied he might not return to missionary work if the manuscript went press. In other words, Visible Sovereignty represented an important pivot in Rushdoony’s ministerial life. Throughout this period he pondered pursuing a Ph.D. and seeking faculty positions at various colleges. Had Chicago accepted his manuscript, it is likely that Rushdoony could have used the book to secure academic work and even submitted it as a dissertation leading him down a very different career path.

In March 1945 John Scoon, an editor with Chicago, rejected Rushdoony’s book. Scoon wrote that the press could not publish the text because it “cannot get from the mills even the small amount of paper which we are allotted by the government.” Also, the editor worried that the manuscript’s focus on England might make it more suitable for a non-American press: “your manuscript is almost entirely devoted to England and we feel that some other organization such as the Oxford or the Cambridge Press would not only

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42 For examples see R. J. Rushdoony to Orval Clay, December 15, 1944, RJR Library; R. J. Rushdoony to George Huntston Williams, February 26, 1945, RJR Library; and R. J. Rushdoony to Ernst H. Kantorowicz, March 22, 1945, RJR Library.

43 R. J. Rushdoony to Ernst H. Kantorowicz, March 22, 1945, RJR Library.

44 John Scoon to R. J. Rushdoony, March 21, 1945, RJR Library.
do a better job with it but would have a larger sale, because of their tradition and the audience they reach." In this ironic twist, government rationing and a study of European Protestantism undid a man who eventually became infamous as a critic of government intervention in the economy and known primarily for his influence on American Protestantism.

Even with this rejection, Rushdoony temporarily believed he might find a publisher for the work. At this point in his intellectual development, Rushdoony considered himself a Kantorowicz disciple. The aspiring historian made this clear as he pondered the fate of his rejected manuscript. Writing to Kantorowicz, Rushdoony wondered if Kantorowicz might be interested in publishing one of his studies alongside Rushdoony’s work and one by George H. Williams, the man who preached Rushdoony’s ordination sermon and fellow Kantorowicz disciple: “It requires temerity on my part to think in terms of coupling my work with your’s and George’s, but the three do represent a single strand and a product of the Kantorowiczian School.” This is an important comment because it underscores that Rushdoony did not yet think of himself as “Christian” historian; he was, by his own admission, a product of the “Kantorowiczian School.”

45 Ibid.
46 R. J. Rushdoony to Ernst H. Kantorowicz, May 20, 1946, RJR Library.
47 Years later, recalling his relationship with Kantorowicz, Rushdoony noted, “I genuinely liked the man,” but went on to describe him as “a decadent” who “belonged to the whole world of scholarship that I feel is bankrupt.” Rushdoony concluded, “But his thinking was tremendous, and I am very deeply grateful for what I learned from him” (Larson, “Oral History Interview,” 42). Although it’s impossible to know what exactly Kantorowicz thought of Rushdoony, the medievalist did send Rushdoony an interesting note responding to the latter’s Van Til, International Library of Philosophy and Theology: Modern Thinkers Series (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960). “You know,” Kantorowicz wrote, “of course, my general attitude and you can imagine that the aggressiveness of your… writings is far remote from my modest historical outlooks. Also, I find it difficult to make God responsible for all the facts” (Ernst H. Kantorowicz to R. J. Rushdoony, April 24, 1959, RJR Library).
Rushdoony’s receptivity to the “Kantorowiczian School” of history had a long-term influence on his intellectual development. First, Kantorowicz was a German nationalist with deeply ingrained strains of European romanticism and idealism. As the historian Norman F. Cantor notes, Kantorowicz’s early scholarship—specifically his biography of Frederick II\textsuperscript{48}—was part of a genre of post-World War I German historiography designed to “put models of charismatic leadership before the beaten, confused, and impoverished postwar German people so that the Volk would rise up again under some Nietzschean and Wagnerian heroic figure.”\textsuperscript{49} Perhaps because his own unfortunate experiences with a certain Austrian corporeal, Kantorowicz arrived in Berkeley having already abandoned his search for national messiahs. Instead, he began to focus his attention on the influence of theological models of kingship and sovereignty in medieval European society.\textsuperscript{50} This new project—dubbed “a spiritual history of European monarchy” by one reviewer\textsuperscript{51}—resonated with Rushdoony’s own search for the Christian roots of all human experience. From Kantorowicz’s methods Rushdoony learned to see the “centrality of theology to politics and the state.”\textsuperscript{52} This focus on the ideological and religious form of history taught him to distrust studies that over-emphasized the importance of individual men in history or those emphasized material context over spiritual content.

\textsuperscript{48} Ernst Hartwig Kantorowicz, \textit{Frederick the Second, 1194-1250} (New York: R. R. Smith, 1931).
\textsuperscript{49} Cantor, “The Nazi Twins,” 84.
\textsuperscript{50} Ernst Hartwig Kantorowicz, \textit{The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology} (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957).
\textsuperscript{51} Malkiel, “Kantorowicz,” 218.
\textsuperscript{52} Rushdoony, “A Biographical Sketch of My Father,” 25.
At this point in his intellectual development, Rushdoony was looking for an alternative to the forms of secular historiography that dominated mid-twentieth century American universities. Modern historical research, with its focus on archival minutia and the evacuation of divine revelation from human toil, deeply disturbed Rushdoony. Prominent historiographic methods in the 1940s betrayed the influence of the materialist philosophy of Karl Marx and the biology of Charles Darwin. Historians who focused on these materialist methods of history writing often also sought to integrate Freudian psychological insights into biographical assessments. Man, in Rushdoony’s assessment of modern historiography, had become the measure of mankind; man was no longer seen as under God’s sovereign judgment. Rushdoony believed that Kantorowicz’s work challenged this trend toward a disenchanted world by calling historians’ attention to the ways in which abstract theological conceptions of God and man had concretized into the political institutions of the medieval and modern worlds.

Second, on a more personal level, the manuscript’s failure forced Rushdoony to reassess his career goals and made it clear that he would not easily find work in academia. If his goal had been to follow Kantorowicz and Williams into academia, he quickly abandoned this path. Instead of throwing himself into a revision of the manuscript, Rushdoony abandoned the text and became increasingly pessimistic about

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53 Years later, Rushdoony formalized his dissent from secular, professional historiography in a series of historical studies that in many ways owed a deep debt to Kantorowicz. For a summary of Rushdoony’s rejection of humanistic and scientific historiography see Rousas John Rushdoony, “A Preface on the Writing of History” in The Nature of the American System (Fairfax, VA: Thoburn Press, 1978), v-vii.
his own abilities, about his missionary work, and about the entire Christian church.\textsuperscript{54} In fact, at this point in his ministerial development, Rushdoony became increasingly convinced that he was losing the war he waged in God’s name. Whether this pessimism was simply linked to his personal failure to draft a marketable academic text isn’t clear, but fortunately for one of the future co-founders of America’s Christian Right this lugubriousness didn’t last long.

\textit{“Where is the Church, that I might find it?”}

Given the failure of \textit{Visible Sovereignty} and the exhausting Owyhee environment, it shouldn’t be surprising that Rushdoony’s personal correspondence from this period took on a deeply pessimistic, even elegiac, tone. When his letters did not deal with the day-to-day operation of the mission, they often betrayed a despondent melancholy that his later letters do not possess. These letters mingled Rushdoony’s own low personal state with a broader concern for the collapse of Western Christendom, a conflation that suggests a unique ability to transpose his personal uncertainties onto the entire cosmic order. In a letter to Williams, Rushdoony described his emotional state as “distressed and disturbed.”\textsuperscript{55} He located “the source of my distress” in a simple question: “Where is the Church, that I might find it?” Throughout the mid-1940s, Rushdoony believed that there was no easy answer to this question, and, from time to time, he worried that the church might be in fact lost and unrecoverable. This concern for the location of the church in Western culture became the central problem that Rushdoony would devote the rest of his

\textsuperscript{54} To this day, a massive, dusty carbon copy of \textit{Visual Sovereignty} remains untouched and unpublished in Rushdoony’s library. It is not clear what Rushdoony thought of the book in his later years, but it is telling that he never sought to revise it and publish it even under his own imprint.

\textsuperscript{55} R. J. Rushdoony to George Huntston Williams, June 12, 1947, RJR Library.
ministry to addressing. How, he began to wonder, might one revitalize Western Christendom so that it could not only regenerate the souls of the Indians of Owyhee, but also the world as a whole? The church, he believed, was rotting from the inside out, so rather than proselytize a dead culture with the message of a dying church, Rushdoony began looking for ways to rebuild the church so that it might, one day, reconstruct the entire world. And through this Godly work, Rushdoony might also give renewed purpose to his diminished station in life.56

Before Rushdoony settled on the need for the global regeneration of humanity, he first had to account for the place of the church on the Duck Valley Indian Reservation. Hinting at his later vision for the global triumph of Christ, Rushdoony consistently conflated the general state of Christendom and the failure of the church with his activities at the mission. In his personal letters, he produced a deeply pessimistic coda to Western civilization that identified the primary threats to the Christian church as the interrelated dangers of the rise of the modern, secular state and modernist theology. As a social critic, he connected each of these broader cultural trends to the realities of Owyhee and in doing so suggested that should the church fail Owyhee it would also fail the world.

In summarizing the sorry state of the reservation, Rushdoony used the physical location of Owyhee—located in the heart of a long dormant volcanic ridge—as synecdoche for the entire Western world:

Both Church and State are located at the base of an extinct volcano, a true symbol of their condition. Ichabod, the glory is departed. Both Church and State live on the dead embers of their true sovereignty and power while striving hungrily to

56 Rushdoony would later develop a theology of Godly work known as “dominion theology.” He considered this work a treatment for a man’s spiritual and physical ills. I discuss dominion theology at length in chapters 3 and 4 of this project.
gain visibility through bastard sources. So it is, but this outpost of the Church shall not do so.\footnote{R. J. Rushdoony to Kantorowicz, March 22, 1945, RJR Library. The phrase, “Ichabod, the glory is departed” references 1 Samuel 4:21.}

Similarly, on more than one occasion he linked the situation in Owyhee to the complete arc of Christian history. “In government men and Indians,” Rushdoony wrote,

I have the full range of the problems of Church and State, and all the concerns of Church History. I am facing the problem in its concentrated form, so that rather than a romantic adventure, Owyhee is in every aspect a studied assault on a thousand and one problems confronting the Church of Christ.\footnote{R. J. Rushdoony to Orval Clay, February 24, 1945, RJR Library.}

As these quotations suggest, Rushdoony saw his Owyhee mission as part and parcel of “all the concerns” of Church history; that is, he saw the mission as a moment in the timeless struggle between humanity’s desire to exercise sovereignty independently of the kingship of Christ and the church’s battle against this sin. The “dead embers of” the church and state’s “true sovereignty and power” refers to their mutual failures to stoke their once red-hot passion for affirming the true sovereignty of King Jesus. Instead, with this Christian zeal exhausted, church and state purloin the sovereignty of God with little understanding or care for being true to their place in a proper Godly order. This battle manifested itself in the two sides facing down one another at Owyhee. On one side stood the government men who claimed an authority to rule all aspects of reservation life. On the other stood a defeated and dominated race that had turned to degenerate forms of ersatz salvation: peyote, booze, illicit sex, nature worship. Only Christ could mediate between these two groups and return the state to its Biblically constrained limits while allowing the Indians to encounter true salvation through the atoning sacrifice of Christ. This, for Rushdoony, was a microcosm of the human drama of Christianity.
Rushdoony managed to make this trans-historical Christian battle intelligible within the much narrower historical context of the mid-twentieth century United States. Specifically, he worried that a creeping secularization had eroded the Christian foundations of the republic while a misguided modernism rendered American churches incapable of combating the threat posed by the secular state. Here, the specific situation of the Indians on the Duck Valley Reservation provided Rushdoony with a framework for understanding the cultural implications of secularization for all Americans. Rushdoony recognized that the state was in charge on the reservation: “[The state] is the giver of all things, the source of power, of land, and (having built a reservoir for irrigation here) even of water. … The government hospital delivers the children, and the government army taketh them away, and blessed is the name of the government each Memorial Day and Fourth of July.”\(^59\) If the federal state stood as the giver and taker of life, then it was usurping the sovereignty of Christ. In governing men, the state denied them the freedom to govern themselves as Christians according to the laws of God. Although only a latent theme at this point in his career, Rushdoony was beginning by fits and starts to focus on the problem of the state and its relationship to the laws of God. Slowly, the question would come into focus: How do men govern themselves and others in a properly organized Christian society?

In a 1949 article in the *Westminster Theological Journal*, Rushdoony pulled together his scattered observations on Owyhee and bundled them with his general reflections on Indian missions. He argued that the failure of the missions reflected a deeper, crisis within Western Christendom:

\(^{59}\) Ibid.
Hence Indian missions are of central relevance to the church. If contemporary Christianity has lost its relevance to the central problem of Indian life, it has lost its relevance to the developing problem of Western civilization. Crisis has then ceased to be its opportunity and becomes its defeat. It must be conceded this is already the case. The weakness of Indian missions is merely the symptom which indicates the church’s ailment as well, while government policies simply communicate the contemporary failure of Western culture.60

For Rushdoony, his mission work became part of much larger network of theological and cultural issues that pointed to modern Christianity’s inability to not only proselytize but it also exposed its failure to offer Christian alternatives to an all-powerful state determined to usurp the ability of men to govern as Christians first and as citizens second.

At Owyhee Rushdoony gleaned an important lesson about the relative strengthens and weaknesses of the Christian gospel as he struggled to spread it across nearly unbridgeable cultural boundaries. He became convinced that Christian Church had become such a weak and ineffectual institution for life that even the populations it had previously subjugated did not respect it. “Hence the dilemma,” he concluded: “Indian culture is dead, Western culture is dying, and the Indian lives on the dregs of both in abject spiritual poverty and degradation.”61 His article registered all of his major concerns of the late-1940s. From his personal pessimism—perhaps even depression—to his deep existential angst about the state of Christianity, the article is an accretion of nearly a decade of despair.

But for all of the gloom shrouding this period of his life, Rushdoony also harbored a kind of rare ambition and a maddening work ethic. “First Owyhee, and then the world: such is my dream,” he wrote to a friend shortly after arriving in Nevada. He

61 Ibid., 3.
quickly qualified this sentiment, noting, “In many respects, I am seriously handicapped here.” Regardless of the handicaps and troubles of Owyhee, the mission was an important step in Rushdoony’s development. The harsh social and physical environment of the reservation exhausted the young minister while the isolated location hampered his intellectual growth.

II. **ROOTS OF RECONSTRUCTION**

Although many of his early Owyhee letters implied that Christianity was a spent cultural force in the West, by the late-1940s and early-1950s a new set of optimistic themes began to emerge in Rushdoony’s letters. This shift in mood was precipitated by a chance encounter with a book. In March 1946 while traveling back to Nevada from an extended trip in the east, Rushdoony stopped in a small Colorado town to visit another minister. During the visit, Rushdoony ran across a copy of Cornelius Van Til’s *The New Modernism* in the minister’s library. Van Til was a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, which J. Gresham Machen founded as conservative alternative to

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62 R. J. Rushdoony to Orval Clay, February 24, 1945, RJR Library.


64 In an interview, Rushdoony said that he first read *The New Modernism* in 1944 or 1945 while traveling back to Owyhee from a trip to Buffalo, New York. Rushdoony told the interviewer, “some years later when I was coming back from the east, where I had been speaking in Buffalo, New York, I stopped in this little town in Colorado to speak also, at a church, and the minister there had a copy of Van Til’s *New Modernism*, which had just been published” (Larson, “Oral History Interview,” 43). In the same interview he tried to pinpoint the date: “Yes, it was 1944 or … about the end of the war” (41). Since the first edition of *The New Modernism* was not published until 1946, and one of the surviving letters in his correspondence indicates that Rushdoony did not visit Buffalo until early 1946, I have adopted 1946 as the year Rushdoony first encountered Van Til (see R. J. Rushdoony to Gilbert Lovell, March 12, 1946, RJR Library, for the only existing reference to Rushdoony’s Buffalo trip). It’s possible that Rushdoony first read another work by Van Til in 1944 or 1945 and subsequently confused it with *The New Modernism*, but this is highly unlikely since Rushdoony consistently pointed to *The New Modernism* as his introduction to Van Til. Rushdoony’s son, Mark, also believes that his father first encountered Van Til through *The New Modernism* in 1946 (Rushdoony, “A Biographical Sketch of My Father,” 26).
what he perceived as the liberal theological trends at Princeton Theological Seminary. Intrigued, Rushdoony thumbed through the book. Noting Rushdoony’s interest, the minister responded, “You want it? Take it.” Rushdoony did and began reading it on his return trip. In a train full of troops returning home from the war, Rushdoony hardly noticed the commotion around him as he consumed the book. “When I reached Denver,” Rushdoony told an interviewer decades later, “I had to wait several hours in the railroad station. I just sat there and didn’t take the time to go and eat. I was there five or six hours.”

In Denver, the rapt Rushdoony read a dense, carefully argued rejection of the theology of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner. The book would have been notable to Rushdoony because it was one of the earliest sustained critical works published in the U.S. on the theologians Barth and Brunner for a Reformed audience. But if the subject

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67 Ibid.

68 In assessing the influence of Van Til’s criticism of Barth and Brunner, Phillip R. Thorne insists, “Without a doubt the history of Barth’s reception by American Evangelicals must begin with Dr. Cornelius Van Til…. Not only was he one of the earliest, most prolific and well read of Fundamentalist Evangelical interpreters, Van Til was the most influential” (Phillip R. Thorne, Evangelicalism and Karl Barth: His Reception and Influence in North American Evangelical Theology [Pittsburgh, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1995], 33). Gregory G. Bolich reaches a similar conclusion regarding the importance of The New Modernism, arguing that Van Til and those who followed his analysis convinced many evangelicals that Barth’s “neo-orthodoxy” was neo-heresy: “Under Van Til… the work of Barth was declared off limits to a generation of evangelicals. Van Til’s general conclusions, as well as many of his specific criticisms, became the primary response of the American conservative community to Karl Barth” (Gregory G. Bolich, Karl Barth & Evangelicalism [Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1980], 66-67). Bolich is careful,
matter lured Rushdoony in, it was the style and theological project that hooked him. Today Van Til’s text is perhaps best known as the first book-length exposition of his presuppositional apologetics. The presuppositional method developed in the text soon became a facet of Rushdoony’s intellectual and theological project. As an apologetic method, presuppositionalism emerged from Van Til’s careful reformulation of Christian theology to create an orthodox lens for grasping the complex relationship between ontology and epistemology. Less abstractly, Van Til argued that the relationship between God and His creation provided an important foundation for reassessing the nature of human knowledge. In a nutshell, if God created the universe then he also created the means for interpreting it. To try to think independently of God is not only impossible, it is the ultimate human temptation that leads to sin in its very essence.

However, to point out that many conservatives rejected Van Til’s analysis as a mere “caricature” of Barth’s theology (ibid., 71.; for Bolich’s summary of these criticisms see pages 70-73). Van Til’s biographer John R. Muether notes that Van Til helped set the tone for Barth’s reception in the United States partly because he had the advantage of reading Barth in the original German years before many of the Swiss’s key writings appeared in English (Van Til, 121). Finally, George Marsden describes Van Til as “one of the few in the fundamentalist fold equipped philosophically and linguistically to deal with the complexities of European dialectic theologies.” He concludes, “Few fundamentalists read [The New Modernism], but many repeated the title” (George M. Marsden, Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism [Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1987], 101).

The term “presuppositional” can mean many things to many people. Within Van Til’s apologetics, the term has a specific, yet undefined meaning: “Christian method of apologetic argument, in agreement with its own basic conception of the starting point, must be by presupposition. To argue by presupposition is to indicate what are the epistemological and metaphysical principles that underlie and control one’s method” (Cornelius Van Til, Apologetics [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976], 61). As John M. Frame summarizes, Van Til didn’t bother to clearly define presupposition: “Van Til uses the term presupposition to indicate the role that divine revelation ought to play in human thought. I do not believe that he ever defines the term. I have tried to define it for him as a ‘basic heart-commitment.’ For the Christian, that commitment is to God as he reveals himself in his Word. Non-Christians substitute something else… as that to which they are ultimately committed and that which governs all of life, including thought” (Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Pub, 1995], 136). I have followed Van Til’s lead and left presupposition undefined, but I believe Frame’s gloss of the term as the basic heart-commitment that underlies all thought and action is a useful way to conceptualize the term.

Van Til clearly believed his ideas were “orthodox” in a Reformed sense. Van Til’s apologetics are so rigid and authoritarian that it can easily be argued that from his perspective his apologetics are the only properly “orthodox” method available to Christians. Such a claim is obviously dubious (unless, of course, you are a Van Tillian) so I use the adjective provisionally.
Rushdoony’s chance encounter with *The New Modernism* precipitated his rapid departure from the pessimistic post-Christendom perspective I discussed in the previous section toward a more positive—albeit highly critical—view of the Reformed churches’ ability to offer an alternative to modernism and statism. After reading Van Til in March, Rushdoony immediately began adopting Van Tillian themes and terminology in his April 1946 letters. In a letter to a Presbyterian Mission official, Rushdoony offered the first clear exposition of Van Tillian ideas without directly mentioning Van Til:

I have been doing considerable studying since my coming here and am increasingly convinced that without a doubt our present day Biblical studies are grounded, not on sound scholarship but on philosophical presuppositions and are thus unrelated to fact. And those elements in the Church which do cling to Scripture do so without the sound study and scholarship it requires: hence the prevalence of the premillennial view which is, I believe, a misreading of both scripture and the Second coming.71

Instead, Rushdoony explained that the faithful look at scholarship with skepticism because it seems to deaden their encounter with God. “To most young men… scholarship seems to belong to doubt and ignorance to faith, and the fact that this equation seems to be true, superficially, indicates, the tragedy of the situation.”72

Rushdoony believed Van Til rectified this tragic situation via a theological system that integrated the fact that God *created* human beings with their struggle to *know* God. In short, knowing is the supreme act of being a fully realized Christian and this knowledge is essentially political because it recognizes God’s absolute sovereignty over His creation.

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71 R. J. Rushdoony to Lorna Logan, April 4, 1946, RJR Library.
72 Ibid.
Epistemology and Ontology

To understand why Van Til’s book had such a jarring effect on Rushdoony’s thinking, it is important understand how radically different Van Til’s thought was from the thinkers who Rushdoony read at PSR and encountered in conversations with his peers in the American Presbyterian and Reformed communities. Van Til developed his presuppositional apologetic method as a sharp contrast to the then dominant Reformed tradition of evidentialist apologetics, which was rooted in the firm philosophical soil of the European Enlightenment. Evidentialist apologetics grew out of the Scottish Common Sense philosophical tradition that American intellectuals adopted and adapted during eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. According to historian Mark A. Noll, American evangelicals generally highlighted three key but simplified aspects of Common Sense philosophy. First, American evangelicals have traditionally emphasized an empiricist epistemology, which asserts, “our perceptions reveal the world pretty much as it is.”73 Second, they argued that human beings can infer certain ethical standards from their nature, thus suggesting a normative anthropological project that assumes universal standards of moral behavior.74 Finally, evidentialists advanced their epistemological and anthropological project through a vaguely Newtonian scientific methodology that “encouraged evangelicals to believe that the end product of theology was a system of

74 Ibid., 221-222. For my discussion of Rushdoony’s rejection of this sort of anthropocentrism, see chapter four.
certain truths, grounded on careful induction from simple facts, eschewing hypothetical flights of fancy, and providing a universal and unvarying picture of God and his ways.”

Van Til broke sharply with this centuries-long tradition in American Protestantism to offer what he believed to be restoration of proper Calvinist epistemology. Van Til was himself an immigrant from Netherlands and was influenced by his Dutch Reformed heritage. Specifically, he was shaped by the teachings of the Dutch theologian and statesman Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). In the United States, Kuyper is remembered as the father of “neo-Calvinism,” a theological and social movement whose adherents view Calvinism as a comprehensive, coherent Christian worldview capable of resisting and rolling back the social, cultural, and political advances of the Enlightenment and Modernism. “Kuyper,” according to one commentator, “insisted on the absolute separation, or ‘antithesis,’ between the Christian and the modern worldview that came to prominence in the French Revolution.” He encouraged Calvinists to draw sharp distinctions “between Christian approaches to social issues and those supported by non-Christian or ‘apostate’ thought.” Only Christians, Kuyper argued, could be epistemologically self-conscious. In fact, non-Christians could

75 Ibid., 224.
76 Van Til encountered Kuyper in his theology and religion classes at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Calvin College was founded by the Christian Reformed Church, which in turn has its roots in the Dutch Reformed churches. For Van Til’s introduction to Kuyper, see Muether, Van Til, 44-46.
77 Muether, Van Til, 24-25; Marsden, Reforming Fundamentalism, 78-79.
78 Muether, Van Til, 25.
79 Ibid. As Muether explains, Kuyper believed that Christians and non-Christians could work together in spite of their irreconcilable worldviews because of the work of common grace. Since non-Christians can never be truly epistemologically self-conscious and ultimately relied on Christian presumptions, there was room for cooperation on projects designed to better the human condition. Van Til reformulated this view of common to argue that it provides a check on any “absolute expression” of human depravity in history. See ibid., 154-155.
not think in a consistently non-Christian manner, because such a project would ultimately lead to utter meaninglessness. All meaning and knowledge for non-Christians was therefore in some sense “borrowed” from the non-Christian’s dull apprehension of King Jesus.

Van Til wholeheartedly embrace Kuyper’s concept of the “antithesis” and rigorously developed it to a degree that Kuyper did not. By coupling Kuyper’s “antithesis” with his own reading of post-Kantian philosophy, Van Til developed his “pioneering insight” that the “given presuppositions of any philosophical position predetermined and governed much of its later outworking.”80 Indeed, Van Til correctly recognized that modern thought is “is largely preoccupied with the theory of knowledge,” and therefore insisted that Christians needed to rigorously expound how their epistemology differed from non-Christian systems of thought.

Van Til’s primary innovation was to expand Kuyper’s ideas in order to assert that Christian and non-Christian epistemologies have little or nothing in common. By adopting and developing the “antithesis” of Dutch Reformed Calvinism, Van Til declared war on any system of thought that did not accept the authoritarian prescriptions of Scripture. Within the context of the early-twentieth century fundamentalist/modernist controversy, Van Til’s ideas made him one of the most radical thinkers in the fundamentalist camp. He insisted that traditional common sense empiricism presumes the autonomy of a human being’s intellect in relation to God. This presumption undermined the Calvinist emphasis on the absolute sovereignty of God over all aspects of

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humanity—including thought. Building on this point, Van Til insisted that human beings could not think a single thought independently of God.

Ontologically, Van Til argued, the Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is the only proper starting point for understanding reality; therefore, ontology and epistemology are fundamentally interrelated in Van Til’s apologetics. Van Til believed that Christianity, rightly understood, posited a two-layer theory of reality. He drew a hard and fast distinction between God and creation. The being and nature of the first layer, God, is “infinite, eternal, and unchangeable.” The second layer is the created universe, which is finite, temporal, and constantly changing. Between creator and created, there is an insurmountable gulf, which cannot be bridged by any willful means of a created being. Instead, the only bond between God and his creation is Grace. The recognition of this chasm between God and creation is, in Van Til’s mind, the essential presupposition upon which orthodox Christianity must be founded. Christians must presuppose this separation in order to correctly apprehend the nature of God and creation. Any attempt to collapse God into creation or to subsume creation into the nature of God is a false, non-Christian presupposition.

**Sin and Sovereignty**

While this condensed summary of Van Til’s ontological presuppositions may read like abstract theological sophistry, to Rushdoony it was simultaneously a theological revelation and revolution. Presuppositionalism, he reckoned, had immediate implications.

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83 Ibid.
for his place as a missionary seeking to bridge two seemingly unbridgeable civilizations.

From the first appearance of the term “presupposition” in his correspondence, to a clear rejection of the anti-intellectualism and the dispensational bent of contemporary fundamentalists, Rushdoony saw the critical power of Van Til’s ideas. They also gave him reason for hope: change a Christian’s epistemological presuppositions and you could change the church. Here were the seeds of the answer to his question, “Where is the Church?” The answer lay in educational reform and the capture and re-Christianization of the social institutions that threatened to undermine a Christian educational system built on a presuppositional foundation. By 1947 Rushdoony began encouraging his friends to read *The New Modernism*, and by the early-1950s Rushdoony dropped the last vestiges of his liberal PSR education to embrace a systematic Reformed perspective based on Van Til’s presuppositional apologetics. Further, during this period Rushdoony recognized in Van Til’s ideas the hope for a wide-ranging American cultural renewal rooted in epistemological self-awareness. By developing this focus on epistemology, Rushdoony launched his first attacks on secular humanism and, most importantly, secular education.

To understand why Rushdoony believed that Van Til’s epistemological insights could change the world, it is essential to understand how Van Til’s ontological theology related to his theories of sin and sovereignty. As I outlined above, Van Til’s epistemology begins with the ontological presupposition that God is the origin of all

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84 While Rushdoony is here critical of dispensationalism, it would be an error to assume he had adopted a postmillenarian perspective. Rushdoony son notes, “My father’s eschatology… crystallized by the mid 1950s. He had very early studied premillennialism as it was widely espoused, but was horrified at what he thought resembled fantastic fairy-tale exegesis. He then turned to amillennial writers but never felt comfortable with that position, either. … He… considered himself a postmillennialist after reading Roderick Campbell’s *Israel and the New Covenant* (1954)” (Rushdoony, “A Biographical Sketch of My Father,” 26). At this time in the 1940s, Rushdoony was making a transition in eschatology as well as theology and was amillennial in outlook.
creation. In terms of creation, since “all aspects” of the universe are “equally created” by a sovereign God, then “no one aspect of reality may be regarded as more ultimate than another. Thus the created one and many may in this respect be said to be equal to one another; they are equally derived and equally dependent upon God who sustains them both.”

Humanity can never have exhaustive knowledge of this creation by attempting to reduce one aspect of nature to another or by trying to subsume the particulars of nature into an abstract totality. Instead, as John M. Frame, a theologian and former student of Van Til, summarizes,

Insofar as we can know the world, it is because [God] gives us revelation and the ability to repeat his thoughts on an analogical, finite level. And insofar as we cannot know the world, we can trust that the world is nevertheless an intelligible whole. Things that are mysterious to us do not spring from an ultimate chaos or meaninglessness; they spring, rather, from the wonderful riches of God’s thought, which transcends our understanding.

The plurality and unity of creation are an analogue for the plurality and unity of the Trinity. Just as God can no more be reduced to a single person of the Trinity, no aspect of nature can be reduced to another. Similarly, just as the persons of the Trinity only have meaning in relation to one another, so too do all aspects of nature.

For Rushdoony, Van Til’s great revolution was his insistence that human beings sin when they attempt to apprehend reality independently of God’s revelation without acknowledging our finite, subordinate relationship to God. As Van Til explains, God gave humanity’s “first parents” a prescriptive path “marked by love and obedience” if

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85 Van Til, The Defense of the Faith, 27. Rushdoony eventually translated this into a political vocabulary to assert that all aspects of social reality are equal to one another. Therefore no aspect of society can be reduced to another, and conversely, no aspect can claim superiority over another. See Rousas John Rushdoony, The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1971).

86 Frame, Cornelius Van Til, 76.
they “led their lives in the direction he indicated to them.” Rather than follow this path, they instead listened to Satan who told them “how free he had become since declaring his independence of God.” “To be self-determining,” Satan explained, “man must surely be able to decide the ‘nature of the good’—regardless of what God says about it.” Adam, after listening carefully to Satan’s appeal and weighing it against God’s plan concluded,

You are right Satan, I must first decide whether such a God as often speaks to us (1) knows what the ‘good’ for us is, (2) controls history so that he can determine what will happen if we disobey him, and (3) has the right to demand obedience from us. After I decide these issues, and if the answer is ‘yes,’ then I shall obey him. Certainly not before.

While one might wonder exactly how Van Til grasped Adam’s thought process in all of its logical rigor, most Christians agree on what happened next: Adam and Eve sinned precisely because they succumbed to Satan’s temptation to “be as gods, knowing good from evil.” At that precise moment, human beings asserted the primacy of their intellect over that of God’s.

Humanity’s fall into sin was precipitated by a desire to reason independently from God’s authority. Accordingly, humanity’s pretense to independent knowledge becomes a matter of rebellion against God’s plan because, “Deep down in his mind every man knows that he is the creature of God and responsible to God. Every man, at bottom, knows that he is a covenant-breaker. But every man acts and talks as though this were not so.” For human beings, the image of thought must be God’s Word. As Wesley A.

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88 Van Til, “My Credo,” 5-6.

89 Van Til, Apologetics, 57.
Roberts notes in his summary of Van Til’s epistemology, “Van Til insists that all knowledge that any finite creature would have must rest upon the revelation of God. Thus the knowledge that we have of the simplest objects of the physical universe is based upon the revelation of God.” Scripture is the objective yardstick by which all human thought must be measured, and when found lacking, by which it must be disciplined. In Van Til’s words, “if man is not autonomous… then man should subordinate his reason to the Scriptures and seek in the light of it to interpret his experience.” Frame clarifies this point by observing, “revelation in the form of scripture governs our interpretation of experience,” but in turn, humans learn of this revelation by experiencing it: “We learn about God by reading the Bible… and by observing his handiwork in creation and in ourselves. That is, we receive revelation through experience.” Thus, for Van Til scripture authorizes human experience and constitutes it—whether we recognize it or not.

From his isolated perch in Nevada, Rushdoony immediately realized that Van Til’s system would allow him to rewire the relationship between his oppressed charges and the state that dominated them. Since thinking is an explicitly religious activity, Rushdoony reasoned that this epistemological claim has political implications: thinking becomes a matter of kingship, power, rebellion, and, in the final analysis, warfare. Either human thought recognizes God’s sovereignty, or it does not. There is no middle ground,

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91 Quoted in ibid.
92 Frame, Cornelius Van Til, 135.
93 Ibid.
no compromise. Thus, Rushdoony embraced Van Til’s theology in part because of its political implications: Van Til’s “antithesis” between Christian and non-Christian forms of knowing justified separatism and secession as a strategy for the political reformation of a rapidly secularizing American republic. Van Til’s antithesis posits a war against those who think God’s thoughts after Him and those who do not. If Rushdoony could convince Christians to reject any form of education that emphasized state sovereignty over God’s sovereignty, then Rushdoony could start a reform movement that would fundamentally reorganize all human relationships.

III. “Basic to Sound Action, Is a Sound Faith”

Rushdoony’s new epistemological perspective unfolded into two apparently mutually exclusive directions. First, Rushdoony began to build alliances with those who held non-Reformed epistemological positions but who nonetheless betrayed some resonance with Van Til’s basic Christian presuppositions. Interestingly, he believed he found spaces for dialogue and cooperation in the nascent American conservative and libertarian movements. His cooperation with libertarians is particularly striking because it points to the single thread that weaves through all forms of American conservatisms: an overt hostility to a centralized federal government. Second, directly connected to his wider political concern for the sovereignty of the state was Rushdoony’s inward turn away from missionary work and toward the church itself. While he never totally abandoned evangelism, his primary audience became committed Christians, not potential converts. He worked tirelessly to popularize Van Til and sought to empower Christian educators and thinkers because he believed such education would ultimately undermine a secular political system that endangered Christianity.
Rushdoony’s earliest attempts to merge political libertarianism and conservatism with Van Tillian epistemology was awkward and required a considerable amount of trial and error. In this section I explore Rushdoony’s earliest efforts to integrate a Kantorowiczian concern for “political theology” with a Van Tillian presuppositional apologetic method. First, I begin by situating Rushdoony’s political and religious concerns within the context of a broader backlash against Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal and the political aftermath of World War II. For many conservatives, the New Deal and the war had undermined traditional American values by socializing the U.S. economy and collectivizing political action. Second, I show how Rushdoony attempted to synthesize these broader political concerns into a religious publication aimed at educating Presbyterians and other Reformed Christians on the political implications of their faith. While this publication, *The Westminster Herald*, ultimately proved an abject failure, it was an important stepping stone in Rushdoony’s ministry as the experience taught him how to communicate his religious concerns to political conservatives and how to persuade religious conservatives into conservative political action.

*Spiritual Mobilization*\(^\text{95}\)

As Rushdoony rallied to the banner of Christian epistemological self-awareness, another oddly analogous trend was percolating within the elite social circles of America’s oligarchs. This movement was founded on a desire to make Christians aware of the implications of their traditions, but the focus was economic and political, not epistemological. Also, this movement of businessmen, lawyers, and organizers was not

\(^{95}\) Some portions of this subsection are based on the extensive revision, expansion, and reworking of Michael J. McVicar, “The Libertarian Theocrats: The Long, Strange History of R. J. Rushdoony and Christian Reconstructionism,” *The Public Eye* (Fall 2007) 3-10.
particularly concerned with systemic religious consistency. Instead, the focus was on experimentation, improvisation, and the eclectic free play of multiple Christian perspectives—theologically liberal or conservative; Catholic or Protestant; heterodox or orthodox. The bottom line of this movement was to equip Christians to defend the market economy with the rhetoric of the Bible and to help businessmen understand that their business was Christ’s business. This complex environment in which theology and capitalism merged, melded, and disintegrated was a rich space for an enterprising, thoughtful, and synthetically-minded religious leaders. Not surprisingly, Rushdoony thrived in this environment.

During the 1930s, a wide variety of business, intellectual, and religious leaders banded together to attack Roosevelt’s New Deal policies and defend the U.S. from the threat of Godless communism. Those who emphasized the sovereignty of the individual citizen-subject, resistance to a centralized bureaucracy, and the benefits of unfettered free market capitalism eventually coalesced into components of the conservative and libertarian movements that we know today. For a brief period in the 1940s, these anti-New Deal forces formed an alliance with Protestant religious leaders determined to resist “socialistic” tendencies within the church. While this cooperation was short-lived, its ultimate influence lasted for decades. It succeeded in creating an intellectual foundation for a small cadre of thinkers and activists who were eager to reinterpret capitalism in terms of Christ. The discursive contours of this mid-century project influenced several generations of American Christians and helped create a political and religious environment in which it has become “common sense” to suggest that theologically conservative Christians are also economically and politically conservative.
The chief target of these economically conservative evangelical clergymen was the Social Gospel, a wide-ranging theological and social movement rooted in the late nineteenth century whose champions sought to fight poverty and improve the conditions of America’s poorest using the government to regulate market forces. The Social Gospelers pulled together across denominational lines to advocate for a heightened awareness of labor conditions in the country. But religious movement had a political side; its clergy tended to emphasize that individual salvation could best be achieved in environments that managed and limited the potential for sin and alleviated poverty as a means of ensuring salvation. Moreover, many were willing to embrace evolutionary theory as a means of explaining human origins. Such a naturalistic perspective led to a willingness to see human beings as the product of their material and social environment.

Like many in the Progressive Era, the reform-minded period before World War I, the Social Gospelers believed that legislation and government regulation could change Americans for the better by changing the social environment in which they lived. By focusing attention on the social context that drives individuals to sin, the social gospel seemed to downplay the individual, embodied experience of salvation that American evangelicals have traditionally sought. Not surprisingly, many prosperous American churchgoers found the emphasis on economic justice over the saving of souls to be yet another expression of the “socialistic” threat to the American way of life.

96 It should be noted that the Social Gospel was far from dominant in American Protestantism. From the ideas of Dwight Moody to the public ministry of Billy Sunday, clergymen spent as much time defending the benefits of capitalism as they did critiquing its excesses.

97 This, of course, is a matter of perspective. Many evangelicals embraced the Social Gospel because of its implication for individual salvation. In fact, as historian R. Lawrence Moore has argued, the Social Gospel was perfectly compatible with the individualistic nature of capitalistic consumption and acquisition and was hardly “socialistic” in any meaningful sense. Moore’s measured historical perspective,
While the social gospel lost much of its impulse during the economic boom following the war, popular interest in the movement reignited during the Great Depression of the 1930s. To resist this renewed influence—and defend capitalism—an alliance between business and religious leaders emerged which sought to reemphasize individual spiritual regeneration and to downplay the effects of social constraints on individual choices.

In 1935, Rev. James Fifield of Chicago formed Mobilization for Spiritual Ideals to address these concerns. Popularly known as Spiritual Mobilization, Fifield’s operation earned the fiscal and advisory support of such right-wing philanthropists as J. Howard Pew of Sun Oil, Jasper Crane of DuPont, B. E. Hutchinson of Chrysler, and the department store mogul J. C. Penney. Facing the daunting task of resisting nearly five decades of entrenched liberal Protestant teaching and the harsh reality of the Depression, Fifield sought to reach preachers and laymen eager to resist the massive redistribution of wealth envisioned by President Roosevelt. His appeal was simplistic but effective.

American clergymen needed to start preaching the Eighth Commandment: “Thou shalt however, is unlikely to change the minds of the more vociferous critics of the Social Gospel. See R. Laurence Moore, Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 204-237. On a similar point, Henry J. Pratt suggests that much of the heated rhetoric aimed at organizations such as the Federal (and later the National) Council of the Churches of Christ that accused them of collectivism and socialism was simply inaccurate. Pratt’s central thesis is that American Protestants—even the most socially and economically liberal—generally favored the principles of volunteerism and individual salvation until the 1960s when many began to change their views. See, Henry J. Pratt, The Liberalization of American Protestantism: A Case Study in Complex Organizations (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1972). I return to this point in more detail in chapter six.


not steal.” In this commandment, Fifield and his supporters believed they had found the Biblical basis for private property and a limit to the government’s ability to redistribute wealth, tax, and otherwise impede commerce. Further, Spiritual Mobilization emphasized the role that the church must play in guaranteeing these Bible-based freedoms from state intervention. “Man,” one early document insisted, “being created free as a child of God, has certain inalienable rights and responsibilities: the state must not be permitted to usurp them; it is duty of the church to help protect them.” Church and state are not only separate in Fifield’s eyes, but because each speaks to different spheres of human existence, the church is the most effective mechanism for constraining the state to its proper boundaries.

In order to undermine government-sponsored economic redistribution, Spiritual Mobilization argued that clergy and laymen needed to focus on the spiritual causes of poverty rather than the social and political programs advocated by the Social Gospelers. The New Deal and the conflicts with the Nazis and Soviets were manifestations of humankind’s rejection of God’s divinity for salvation of a centralized bureaucracy. An all-powerful bureaucracy, they warned, usurped the “Christian principle of love” and replaced it with the “collectivist principle of compulsion.”

At its peak in the mid-1950s, the Christ-centered free market ideals of Spiritual Mobilization reached nearly fifty thousand pastors and ministers via the organization’s

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publication, *Faith and Freedom*. Although it didn’t operate on the basis on a dues-paying membership, the organization eventually claimed nearly 17,000 clerical representatives who distributed *Faith and Freedom* and used it in sermons and in public outreach. Under the dynamic leadership of James C. Ingebretsen, a Los Angeles-based lawyer and devoted religious agnostic, and William Johnson, the publication displayed the rhetorical flare of such libertarian luminaries as the Congregationalist minister Edmund A. Opitz, the Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises, and the anarcho-libertarian Murray Rothbard. In spite of the fact Ingebretsen and William and their eclectic assortment of libertarian authors often avoided religion in their articles, the periodical’s provocative journalism nonetheless moved many clergymen to embrace Spiritual Mobilization’s anti-tax, non-interventionist, anti-statist economic model.

By the mid-1950s, prominent secular libertarian organizations like the Foundation for Economic Education (FEE) and the Intercollegiate Society of Individualists (ISI) began to supplant Spiritual Mobilization’s influence in libertarian circles. In fact, many

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106 The ISI was modeled on the Intercollegiate Society of Socialists and William F. Buckley, Jr., served as its first president. The ISI is still going strong under its new name, the Intercollegiate Studies Institute. For a thorough history of the ISI see Lee Edwards, *Educating for Liberty: The First Half-Century of the Intercollegiate Studies Institute* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2003).
of *Faith and Freedom*’s regular contributors like Opitz and Rothbard\(^\text{107}\) left Spiritual Mobilization and began writing for FEE’s publication, *Freeman*. Further, Ayn Rand’s atheistic Objectivism pulled many libertarians away from the Christian ideals of Spiritual Mobilization.\(^\text{108}\) Outside of the libertarian scene, explicitly Christian organizations led by fundamentalists such as Rev. Billy James Hargis, Rev. Carl McIntire, Dr. Fred C. Schwarz, and Major Edgar C. Bundy offered laymen a more obviously religious appeal than that provided by Spiritual Mobilization.\(^\text{109}\) Finally, the rise of John Birch Society and the popular Goldwater movement all but rendered Fifield’s efforts irrelevant.

Secular libertarianism and a militant anti-communist conservatism movement eventually displaced Spiritual Mobilization in the 1950s, but not before Fifield’s organization helped a generation of theologically and economically conservative clergymen to find an alternative to the Social Gospel, the New Deal, and communism that resonated with their traditional values, pro-business sympathies, and Christian faith. *Faith and Freedom* encouraged clergymen such as Rushdoony to see government as a problem, not a solution. Even though Rushdoony didn’t agree with the organization’s theological eclecticism, he did agree with its diagnosis of the problem and suggested treatment: The solution wasn’t to take over the federal government; it was to raise up a

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\(^{107}\) Rothbard contributed to *Faith and Freedom* under a pseudonym because he was already well known as a radical of questionable religious commitment (Toy, “Faith and Freedom,” 156). In 1956, *Faith and Freedom*’s editors fired him after readers complained about his radicalism (Doherty, *Radicals for Capitalism*, 273).


generation of activists armed with the necessary tools to replace it with something radically different.

_A Tendency Toward Rigidity_

While in Owyhee, Rushdoony had been receiving *Faith and Freedom* and reading it with interest. When offered an opportunity to review the publication by its editor, William Johnson, Rushdoony responded with an effusive note. He cited his predisposition toward “any publication which takes the stand yours does,” specifically noting its support of private property and free enterprise as his principal points of agreement.\(^{110}\) In his letter, Rushdoony noted that many clergy he had spoken with regarding *Faith and Freedom* rarely attacked its merits, but instead denounced its “tendency toward rigidity” in its social and political positions.\(^{111}\)

Rushdoony had little critical to say of the publication except to note that it, in fact, did not go far enough on many issues. Specifically, he argued that *Faith and Freedom* needed to attack the Christian church as a whole, and, as was his wont, he observed that it was not Calvinist enough. On the former issue, Rushdoony lamented *Faith and Freedom*’s timidity in directly accusing various denominations of hypocrisy on economic matters, warning that the chief danger to conservatives is “the lack of an independent church press,” which “has crippled the cause of freedom.”\(^{112}\) On the issue of Calvinism, Rushdoony argued, “the American republic was the product of two streams of thought,

\(^{110}\) R. J. Rushdoony to William Johnson, March 14, 1950, RJR Library.

\(^{111}\) Ibid.

\(^{112}\) Ibid.
classical liberalism…, and Calvinism.”  

Applying Rushdoony's laudatory, but nonetheless candid comments caught someone's attention because in July Spiritual Mobilization invited him to attend a conference at Carleton College in Minnesota. “With great personal satisfaction,” Fifield wrote, “it is my privilege to invite you to join with leading ministers in a conference dedicated to the exploration and study of individual liberty and its relationship to the Christian faith.”  

Fifield sweetened the invitation by stating that all of Rushdoony's travel expenses would be covered by “the generous grant of two non-profit foundations.”  

Although Fifield never named the two foundations, one of them was most certainly the William Volker Fund. The Volker Fund tended to support such small conferences under conditions of strict anonymity, but would send auditors to observe the proceedings in order to assess the value of its contribution. During the Carleton conference a Volker staffer, Herbert Cornuelle, attended the meeting and subsequently opened a correspondence with Rushdoony.

The conference marked a major turning point in Rushdoony's ministry because it brought into him contact with some of the leading libertarian activists and organizers of the 1950s. At Carleton, Rushdoony not only met the Volker Fund's Herb Cornuelle, but

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113 Ibid.
114 Ibid.
115 James W. Fifield, Jr., to R. J. Rushdoony, July 1, 1950, RJR Library.
116 Ibid.
117 Herbert C. Cornuelle to R. J. Rushdoony, August 30, 1950, RJR Library.
he also met FEE’s F. A. “Baldy” Harper. Like Cornuelle, Harper had close ties to the Volker Fund. Cornuelle and Harper immediately sensed an affinity with Rushdoony and an extended correspondence blossomed that ultimately brought Rushdoony out of the Presbyterian Church and into the wider world of American conservatism. The Carleton meeting served as a critical catalyst for Rushdoony’s career: as he began to correspond with and deepen his ties with thinkers and activists outside of the church, Rushdoony developed a theological system that negotiated between his heartfelt Calvinism and the anti-communist, anti-statist commitments of his new friends.

However, before he cast his lot with those outside of the church, Rushdoony attempted to use his new network to change the church from the inside out.

*Westminster Herald*

At Carleton College, Rushdoony circulated an idea for an independent newspaper aimed at conservative Presbyterian laymen and pastors. The project grew out of his criticisms of *Faith and Freedom* and his missionary work at Owyhee. As he had indicated in his analysis of the importance of Fifield’s periodical, Rushdoony believed that the lack of critical journalism within all major Protestant denominations imperiled the church. Further, as he explained to the participants at Carleton, his time as a missionary had convinced him that clergy could no longer effectively link the profound theological realities of Christianity with the lived reality of laymen. Inspired by both

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118 Rushdoony had been corresponding with Harper, then at FEE, for several months prior to the conference but had not yet met him in person. Although it is not clear how Rushdoony began corresponding with Harper, it appears that Rushdoony was operating as an author or researcher for FEE by early 1950. See R. J. Rushdoony to F. A. Harper, April 26, 1950, RJR Library, and F. A. Harper to R. J. Rushdoony, August 31, 1950, RJR Library.

119 I document Rushdoony’s relationship with the Volker Fund in chapter 2.
Faith and Freedom and the Carleton conference, Rushdoony aspired to launch an ambitious project to attack mainline liberalism through the organization of a new publication, Westminster Herald.

From the outset, the project was burdened by Rushdoony’s general inability to synthesize his religious concerns with his aspirations to reform American culture and politics on an explicitly Christian foundation. First, Rushdoony sought support for his religious journal from political operatives who shared some of his basic presuppositions, but didn’t believe they merited an expensive new publication. Second, Rushdoony dreamed that the Herald would refight battles long settled in theological circles: he longed to defeat theological liberals using the tools of Van Tillian presuppositional apologetics. That this war was already settled history was lost on Rushdoony. The result was a bland publication that found no supporters among its intended audiences of political and theological conservatives.

In summarizing the nature of the periodical, Rushdoony explained that it would serve as an unapologetic defender of Presbyterian economic and political theory by providing the “devotional Christian reading the laity demands and needs.” His point was not, he explained to make more Christians because Christianity is at “its greatest strength in American history, [but] it exhibits the least Christian influence, because it is basically a body of sentimentally held and conflicting ideas. It is naive syncretism.” Instead, he hoped the periodical would support the church when sensible and attack it when necessary. Clearly echoing Van Til, he argued that the point is to educate those

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120 R. J. Rushdoony to Herbert C. Cornuelle, October 10, 1950, RJR Library.
121 Ibid.
who are already Christians on the finer points of theological orthodoxy. “Basic to sound action,” he concluded, “is a sound faith.”

When Rushdoony pitched his new journalistic project to the Carleton participants, he did so to a unique rouges’ gallery of secular libertarians and religious mavericks. Oddly, for the theologically conservative Rushdoony, he seemed unconcerned with the irony of his proposal. When he approached potential backers at the conference, his most vocal supporters were Herb Cornuelle and Spiritual Mobilization’s James C. Ingebretsen. Cornuelle’s religious beliefs remain unclear in his correspondence with Rushdoony. At best, Cornuelle didn’t mind Rushdoony’s theological conservatism, explaining in a letter, “I am much intrigued by the idea outlined [at Carleton] regarding a publication for ministers and laymen in the Presbyterian Church.” While Cornuelle hardly offered a ringing endorsement of Reformed Christianity, he did open avenues for support from other libertarians associated with the Volker Fund and FEE, including Baldy Harper. Like Cornuelle, Harper stopped far short of offering financial support for the project. Instead, he offered a stark warning, cautioning, “Your church ‘hierarchy” will be grossly displeased, in the main, with your project.”

With little hope of secure funding from the Volker Fund, Rushdoony pressed James C. Ingebretsen at Spiritual Mobilization. Similar to Cornuelle and Harper, Ingebretsen shared a generically Christian persuasion, but identified himself as a religious

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122 Ibid.

123 Herbert Cornuelle to R. J. Rushdoony, August 30, 1950, RJR Library.

agnostic. Ingebretsen made a half-hearted effort to stir up support for the *Herald* by pitching it to several of Spiritual Mobilization’s major financial backers, including William Mullendore and Jasper Crane, but he ultimately recognized that public support for the *Herald* would prove a distraction from his duties at Spiritual Mobilization.

“When it comes to raising money,” he wrote apologetically, “my primary obligation and interest is in the direction of providing more resources for Spiritual Mobilization.”

All of this added up to a confusing and rather unsatisfying effort at networking for Rushdoony as he awkwardly tried to negotiate the beliefs of men who shared some of his free market ideals, but none of whom shared his underlying religious convictions.

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125 For Ingebretsen’s religious convictions, see James C. Ingebretsen, *Apprentice to the Dawn: A Spiritual Memoir* (Los Angeles: Philosophical Research Society, 2003). Ingebretsen’s father was a Mormon apostate who carefully insulated his children from religious influence (26). As result, in his undergrad days at Stanford in the 1930, Ingebretsen was thoroughly convinced that religion was “balderdash” (27). Further, in describing his reason for heading Spiritual Mobilization Ingebretsen noted, “I didn’t come to Spiritual Mobilization as a preacher: I came as a lawyer and libertarian. Fighting the forces that wanted to abolish the free enterprise system was my mission, not promoting Christ!” (27-28). Ingebretsen eventually became a follower of Gerald Heard (45-76). Heard was a confidant of Aldous Huxley and was similarly interested in psychic phenomena and experimentation with LSD. Ingebretsen, Ed Opitz, William Mullendore of Spiritual Mobilization, and Leonard E. Read of FEE, formed the Wayfarers, a group dedicated to exploring Heard’s ideas. Mullendore and Ingebretsen experimented with LSD as part of their spiritual program. For a summary of Ingebretsen’s religious ideas, see Doherty, *Radicals for Capitalism*, 274-285. For a study of Heard and the Wayfarer’s drug use, see Eckard V. Toy, “The Conservative Connection: The Chairman of the Board Tool LSD before Timothy Leary,” *American Studies* (January 1980): 65-77. For a shorter discussion of the eclectic religious practices of Spiritual Mobilization’s principals, see Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), 70-76.

126 James C. Ingebretsen to R. J. Rushdoony, April 10, 1952, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries, collection 147, box 9, folder 32 (hereafter UO Libraries). For his part, Rushdoony pooh-poohed the suggestion of seeking support from men such as Jasper Crane. “[F]rankly,” Rushdoony noted dismissively, “I don’t feel too sure of the reactions of men like Crane, etc., who probably represent a vague, urban Presbyterianism. Their political and economic thinking is not derived from certain root and branch Presbyterian concepts, but from American liberalism” (R. J. Rushdoony to James C. Ingebretsen, April 15, 1952, UO Libraries). If Rushdoony didn’t think much of Crane, he was more positive about Mullendore’s pastor, W. Clarence Wright, “one of our outstanding men in the Church…. He has received copies [of the *Herald*], and has given [money]” (ibid.).

127 Further, Fifield, the spiritual engine behind Spiritual Mobilization “is not,” Ingebretsen relayed, “particularly sympathetic to your theological position, but he likes what you are trying to do and has been giving the magazine some publicity” (James C. Ingebretsen to R. J. Rushdoony, June 10, 1952, UO Libraries). Despite his theological disagreements with Rushdoony, Fifield spoke favorably of the *Herald* during his radio program (ibid.).
Undeterred, Rushdoony pushed on and with the *Herald* going so far as to assemble an introductory issue to circulate to among Presbyterian clergy and laymen. The response was swift and underwhelming. Letter after letter came in response. Most affirmed the importance of the project. Some offered to subscribe. Few offered sizeable financial support. Most promptly demurred.

Rushdoony did find some support for his periodical among young clergymen and laymen from predominantly rural areas. One nineteen-year-old student at Southern Presbyterian College wrote a long, excited note to Rushdoony regarding the *Herald*:

I have been investigating the possibilities of organizing the faithful in our Church in order to present a united witness for the Faith and combat the spiritual wickedness. I felt that the most urgent need was a militantly conservative journal, for only after the laymen are informed will there be any hope of restoring a believing leadership and pure clergy in our beloved Church.¹²⁸

Summarizing the sentiment of this letter and others like it, Rushdoony noted, “the interest is mainly among the young men”¹²⁹ who live “in the town and country areas, where Presbyterian thinking and tradition are strongest.”¹³⁰ Not only did these rural supporters prove capable of resisting the siren song of theological modernism, they also were more insulated from the pull of that other urban horror, communism: “Communists,” Rushdoony reasoned, “are products of our rootless urban culture, [and] are rarely found in the rural areas.”¹³¹ As a result, his rural supporters were inoculated against the twin threats of theological liberalism and the dangers of messianic statism, but they were

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¹²⁸ Robert Glover Shoemaker to R. J. Rushdoony, October 5, 1950, RJR Library.
¹²⁹ R. J. Rushdoony to Samuel G. Craig, October 11, 1950, RJR Library.
¹³¹ Ibid.
neither particularly wealthy nor intellectually sophisticated. It was a cruel catch-22 for the aspiring editor.

Even with this degree of support from young, rural clergy and laymen, Rushdoony found few supporters in the church’s hierarchy. In fact, many conservatives in the Presbyterian Church familiar with the project tried to dissuade Rushdoony from moving forward with it. Warning of the disastrous consequences to both his ministry and his wallet, they argued that Rushdoony was picking a fight against a liberal establishment that was firmly in place that would not be dislodged by a small publication like the one he proposed. In response to one such letter that registered support for Rushdoony’s ideas but urged him to end the project Rushdoony replied,

> I thoroughly share your feeling about starting a dog fight in our denomination. I am by nature averse to such things, and it was only after long and prayerful consideration that I was ready to make this present step. … The fight is already being waged against us, and there is no evading that point. I do not want to respond in kind, but I do feel that our fundamental principles need re-asserting, that we need to put our own candidates, and take up patient, Christian action.132

This is a refrain Rushdoony returned throughout his life. He rarely understood his own theological and political positions as antagonistic to others; or, if he recognized their challenge he always seemed perplexed and wounded when others rejected his ideas or attacked him personally. Instead, he consistently viewed his ideas as the bedrock core of orthodox normalcy. It was his opponents—theological usurpers, heretics, and “modernists”—who were attacking him, not vice versa. The results could be jarring for Rushdoony. He would often lament the attacks of “brawlers” from whom he was unable or unprepared to defend himself.

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Yet, at every turn, much like his non-Presbyterian, secular associates, Rushdoony’s Presbyterian supporters urged him to understand the awkward position into which he was attempting to pull them and to warn him of the personal consequences of his actions. As a case in point, Dr. Samuel G. Craig, the theologically conservative president of the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company living in Princeton,133 offered Rushdoony everything short of his direct support. “I am disposed to think,” Craig wrote, “…that it would be better for me to at least keep well into the background in the early period of the publication.”134 That such “support” did Rushdoony little good was not lost on the aspiring editor. As he later observed in a forlorn note to Ingebretsen,

the more prominent ministers, like senators, will play safe until they feel that open support is politically expedient. I have received very enthusiastic letters from a number, written immediately on receipt of the Westminster Herald, promising help, but, as the days go by, they seem embarrassed by their outburst and find themselves “too busy” to do much.135

Most prominent men in the church recognized that Rushdoony was hankering for dogfight whether he knew it or not. As a result, they gave their support privately and kept their wallets and mouths firmly closed.

On a more personal note, one of the most blunt and telling responses to the Herald came from John M. Paxton of the Board of National Missions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Paxton, like so many others familiar with Rushdoony and his ideas, registered his support but encouraged him to abandon the project.

133 Partly as a result of Craig’s sympathy for conservative theology, Rushdoony eventually would go on to have a long and highly productive relationship with the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company.

134 Samuel G. Craig to R. J. Rushdoony, September 20, 1950, RJR Library.

I am much interested in your venture in journalism. … I am not, however, financially able to assist in the project. It is quite beyond my present ability to undertake, nor could I in good conscious incourage [sic] you to proceed in the financial indebtedness, which I am sure will incur in such a project. … I am not unaware of the sacrifice you have made but I am loath to see you inflict upon yourself and your loved ones more of the same, and of course, you must know it will mean ostracism if not more. I speak to you in perfect frankness as a friend.\(^\text{136}\)

Unbowed, Rushdoony largely ignored such advice no matter how practical or heartfelt. He longed to participate in the larger theological and ecclesiastical debates taking place within orthodox Presbyterianism, but short of support from small, rural clergy and laymen, he found little denominational interest in a journalistic project that addressed long-settled issues. This nominal support for the *Herald* succeed in making Rushdoony a controversial regional figure among Presbyterian clergy on the West Coast and made his life difficult when he decided to leave Owyhee for a pastorate in Santa Cruz.

**CONCLUSION: FROM SANTA CRUZ TO AMERICAN CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT**

After some searching, Rushdoony accepted a call to the pastorate of Trinity Presbyterian Church in Santa Cruz, California. The new church called Rushdoony to its pastorate and Rushdoony left Owyhee in May 1952.\(^\text{137}\) The 300-member church was affiliated with the mainline Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).\(^\text{138}\) Although Rushdoony had strong support from some in the church, many in the church immediately attacked his conservatism. They were particularly angered when Rushdoony solicited support for his

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\(^{136}\) John M. Paxton to R. J. Rushdoony, June 11, 1952, RJR Library.


\(^{138}\) David Watson, “Theonomy: A History of the Movement and an Evaluation of its Primary Text,” master’s thesis, Calvin College, 1985. It is interesting that Rushdoony accepted a call to an urban congregation after spending nearly a decade lambasting urban churches as bastions of theological liberalism. Perhaps he saw the environment as a challenge. He managed to survive an effort to remove him from the pastorate. He split the congregation, taking a minority of its 300 members with him into a new church. It’s unclear whether Rushdoony saw the result as a victory, a loss, or a draw.

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struggling *Westminster Herald* project and voiced his unwavering support of Van Til’s ideas.\(^{139}\) Several in the congregation, however, remained fiercely loyal to Rushdoony and they petitioned to separate from Trinity and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). At least 66 members split from Trinity and joined the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, a secessionist church founded by J. Gresham Machen.

The isolation of Owyhee and the transition back to the city took its toll on Rushdoony’s personal and professional life. On a personal level, Rushdoony’s relationship with Arda disintegrated. For reasons that remain obscure, Rushdoony divorced Arda in and won custody of their children in 1959.\(^{140}\) On a professional level, it became clear to Rushdoony that the reservation was not an environment conducive for achieving his newly formulated goals of using education to revitalize both the church and American culture. In response to this realization, Rushdoony sought out a pastorate that would allow him to advance his ministry.

With the majority of his own denomination against him and deep divisions in his first pastorate, Rushdoony continued to cultivate the connections he made at Carleton

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\(^{140}\)Existing records of the divorce provide little information regarding the motivations for each party in the separation. The two separated in 1957 and the divorce was finalized in 1959. The initial settlement gave Rushdoony custody of their six children. The judge awarded Arda $1 per month of alimony. In 1962, another ruling gave Arda custody of the three oldest children, while the youngest remained with their father. For her part, Arda accused Rushdoony of being difficult to live with and of inflicting “extreme cruelty” and “wrongly inflicted upon her grievous mental suffering.” Rushdoony remained silent on the matter, but decades later did confide in his private journal that Arda had engaged in “extensive fornication after the divorce” and noted that some unnamed similar offense had “preceded that step” of the divorce (R. J. Rushdoony journal entry for June 20, 1984, RJR Library). Rushdoony’s letters from his missionary period indicate that Arda was often ill due to a misdiagnosed thyroid issue (R. J. Rushdoony to George Huntston Williams, November 9, 1949, RJR Library). Further, he frequently noted that Arda was exhausted by the reservation and often sent her to visit family in California for recuperation (R. J. Rushdoony to George Huntston Williams October 5, 1945; R. J. Rushdoony to Lorna Logan, April 4, 1946; and, R. J. Rushdoony to James Laurie, October 15, 1949, RJR Library). Whatever the exact circumstances surrounding the divorce, it is probable that Arda was not happy on the reservation or with missionary work.
College to build support for his ideas outside of the boundaries of traditional Presbyterianism. While it seems clear from his correspondence and activities that Rushdoony loved his work as a missionary and preacher, it also seems equally clear that Rushdoony felt equally at home with the rogue’s gallery of political activists he met through his association with Spiritual Mobilization, FEE, and the Volker Fund. In fact, it’s reasonable to suggest that Rushdoony saw no tension between his associations with these political activists and his duties as a Presbyterian missionary and pastor.

The activists staffing Spiritual Mobilization, FEE, the Volker Fund, and any number of other fledgling “conservative” or “libertarian” organizations were at the forefront of broader and growing movement to attack federal management of the economy, criticize U.S. foreign policy, and roll back the social welfare advances of the New Deal. For secular libertarians such as Ingebretsen, Harper, and Cornuelle, their political and economic agenda had a quasi-religious force behind it that can be best seen in the eclectic spiritual antics embodied in the LSD-infused experimentation of Spiritual Mobilization. For others, however, resistance to a centralized federal government was not simply a matter of liberation and spiritual well being; it was a religious obligation rooted in the deepest traditions of Western Christianity.

In this chapter I have attempted to outline how Rushdoony’s time on the Duck Valley reservation led him to this latter position. From his own personal history as a descendant of an oppressed ethnic minority to his work with Native Americans who were less than a generation removed from forced relocation and genocide, Rushdoony was particularly sensitive to trends in governance that could lead to the intensification of ethnic and religious persecution. At Berkeley, Rushdoony learned from Ernst H.
Kantorowicz that Christian theology had a profound influence on the political and social realities of Western civilization. His time on the Duck Valley Indian Reservation convinced him that modern Christianity had abdicated its responsibility to address the very problems of political theology that it had bequeathed to the modern world. On the reservation, Rushdoony believed that he had seen two peoples: a race that had lost faith in its own history and in the religion of the culture that had conquered it, and another that was were eager to reject their God-given Christian liberty for government management of their lives. When combined, Rushdoony’s personal history, his education, and his missionary work led him to question the role of state governance in the lives of individual men and to worry about Christianity’s proper relationship to state governance. Further, he believed that Christians in the United States could address these theological and political problems by adopting the self-conscious Christian epistemology of Cornelius Van Til who founded his criticism of modernity on an orthodox elucidation of the ontological relationship between the Persons of the Holy Trinity.

After a tumultuous decade in Santa Cruz, Rushdoony abandoned his pastorate in 1962 to peruse this problem of the proper relationship between Christ and the state as a full time career.\textsuperscript{141} In leaving the Santa Cruz church, Rushdoony set aside work as a pastor and missionary in favor of the shadowy and amorphous world of mid-century American conservative activism, research, and education. Building on his interconnected concerns of political theology, epistemological self-awareness, and anti-statism, Rushdoony approached the blossoming conservative movement with a unique religious, political, and cultural agenda. His certainty and intellect impressed many of the

\textsuperscript{141} Rushdoony, “A Biographical Sketch of My Father,” 27.
businessmen and activists he encountered. By the beginning of the 1960s Rushdoony found himself working with right-wing political activists with closer ties to the John Birch Society than with the evangelical activists who would eventually form the backbone of the New Religious Right that emerged in the late-1970s. In chapter 2, I take up Rushdoony’s relationship with the budding libertarian and conservative movements and explore how his work with these activists can help historian of politics and religion think critically about the nature, meaning, and ultimate goals of something we now call the American conservatism movement.
Chapter 2: On the Boundaries of American Conservatism

Conservatisms, Fusionism, and the Creation of the Right-Wing Extremism

“The failure of the conservative movement in the United States has been a failure of the churches. … With rare exception, conservatives have lacked Biblical and theological roots. This is not surprising, given the fact that the clergy are themselves abysmally ignorant. … Without the doctrine of sin and total depravity, men will trust in the abilities of men and civil governments to do good, and they will concentrate powers in the hands of church and state, an action which will surely lead to evils. … The Christian element in the conservative movement lacks theology; the non-Christian elements are usually inconsistent humanists, closer to the Left than to anyone else.”

– R. J. Rushdoony, “The Failure of the Conservatism Movement”¹

“Conservatism… is… the political secularization of the doctrine of original sin.”

– Peter Viereck, Conservatism Revisited²

William Terry Couch stank. His unfortunate stench originated from two interrelated causes. First, he rarely bathed.³ Second, he had recently become a key mediator in a dispute between various factions within the Center for American Studies, a charitable organization on the forefront of the right-wing intellectual movement. This


latter situation had brought him into direct conflict with two of the Center’s researchers and writers, R. J. Rushdoony and David L. Hoggan. In Rushdoony, Couch found himself squaring off against a “literate Fundamentalist”\textsuperscript{4} and “congenital liar”\textsuperscript{5} who was using his position at the Center to forward his “anti-Catholic, anti-Semitic, anti-Negro, anti-just about everybody and everything” agenda. Hoggan, Couch believed, was a “Nazi sympathizer” and “apologist”\textsuperscript{6} who was cooperating with Rushdoony to start a “neo-Nazi movement”\textsuperscript{7} in the U.S. For a year from 1963 to 1964 Couch struggled against this united Rushdoony/Hoggan front.\textsuperscript{8} The conflict left Couch “deeply distressed,” leading him to conclude his only real option was “to quit and get away just as quickly as I could.”\textsuperscript{9} He eventually succeeded in getting the two men fired but at a high personal and professional cost: the incident created intense antagonisms and an environment of mutual distrust amongst the Center’s board members, staffers, and academic backers contributing to its eventual implosion.

Couch, formerly director of both the University of North Carolina and University of Chicago Presses and editor-in-chief of \textit{Collier’s Encyclopedia}, was, despite his unfortunate smell, a notable American academic who was no stranger to controversy and

\textsuperscript{4} William T. Couch to A. N. J. den Hollander, March 24, 1964, folder 138, William Terry Couch Papers #3825, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (hereafter cited as the WTC Papers).

\textsuperscript{5} William T. Couch to Fred Wieck, September 5, 1963, folder 138, WTC Papers.

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{7} William T. Couch to Ivan R. Bierly, n.d., folder 138, WTC Papers.

\textsuperscript{8} Because of Hoggan’s highly controversial nature, it is worth pointing that later in life, Rushdoony denied that he and Hoggan were ever friends. They cooperated at the Fund, but out of convenience and not necessarily out mutual agreement on the issues, he suggested. Rushdoony summarized their relationship as follows: “he was an assigned burden who made my life difficult” (R. J. Rushdoony to “Wayne,” November 14, 1992, R. J. Rushdoony Library, Chalcedon Foundation, Vallecito, CA (hereafter cited as the RJR Library).

political infighting. But his timing at the Center for American Studies couldn’t have been worse. He found himself in the midst of an intense struggle to define what it meant to be a right-winger in post-World War II America. In the specific context of the Center, this dilemma revolved around religion and fascism. Regarding the former, Couch worried that Rushdoony’s “anti- just about everybody and everything” agenda would alienate Catholics and anyone else with “genuinely valid religious and moral commitments.” In the case of fascism, Couch worried that Hoggan would permanently taint the Center’s educational mission with the “remnants of Nazism.” As a result, Couch concluded Rushdoony was “an extreme right-winger” who needed to be expelled from the Center. Hoggan’s “pro-Hitlerism” put him into another category entirely, requiring his immediate termination from the Center accompanied by repeated public denunciations of his research.

In each case, Couch’s personal struggle to hold the Center together while simultaneously expelling the sectarian Rushdoony and the fascist Hoggan reflected wider tensions within the American right-wing. Namely, activists, thinkers, and funders of the

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12 Ibid.

right had begun debating the nature and meaning of the “right” and many adopted the adjective “conservative” to describe their political, social, and cultural agenda. This chapter explores the controversies surrounding the struggle to define the limits of American “conservatism.” First, I open with a critical interrogation of the category “conservative”—a discursive formation that was in its infancy as Rushdoony, Hoggan, and Couch fought for the future of the Center for American Studies—and its relationship to religion. Next, I move on to examine how this struggle define the proper relationship between conservatism and religion played out in the specific context of the Center. As a whole, this chapter problematizes the standard historiographic assumptions underlying intellectual and social histories of the American right to produce what I hope is a more multifaceted and complex story of the origins of American conservatism. I argue that religion posed a threat to the rise of modern American conservatism, and yet no other element of conservatism is more essential to its identity as a political, social, and cultural movement. Further, key intellectuals in the movement implicitly or explicitly perceived this threat and made a series of complex intellectual and organizational moves to preserve the unity of the movement by jettisoning denominational and sectarian commitments. Others, such as Rushdoony saw specific religious commitments as the key to the movement’s success and struggled to preserve sectarian exclusivity as the necessary foundation of all conservative action. Thus, from its inception modern conservatism has been at once defined by religious commitment and perpetually haunted by it. Religion proliferates, reenergizes, and defines American conservatism; it is also the element that threatens its very existence.
I. RELIGION AND POST-WAR CONSERVATISM: THE DISCOURSE OF “FUSIONISM” AND THE PROBLEM OF RELIGION

Before discussing Rushdoony’s relationship with the Center for American Studies, I first need to establish the wider context of the American right wing circles he was entering. This section sets the intellectual stage for discussing the problems of religion and fascism that eventually precipitated William Couch’s flop sweat with which I opened the chapter. It is an excurses from my exploration of Rushdoony’s religious ideas, yet it is necessary a digression because it traces the wider contours of the conservative milieu out of which Rushdoony’s project Christian Reconstruction eventually emerged. This section takes as its focus the concept of “fusionism” and the interconnected ideas of three highly influential conservative intellectuals: Frank S. Meyer, Will Herberg, and George H. Nash. Through a close reading of their works, I provide a typography of the place of “religion” in the formative period of the modern American conservative movement from roughly 1955 through to the early 1970s. This map will provide a framework for exploring Rushdoony’s ideas over the course of the next three chapters of this project.

As I noted in the introduction, I intend to follow Michel Foucault’s suggestion that historians should efface discursive unities in order to understand the conditions out of which such unities emerged. This section seeks to erase the presumed unity between conservatism and religion and, building on the method of Bruno Latour’s sociological insights, tries to follow the controversies that emerged from the effort to merge the two into a coherent ideological whole. My starting point in this section “begins precisely

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with the controversies about which grouping one pertains to”\(^\text{15}\) because the processes that lead to “[g]roup formations leave many more traces in their wake than already established connections which, by definition, might remain mute and invisible.”\(^\text{16}\) Thus, as “conservatives” worked to define the constituent boundaries of their movement via performative definition, they created numerous discursive “cracks” or “traces” in history that may have inestimable long-term implications. By following Foucault’s suggestion to erase unities and Latour’s injunction to follow the traces of the controversy, my intention in this chapter is to focus on the contested nature of American conservatisms with an eye to the controversies that plagued any effort to define a coherent conservative approach to American social, cultural, and political problems.

Before tracing these controversies, however, I need to make three explicit about the limited and provisional nature of this project. First, in this section I am looking specifically at the work of intellectuals, not of grassroots activists or political organizers. The ideas that I explore here have had a profound influence on all forms of the American conservatism, but they should not be seen to be as universal or constituent of all components of the movement. Second, my focus here is on a very narrow subject—“religion”—as it is developed in the work of three specific figures within a period of about two decades. This narrow perspective is designed to highlight certain important trends, but other parameters—such as a different date-range, the study of other thinkers, or an exploration of the grassroots rather than the intellectuals—might yield a very different understanding of religion’s place in American conservatism. Third, and finally,


\(^{16}\) Ibid., 31.
by focusing on intellectuals writing in the post-War period, I am making a number of unstated assumptions about the definition, nature, and meaning of conservatism in America culture. But, these caveats aside, I have to begin somewhere and so I have taken these figures and this timeframe as the problematic starting points of my discussion of the relationship between conservatism and religion.

Fusionism, which is generally defined as the convergence or fusion of traditional, cultural conservatism with economic conservatism or libertarianism, is one of the most important intellectual constructs of mid-century U.S. culture because it ostensibly allowed warring forms of conservatism to work together to resist Communism and Liberalism. I take it as my subject in this section for three reasons. First, is its importance to intellectuals, political leaders, and grassroots activists. Second, many scholars of conservatism generally accept the fusionist paradigm without reflecting critically on its origins and how the category was constructed. Third, and the focus of this chapter, fusionism has many implicit assumptions about the nature and meaning of “religion” imbedded in it, yet these assumptions have remained largely unexplored. By exploring the place of “religion” in fusionism we can begin to appreciate why Rushdoony’s project of Christian Reconstructionism never became a component of the broader American conservative movement. Further, such an exploration is needed if we hope to understand what American conservatism is and how it works in other popular discourses. Thus, in this section I offer a very tentative and provisional typography for charting how an important group of intellects created the generally assumed linkage between conservatism and religion. I focus on a group of intellectuals who were closely
associated with William F. Buckley’s *National Review* and, therefore, found themselves at the vanguard of defining conservatism in post-World War II American culture.

**Dialectical Conservatism**

In 1956, William F. Buckley, Jr., hired Frank S. Meyer to review books for the newly established *National Review* and the two launched a long, productive collaborative effort to unite American conservatives into a potent cultural and political force. At *National Review* Meyer engaged in a series of intense fights to determine the proper limits of American conservatism.\(^\text{17}\) In the course of these struggles, Meyer hit upon a dialectical model of conservative philosophy that in proper pseudo-Hegelian\(^\text{18}\) fashion waltzed its way through a thesis-antithesis-synthesis dialectical triad. The engine of Meyer’s dialectic was his primary insight about a “bifurcation” at the heart of Western civilization.\(^\text{19}\) This bifurcation, Meyer argued, developed in the eighteenth century between thinkers who stressed freedom and the “innate importance of the individual person,” and those who “stress[ed] value and virtue and order.”\(^\text{20}\) Meyer argued that over the course of the nineteenth century these differences in emphases solidified into two

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\(^{17}\) This biographical material is drawn from Kevin J. Smant, *Principles and Heresies: Frank S. Meyer and the Shaping of the American Conservative Movement* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2002).

\(^{18}\) In an assessment of Meyer’s thought, Paul Edward Gottfried argues that Meyer imbibed a vaguely Hegelian dialectical historicism during his early association with Marxists. Even after shifting right Meyer retained a narrative of historical progress propelled by the conflict and reconciliation between opposing principles. In contrast to his earlier Marxism, he rejected historical materialism in favor of exploring the unfolding of spiritual forms. Gottfried is careful not suggest that Meyer was a Hegelian. Instead, he suggests that Meyer “may have been to Tübingen without even knowing it.” See Paul Gottfried, *The Search for Historical Meaning: Hegel and the Postwar American Right* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986), 83-103.


\(^{20}\) Ibid., 8.
divergent sociological and political positions that he labeled classical liberalism and traditionalism, respectively.

Meyer believed that the fundamental tension between classical liberalism (or “libertarianism” as he also identified it) and traditionalism grew from the “sublime paradox of faith that created the West.” This paradox was Christ’s Incarnation. Christ, Meyer believed, introduced a dialectical antagonism between individuality and a divinely revealed social order into history while simultaneously making it possible for human beings to freely act within the context of their transcendent destiny. As a result, “The individual person became, under God, the ultimate repository for meaning and value.” Christianity challenged Western Europe to create the political mechanisms “in which the person would be primary, and all institutions—in particular the state—secondary and derivative.” Western Europe ultimately failed to reconcile the paradox between individual liberty and a collective moral order. Meyer claimed that the fruits of this failure included the French Revolution and the emergence of the ideologies of Marxism, utilitarianism, and fascism. All of these -isms failed to synthesize the antithesis of Christ because they either betrayed an overemphasis on the autonomy of

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25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., 424-425.
humanity from divine order or they insisted on humanity’s subservience to an authoritarian social order.

In contrast to Europe’s failure to synthesize the paradox of Christendom, the Founding Fathers of the United States succeeded. They did so with the creation of a social contract that properly embodied the tension between the infinite and the finite manifested in the Incarnation. “In the open lands of this continent,” Meyer argued, the Founders “established a constitution that for the first time in human history was constructed to guarantee the sanctity of the person and his freedom.” The Founders’ “great achievement… in the drama of Western civilization” created a political order in which neither side of the dialectic—neither liberty nor ordered virtue—could triumph over the other. “Out of that dialectic they created a political theory and political structure based upon the understanding that, while truth and virtue are metaphysical and moral ends, the freedom to seek them is the political condition of those ends—and that a social structure which keeps power divided is the indispensable means to this political end.”

By the twentieth century, as the agents of European failure flooded into the U.S., Meyer believed that the great American synthesis was giving way to “collectivist Liberalism.”

In Meyer’s eyes, in order to resist collectivist Liberalism conservatives needed to recognize that the tensions between classical liberals and traditionalists were largely illusory because they developed from strains of the same Western intellectual tradition. The split between classical liberals and traditionalists merely reflected a difference of

27 Ibid., 426.
28 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
“emphasis” between the two camps. Rather than allowing the two camps to spiral to their respective extremes—authoritarianism in the case of traditionalism and anarchism for libertarians—their commonalities add up to a fervent rejection of all forms of collectivism, and as a unified front against decades of “Communist aggression.” Thus in Meyer’s work, American conservatism is the synthesis of the Western Christian tradition. If classical liberalism is the thesis of Christian subjectivity, and traditionalism stands as its antithesis, then a religiously motivated anti-communism was the dialectical catalyst that allowed the other elements to hang together as a coherent—if not totally consistent—conservative whole that Meyer variously labeled the “conservative mainstream,” the “conservative consensus,” and the “conservative synthesis.”

Meyer’s effort to define conservatism was founded on his implicit adoption of Catholic theological categories. Under the hood, his synthesis cohered around certain assumptions about the nature, meaning, and practice of something he understood as “religion” that he never elaborated or defined. This project opened a space for certain practices, such as publication, fund raising, and resistance to Liberalism, but also raised difficult questions about the place of other traditions—namely Protestantism and Judaism—and their practice within the conservative paradigm. William F. Buckley, Jr., who was aware of the “Catholic” problem at National Review, sought out a religion editor who could at once bring Jews and Protestants into the Meyer synthesis without abandoning the particulars of each faith.

The American Religion

Not surprisingly he turned to Will Herberg in 1961.\(^{32}\) Herberg’s already famous sociological essay *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*\(^{33}\) argued that America was “one great community divided into three big sub-communities religiously defined.” He critically demonstrated how the three most prominent American religions at midcentury created an “organic structure of ideas, values, and beliefs that constitutes a faith common to Americans and genuinely operative in their lives, faith that markedly influences, and is influenced by, the ‘official’ religions of American society.”\(^{34}\) But even as he criticized the tepid mediocrity of the “American Way of Life” embodied in this tradition, he nonetheless identified the differences between the three competing communities while also asserting they shared essential “Judeo-Christian” foundation. Further, for all of their tensions, Herberg suggested that Americans must negotiate between the competing transcendent claims of Catholics, Protestants, and Jews in order to resist the threat of “godless Communism,”\(^{35}\) which he called “the sworn enemy of both democracy and religion.”\(^{36}\) Like many in midcentury America, he deemed this interfaith resistance essential and suggested that Americans could reconcile their religious differences by accepting their generic “Judeo-Christian” or “interfaith”\(^{37}\) heritage.

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\(^{34}\) Ibid., 90.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 93.

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 268-267n33.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 260-261.
Standing in opposition to a vibrant and effective Judeo-Christian tradition were two prominent enemies: the forces of disintegrative religious particularism and the proponents of collectivism. First, his “religions of democracy” explicitly excluded minority Asian, humanistic, and atheistic traditions from American culture along with the “smug and nagging moralism” of evangelicalism and “fringe” movements such as the Pentecostal-Holiness movement and “Negro churches.” While these religious movements threatened to pull American democracy apart, proponents of collectivism threatened to homogenize the nation and ultimately undermine its traditions of an ordered virtuous civil society, democratic pluralism, and individual liberty.

On the pages of *National Review*, Herberg honed this argument to sharpen its political implications. In an argument with striking similarities to Meyer’s “consensus”  

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38 As historian of religion Randall Balmer points out, Herberg “enlarged the boundaries of the ‘American way of life’ to include Jews and Roman Catholics, but in doing so he effectively bracketed out all others” (Randall H. Balmer, “Religion in Twentieth-Century America,” in *Religion in American Life: A Short History* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2003], 343). Herberg’s eloquent defense of the “Judeo-Christian tradition” “implied that Jews and Christians were the ‘true’ Americans and that everyone else—Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Sikhs, Taoists, humanists—all professed beliefs outside of the mainstream” (343). Herberg is explicit that one cannot be an “American” and a Hindu, Buddhist, etc. He notes that any American who converts to one of these “exotic cults” is either regarded as an eccentric or shoehorned into the closest relevant Judeo-Christian category. In fact, he barely considers the possibility that, for instance, a Hindu immigrant could ever be “Americanized” (Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, 53). Balmer’s point is important for understanding how Herberg’s ideas functioned on the pages of *National Review* whose readers aspired to create a coherent conservative movement. Critically, Herberg not only excluded minority Asian, humanistic, and atheist traditions from the “religions of democracy,” but he also explicitly rejected many more or less common subgroups within the three dominant religions he discussed because they threatened to undo his “Judeo-Christian” consensus.


40 On Pentecostalism and Holiness see ibid., 138.; on African-American churches see ibid., 129. The irony here is that many of these Protestant groups that Herberg did not include as representatives of “religions of democracy” and the “American way of life” have, over time, uncritically adopted aspects of Herberg’s Judeo-Christian discourse. Again, to Balmer: the notion of a Judeo-Christian tradition “presumes a kind of moral consensus between Christians and Jews that has never really existed, and the use of the term, repeated by neoconservatives and the Religious Right, functions as a code of exclusion” (Randall H. Balmer, *Blessed Assurance: A History of Evangelicalism in America* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1999], 105). The further irony is that Herberg’s argument is a forerunner of neoconservative analyses of the place of religion in American culture, analyses that would be eagerly embrace many of the Protestant groups Herberg initially dismissed in his book.
model, Herberg argued that religious and non-religious conservatives all share a common faith in a “higher law,” and this faith must provide the foundation for a resistance of both foreign Communism and the “relativism and moral pragmatism” of domestic Liberals.\footnote{Will Herberg, “Conservatives, Liberals, and the Natural Law, II,” \textit{National Review} (June 18, 1962): 456.} His work recognized the differences between various religious and secular conservatives, but he encouraged them to see that their convictions are “essentially the same” as opposed to the “radically different” ideas of Liberals.\footnote{Ibid.} In an early essay, he insisted on this sameness: “Our religion, after all, is the religion of Amos, Isaiah, Jesus, and Paul.”\footnote{Will Herberg, “Conservatives and Religion: A Dilemma,” \textit{National Review} 11, no. 14 (October 7, 1961): 230.} The “our” in question here is, of course, the conservative readers of \textit{National Review} and it is constituted in opposition to the “they” of “anti-religious” “Jacobin” Liberals who, like their Communist allies, share a “common hostility to religion in public life.”\footnote{Will Herberg, “Conservatism, Liberalism, and Religion,” \textit{National Review} 17, no. 48 (November 30, 1965): 1087.} Even secular conservatives with their faith in a fixed, transcendent natural law are generically Judeo-Christian in a way that pragmatic, relativistic Liberals are not. Thus, in Herberg’s synthesis, the tradition of Judeo-Christian “biblical religion” is the mechanism that integrates a conservative vision of liberty with a divinely order social system.\footnote{Ibid., 1088.}

\textit{Fusion}

At each point in this process we have moved farther and farther away from the original “religious” or Christian core of conservatism posited by Meyer. With Meyer we began with the Incarnation and proceeded to the synthesis of individualism and social
order in form of America’s religiously grounded constitutional order. In Herberg’s work for the National Review we find that faith in the Incarnation is no longer necessary to hold conservatism together because any Judeo-Christian foundation is enough to synthesize the movement in the face of the collectivist challenge of Communism and Liberalism.

The final secularizing step in the formation of mid-century conservatism came in the form of historian George H. Nash’s The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America, Since 1945. In this text, Nash imposed order on the ever-shifting landscape of American conservatism by developing Meyer’s synthetic project into the internal logical of mainstream conservatism itself. As he surveyed his subject, Nash developed a series of highly influential heuristic categories from the writings of conservative intellectuals and in turn applied those categories back onto their creators. The result is that Nash effectively used a native discourse to map his subject and authorized the very distinctions, boundaries, and territories conservatives themselves labored to create. Nash, a self-described conservative, helped to create a unified conservative movement by outlining an elegant chronological and typographical map of “conservatism” that largely remains unchallenged within scholarly and popular literature. Further, this intellectual

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The necessity for this imposition of order becomes clear when one looks at attempts by left-wing critics to map the American right-wing. For example, popular works like Ralph Lord Roy, Apostles of Discord: A Study of Organized Bigotry and Disruption on the Fringes of Protestantism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1953) and Arnold Forster and Benjamin R. Epstein, Danger on the Right (New York: Random House, 1964) lump “mainstream” conservatives together with discordant and downright dangerous religious and political groups. Further, scholarly works labeled many radical movements as “conservative,” or, more pejoratively, “puesdo-conservative.” For examples see Daniel Bell, ed., The Radical Right (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964); Richard Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style in American Politics and other Essays (New York: Vintage Books, 1967); Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, The Politics of Unreason; Right Wing Extremism in America,1790-1970, Patterns of American Prejudice Series 5 (New York: Harper & Row, 1970). Although he was well aware of them and cites many of these studies, Nash had little interest in following these precedents and was instead interested in legitimizing a respectable and mainstream form of conservatism.
production and its embodiment in Nash’s text and its transmission via other texts that develop, refine, and criticize it has become an identity for conservatives and a foundation for their institutions.

At the outset, Nash adopted Meyer’s three-fold categorization of the post-war Right and used it to structure *The Conservative Intellectual Movement* by organizing his study around three forms of conservatism: 1) “classical liberals” or “libertarians;” 2) “traditionalists” or “new conservatives;” and, 3) “militant” anti-communists. It is

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47 Arguably, Nash himself did not intentionally secularize Meyer and Herberg’s ideas, but it is nonetheless the effect of his argument. His tight focus on the “fusion” of libertarians, traditionalists, and anti-Communists pointed to Meyer’s religious ideas, but did not linger on them. Instead, Nash’s categorization of the various conservatisms is, as the historian Jennifer Burns points out in a critical review of Nash’s text, “a profound argument unto itself” (Jennifer Burns, “Review: In Retrospect: George Nash's ‘The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945,’” *Reviews in American History* 32, no. 3 [September 2004]: 451). Burns notes that when Nash’s work appeared in 1976 there were profound disputes both inside and outside of American conservatism over the nature, history, and meaning of the concept. Nash’s book helped to settle many of the arguments and to define conservatism in terms of a generalized and simplified “fusionism” that many at the time of the text’s publication neither accepted nor believed characterized the movement. Thus, Nash’s text was a pivot in the discourse of conservatism and helped to finally settle many of the definitional controversies that originally plagued the movement. Again, returning to Burns’s review of Nash: “historians rely on Nash as an easy citation for the intellectual side of the story as they rush on past toward the political campaigns, secretive societies, and social movements that are their destination” (455). In referencing Nash’s text, even briefly, scholars often adopt his periodization and, perhaps more problematically, his heuristic categories of distinction: libertarian, traditionalist, and anti-Communist. This means, that for better or worse, “the political campaigns, secretive societies, and social movements” are all approached from a Nashian perspective that has already determined their place within (or on the margins of) the mainstream of conservatism.

Some scholars have gone so far as to not only maintain Nash’s heuristic categories but also to maintain fidelity to the order in which Nash introduces them in his text. For instance in his survey of the entire arc of the American conservative tradition, Patrick Allitt provides a pivotal chapter on “The New Conservatism, 1945-1964” that reinterprets all of his previous profiles of American conservative ideas in terms of Nash’s analysis. Conservatives are dutifully hammered successively into the categories of libertarian, traditionalist, and anti-communist and allowed to fuse into a conservative mainstream before the chapter’s end. Patrick Allitt, *The Conservatives: Ideas and Personalities Throughout American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 158-190.

48 Nash, *Conservative Intellectual Movement*, xiii. Nash has since reformulated this tripartite scheme into a fourfold model that drops anticommunists to include neoconservatives and religious conservatives (George H. Nash, “The Uneasy Future of American Conservatism,” in *The Future of Conservatism: Conflict and Consensus in the Post-Reagan Era*, ed. Charles W. Dunn [Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2007], 1-20). Although his new model perhaps reflects the contemporary, post-Bush moment in conservatism more accurately than his original fusionist paradigm, it’s his original tripartite scheme that remains a popular and common citation.
impossible to exaggerate the impact Nash’s heuristic has had on conservatives and those who study the movement. The power of Nash’s map of the American conservative movement comes from its basic elegance. Nash jettisoned Meyer’s theological foundation and reworked Meyer’s dialectical historicism to provide a leaner and more compelling story of the formation of the conservative mainstream that Nash dubs “fusionism.” By jettisoning Meyer’s carefully wrought and explicitly theological underpinning, Nash’s version of fusionism rather ruthlessly created an opening for all religious conservatives within the singular “traditionalist” category. Further, Nash’s fusionism embraced Herberg’s project that actively disqualified any anti-Catholic, anti-Semitic or rigidly theologically conservative Protestants from participating in the

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50 Brent Bozell first labeled Meyer’s conservative synthesis “fusionist” in a highly critical National Review article (L. Brent Bozell, “Freedom or Virtue,” National Review 13, no. 10 (September 1962): 181-187, 206. Bozell picked up the term from a suggestive passage in a January 16, 1962, National Review article, “The Twisted Tree of Liberty,” in which Meyer refers to “the fusion that is contemporary conservatism” (reprinted as the “Twisted Tree of Liberty,” in Meyer, Conservative Mainstream, 41). Meyer disliked the title and dismissed Bozell’s article as a misunderstanding of his project. He explicitly rejected it in an essay on Richard Weaver, noting, “American conservatism today… is not a ‘fusionism’ of disparate European traditions… but is born out of the most fundamental American experience” (Frank S. Meyer, “Richard M. Weaver: An Appreciation,” Modern Age 14, no. 3 [Summer/Fall 1970]: 244). Despite Meyer’s best efforts, the title stuck—in part because of Nash’s adoption of it.
fusionist paradigm while simultaneously embracing secular conservatives who maintained a generic fidelity to the theological underpinnings of Western Christendom.

Nash completed the process of the steady disengagement of explicitly religious commitments in fusionism and replaced them with generic commitment to Judeo-Christian values. The ready adoption of his model—by his supporters and detractors alike—suggests that by the 1970s the expectation was that conservatism was generically religious—it wasn’t Catholic, mainline Protestant, Fundamentalist, or Jewish; it was all of them and none of them at the same time. Here we find fusionist conservatives developing what we might call a “minimalist” conception of religion. That is, they had worked to more or less restrict religion to a specialized sphere of otherworldly, supernatural concerns that has only limited relevance to their political agenda. Religion may inform the political and cultural choices of conservatives, but it must not determine those decisions. Religion simply cannot be allowed to draw unneeded or unwanted distinctions between men of common cause seeking to resist, criticize, and ultimately overthrow a Liberal regime because it will threaten the chances of “fusion.”

When combined, Meyer’s consensus model, Herberg’s Judeo-Christian tradition, and Nash’s narrative of fusionism provided a neat, productive order for the conservative movement. Gone were the days of infighting, name-calling, intense disagreement over the nature and meaning of American conservatism. Liberalism clearly emerged as the endemic domestic threat to American freedom and social order, while the omnipresent threat of global Communism provided the outside pressure necessary to hold the

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51 I borrow this point and the ones that immediately follow it from Bruce Lincoln, Holy Terrors: Thinking About Religion After September 11 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). I pick up and develop this point more fully in chapter 6.
movement together. Those groups, individuals, and religious zealots who refused to abide by or dared to question the reality of the fusionist and Protestant-Catholic-Jew synthesis found themselves ravaged on the pages of National Review and ostracized by the proponents of the “conservative mainstream.”

Fusionist conservatives’ “minimalist” conception of religion worked to more or less restrict religion to a specialized sphere of otherworldly, supernatural concerns that has only limited relevance to everyday activities. Religion may inform the political and cultural choices of conservatives, but it must not determine those decisions. Religion simply cannot be allowed to draw unneeded or unwanted distinctions between men of common cause seeking to resist, criticize, and ultimately overthrow a Liberal regime. In this midcentury moment, religion occupies a completely different place in conservatism than it would in the varieties of conservatism that developed in the 1970s and eighties: it provides a common ground on which conservative intellectuals must stand in opposition to the humanism, secularism, and atheism of the Liberal opposition.

Further, to barrow a term from Bruno Latour, I would suggest that fusionism flattened religion into an “intermediary” concept. An intermediary “is what transports meaning or force without transformation: defining its inputs is enough to define its outputs.” In fusionism, religion may only be performed in such a way that is largely reducible to the function of a “blackbox” through which an adherent to one of the three great religions of democracy and Americanness passes into the fusionist paradigm to reemerge as a “conservative” capable of defending the very form of Americanness to which they owe their identity. The intermediary category of religion is linear, equal to

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52 Latour, Reassembling the Social, 39.
the sum of its inputs, and preformed based on a presumption of social, political, and cultural equilibrium. It transforms the already conservative Catholic, the Protestant, or the Jew into a cultural and social conservative capable of resisting the twin threats of Liberalism and Communism.

If we take this point seriously, then it becomes clear that fusionism was a performative effort to define conservatism in an unconditionally “modern” fashion. That is, fusionists worked to purify conservatism by establishing and preserving its separation from other alternatives and denying its status as a hybrid imbrication of other forces. As an intermediary, religion purifies and tidies up otherwise difficult problems and ultimately led to the punctualization of “mainstream conservatism.” The two central controversies that I have traced here—what is conservatism and what is religion—were never settled in meaningful sense apart from the performative discourse I have outlined. In fixing “religion’s” place as an intermediary at the heart of conservative discourse, Meyer-Herberg-Nash provided a foundation for common action that the concept of mere conservatism would never allow. Fusionism emerged from the associations created out of the texts produced by Meyer, Herberg, and Nash; the network of readers, donors and fund-raisers associated with Buckley’s National Review; the think tanks and organizations that more and more came to reflect the fusionist sensibilities of the elites they cultivated; and by the political gains to be made by leaders willing to plug into the fusionist milieu for fast political payout.

But if fusionists preserved religion as an intermediary, other conservatives, such as Rushdoony, worked equally hard to define religion in such a way that restored its ability to function as a mediator. In Latour’s term, mediators “transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or elements they are supposed to carry.”\textsuperscript{54} Mediators are dynamic systems that do not result in equilibrium and are certainly not equal to the sum of their inputs. Mediators, then, are difference engines, akin to metaphors, that carry meaning over from one realm to another and destabilize everything in the process. They amplify differences and generate outcomes that cannot be easily accounted for and cannot remain purified, fixed, or permanently defined.

In preserving religion at the heart of fusionist conservatism, Meyer, Herberg, and Nash helped create the conditions for fusionism’s instability and ultimate collapse. Even as a whole generation of conservatives successfully used fusionism to create a coherent agenda for institutional, academic, and political success, the “settled” problem of religion remained unsettling for theological conservatives like Rushdoony who interpreted fusionist conservatism as a form of religious and cultural retreat. By the 1970s just as fusionism had settled the issue and expelled many conservatives from the movement, many of them reemerged with the intention of performing a new form of religion, one that at once effaced by fusionism but made possible by it, that could redraw a whole new field of social, political, and cultural distinctions.

\textit{Ideas have Consequences!}

As I outlined in chapter one, many businessmen, lawyers, and activists on the right embraced the notion that ideas shape reality. Organizations such Spiritual

\textsuperscript{54} Latour, \textit{Reassembling the Social}, 39.
Mobilization, the Foundation for Economic Education (FEE), and Intercollegiate Society of Individualists (ISI) made public education their top priority. For his part, Rushdoony threw himself into the project of bringing Christian education into accord with Van Tillian presuppositional epistemology. In short, the development of a generation of self-conscious conservatives became the cause of the American right during the 1950s and ‘60s. For fusionists and many other conservatives, this epistemological project found its clearest expression in the work of an English professor at the University of Chicago who published the “fons et origo of the contemporary American conservative movement.”

Richard M. Weaver’s Ideas Have Consequences provided the right with both a provocative intellectual genealogy of liberalism (he situated the seeds of the decline of the West in the nominalist philosophy of William Occam) and a potent slogan—“ideas have consequences!” Weaver’s book captured the mood of an era and potently encapsulated the primary argument made by American conservatives—regardless of their specific location on the fusionist map—that all of the societal ills of the U.S. can be boiled down to bad ideas, not the structural inequities created by industrial capitalism, racism, gender, etc. Historian Paul V. Murphy neatly summarizes this sentiment:

The conservative movement was as much about power as ideas, but organizers and activists… defined it as a movement of ideas, not of party or class. It was the purveyors of flawed and corrupted ideas who were responsible for any ills in

57 Interestingly, Weaver had originally titled his manuscript The Fearful Descent (Nash, Conservative Intellectual Movement, 39). William T. Couch, Weaver’s editor at the University of Chicago Press, insisted on the name change and gave the right a catchphrase for the ages (Murphy, Rebuke of History, 162). Weaver disliked the change, but it proved far more compelling than his first choice.
modern America, not the structure of industrial capitalism itself or any other such large, impersonal force.\textsuperscript{58}

To argue otherwise would be to betray a basic agreement with Marxists, disgruntled minorities, labor unions, feminazis, and other roustabouts. The right insisted on the noetic origins of human action.

As a consequence of this shift toward epistemological priorities, the American right worked tirelessly to correct what they saw as a fundamental imbalance between their rather puny infrastructure for producing and disseminating ideas and the apparent monopoly American liberals had on the means of ideological production. One of the first and most important organizations devoted to busting the liberal monopoly was a tiny, but inestimably important philanthropic organization known as the William Volker Charities Fund. In fact, all of the educational organizations I cited in chapter one, and most of the intellectuals I have discussed in this chapter received direct funding from the Volker Fund. Beyond Spiritual Mobilization, FEE, and ISI, also helped fund Buckley’s \textit{National Review}, conservative book publisher Regnery, and the academic careers of thinkers ranging from Milton Friedman to R. J. Rushdoony. In Nash’s interpretive performance, the Volker Fund emerges as the exemplar of Meyer’s fusionist paradigm and a manifestation of Weaver’s idealist conception of correct thinking:

Another sign of healthy cooperation was the growing William Volker Fund series in the Humane Studies; by 1963 fifteen scholarly volumes had been published under the fund’s auspices. Although heavily oriented toward economics… the list… drew upon not just laissez-faire economists but traditionalists like Eliseo Vivas and Richard Weaver as well.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{58} Murphy, \textit{Rebuke of History}, 119.

\textsuperscript{59} Nash, \textit{Conservative Intellectual Movement}, 182.
Yet, contrary to the retrospective triumphalism implied by Nash, the Volker Fund embodied the turmoil of early conservative movement: would the right make its epistemological stand on a firm religious foundation at the cost of alienating potential allies, or would it jettison specific religious commitments in the interest of “fusing” the right into a large, popular political movement? In the next section I explore the relationship between the Volker Fund and the Center for American Studies in order to give material weight to the epistemological issues I raised in this section.

II. A NEW TYPE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

As William Terry Couch sat stinking and stewing in the Burlingham, California, offices of the Center for American Studies over the vexing nature of his Rushdoony/Hoggan problem, he found himself in the trenches of this much broader, nationwide fight to define the constitutive boundaries of the American right-wing. While Couch himself had yet to self-consciously adopt the moniker of “conservative,” his tenure at the Center was coterminous with the discursive fight over the place of religion in American conservatism. In the previous section of this chapter, I outlined the intellectual contours of fusionism. This takes the previous as a starting point for exploring the practical and organizational disputes that eventually gave rise to the concept of fusionism and will lay the ground work for understanding how R. J. Rushdoony’s project of Christian Reconstruction emerges from his interaction with movement conservatives, yet differs significantly from it. The next two sections of this chapter will outline how Rushdoony engaged in the controversies to define modern conservatism in the United States, but eventually had to blaze a different path that
ultimately defined Christian Reconstruction as project at odds with mainstream conservatism.

*Aggressive Philanthropy*

In an earlier incarnation, the Center for American Studies was known as the William Volker Charities Fund. The Volker Fund was the brainchild of William Volker, a wealthy Kansas City philanthropist who amassed a fortune selling window blinds and home furnishings throughout the Midwest. As his wealth grew, Volker began giving way much of his fortune. His charity stemmed from his days as a German immigrant on the streets of Chicago. The Volker family had arrived in Chicago in October 1871 shortly after the Great Fire destroyed much of second city. The twelve-year-old Volker “saw the operations of a vast spontaneous system of relief supported by charitable persons from every section of the world.”\(^{60}\) After witnessing the resilient charity of the stricken Chicagoans, Volker’s mother reportedly quoted the Gospel of Matthew to her son:

> Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them…. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. ... But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.\(^{61}\)

Following this lead from scripture, Volker gave all of his gifts anonymously and insisted that recipients of his charity tell no one of his generosity. The practice eventually earned him the nickname “Mr. Anonymous” and, paradoxically, made him a legendary figure in Kansas City—his adopted hometown and headquarters of his home furnishing business—

\(^{60}\) Herbert C. Cornuelle, “Mr. Anonymous:” *The Story of William Volker* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 1951), 23.

\(^{61}\) Gospel of Mark, 6:1, KJV.
because his practice of secret alms failed miserably as word of his generosity spread to those in need.  

Volker’s charity started small as he gave to drunks, widows, and the generally needy. Eventually these small, individual grants became a tiny fraction of Volker’s magnanimity as his grants grew in amount and quantity until they influenced the entire political and cultural structure of Kansas City. The long-term arc of his giving suggests that his charity was grounded in a strong sense of Christian duty, a deep regard for the dignity of all human beings regardless of their station or misfortunes in life, and a high-minded yet largely unspoken sense of civic duty. Thus, over time, his earliest gifts to the poor and infirmed developed into a wider agenda of giving that aimed at developing the infrastructure, educational institutions, and public welfare apparatuses of Kansas City—all with an eye toward reforming the government of the city.

In order to achieve these goals, the fund operated on a model of “aggressive philanthropy” that “never waited for opportunities [for giving] to appear but went in search of them.” Under Volker’s direct leadership, “aggressive philanthropy” meant the fund gave much of its money to community members in immediate need or to charities that could immediately affect the broader community. As he aged, Volker

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relinquished most of the control of his company to his nephew, Harold W. Luhnow, and focused on his charitable activities, which he eventually organized into a sizable charitable trust.

When Volker passed away at the age of eighty-eight in 1947, Luhnow took control of both the company and the charitable fund and something magical happened: Luhnow channeled the fund’s $15 million away from its typical targets in Kansas City and towards a broader and stranger object—conservative intellectuals. Under Luhnow, “aggressive philanthropy” morphed into an ideological project favoring charities, educational programs, and academicians that shared Luhnow and his staff’s hostility toward government subsidized social programs and support for the proliferation of unregulated markets. Where Volker had justified his giving based on a vaguely “conservative” ideological model rooted in scriptural precedent and bootstrap individualism, Luhnow developed the fund into a major supporter of anti-statist, pro-capitalist, anti-communist, and pro-Christian values.

Luhnow assembled a staff drawn mostly from the business community and academics with advanced degrees in economics. Principal staffers included the brothers Herbert and Richard Cornuelle, Kenneth Templeton, and Cornell University economist F. A. “Baldy” Harper. With Luhnow’s blessing the Fund’s various staff members spent much of their time quietly and methodically locating intellectuals who shared Luhnow’s views of government, free enterprise, and religion. They saw themselves as continuing Volker’s model of “aggressive philanthropy.” They created a network of thinkers and activists who, in most cases, had no idea that like-minded rightwingers existed.

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65 Statement of Policy, 10; Doherty, Radicals for Capitalism, 185-186.
Journalist and libertarian historian Brain Doherty notes that the results of this network building were thrilling and emotional for Volker’s people:

> These efforts to spin webs of communication among this scattered band of ideological outliers, helping them find each other, thrilled Volker’s employees, and they all remember it with great affection decades later. It got ingrown, admits Cornuelle, but it was still “very gratifying. We were a delightful bunch, all serious, dedicated, interesting misfits.”

Through these efforts, the Volker staffers helped form an intellectual foundation for American conservatism that had not previously existed. While much of their efforts focused on recruiting free market economists, they also cultivated cultural conservatives who criticized collectivism and any form of state-sponsored coercion. The result was the kind of proto-fusionism that Nash highlighted in his history of Conservatism. The Fund brought scholars together through symposiums, a nationwide book distribution effort, and other networking opportunities. As we saw in chapter 1, one of these Volker funded symposia brought R. J. Rushdoony off the reservation and into contact with host of thinkers who shared his hostility to the federal government. Further, Volker supported a host of American and international scholars, most notably bringing the leaders of the Austrian school of economics to the United States. In this instance, Volker’s money helped bring the controversial European economists Friedrich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises to the University of Chicago and New York University, respectively.

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In spite of the organizational success of the Volker Fund, its staff was riven with religious and ideological tensions. These deep tensions came to a head during a heated staff meeting in February 1962. Luhnow opened the meeting with a discussion of his peculiar religious views, noting that he possessed a unique but unspecified spiritual power. “The power I have may enter even Khrushchev,” Luhnow told his staff. “The step is to tune in on this power and let it work.” If this revelation perplexed the fund’s staff, it also heightened tensions between various factions in the fund’s staff. Since the late 1950s, Luhnow had become aware that many of the staffers did not share his appreciation for Christianity. To remedy the heathenism of his staff, Luhnow began aggressively insisting on the importance of Christianity as the foundation of the American social order. He stressed that Volker employees must themselves be committed Christians, and he became suspicious of his longtime staffers, including Templeton, Harper, and the brothers Cornuelle.

By the 1960s, the increasingly erratic Luhnow came under the sway of I. R. Bierly, another Cornell University economist and convicted Christian who convinced Luhnow that the Volker staffers were atheists and anarchists, and warned against their

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68 By most accounts, Luhnow adhered to some idiosyncratic form of Christian Science. In an interview with the author, Templeton described Luhnow as “science of mind guy” from a “nominally” Baptist background who opened all board meetings with a prayer (Kenneth S. Templeton, interview by author, March 20, 2007.). He was also a teetotaler who forbade smoking in Volker’s offices. Gary North, who interned at CAS in 1963, remembered that as he prepared to meet Luhnow for the first time, Rushdoony “warned me that Luhnow was a science of mind disciple, and not to laugh if he said something preposterous” (Gary North, email to author, March 17, 2007).

influence on the fund. The staff had traditionally avoided discussing religious issues because Templeton and Harper both attempted to recruit and cultivate men of very different religious backgrounds. Both men felt comfortable working with known atheists such as the economist Murray Rothbard and they had little difficulty reaching out to Catholics associated with organizations such as Intercollegiate Society of Individualists (ISI) and Buckley’s *National Review*. In contrast to this ecumenicism, Ivan Bierly actively antagonized atheists and made his preference for Protestantism obvious.

According to Templeton, when Bierly convinced Luhnow that his staff harbored non-Christian sympathies, “He [Luhnow] blew the whole damn thing up.” Shortly after the strange February 1962 staff meeting, Luhnow produced a memorandum declaring the termination of the Volker Fund. He announced his intention to fire most of Volker’s staff and reorganize Volker into the Center for American Studies (CAS). Luhnow sent his irreligious staff packing. Bierly remained with Luhnow and they rebuilt the fund’s staff.

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70 Doherty, *Radicals for Capitalism*, 294. In a note, Doherty cites a Volker associate as recalling “Bierly [made] sly references to what a shame it was that certain of his Volker colleagues weren’t going to church, and that Rothard was attempting to craft libertarian natural rights theory that wasn’t explicitly theological” (671-672n5). Rothbard seems to have been a lightening rod for Bierly’s religiously inspired wrath.

71 Templeton, interview.

72 Brian Doherty reports that Luhnow “adopted shifting pretenses that Volker had ordered the fund be liquidated back in 1958, and he was only now getting around to remembering that or telling anyone…. The standard story, contained in the Luhnow-sponsored William Volker biography… is that Volker decreed a lifespan of thirty years after his death on the fund, which should keep the fund alive until 1977” (*Radicals for Capitalism*, 294). In fact, Volker principals seem to have moved the goal posts as situations dictated: they variously told employees that the fund would cease activities twenty-five years after Volker’s death or that it would begin termination in 1957, 1959, and 1978.

73 H. W. Luhnow to Members and Executive Staff of the William Volker Fund, 15 March 1962; available in folder 132, WTC Papers and in the RJR Library.
The Center for American Studies

With the precipitous dissolution of the fund in 1962, Luhnow decided to unload what remained of the Volker Fund’s commitments to social charities in Kansas City and replace them with a new mission to provide a physical and intellectual home for conservative and libertarian scholars. Luhnow and Bierly proposed a “new type of educational institution” that would be oriented with a unified religious vision. “The intent of the Center,” Luhnow stated in a press release, “is to bring a renewed appreciation of Americans to the firm convictions of founding fathers in the reality of God, and the necessity of looking to Divine Providence for the proper of our government.” An internal memo circulated to Center staffers made this commitment even clearer:

No individual will ever be employed by the Center of American Studies who does not have an admitted dedicated commitment to God. … In our daily contacts we hope all staff members might clearly demonstrate their Christian convictions but nevertheless our activities, particularly our printed literature, will stress the

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74 One of Volker’s most important contributions to Kansas City was his gift of 40 acres to establish the University of Kansas City in 1930. Over the course of his life, Volker gave more than a million dollar in gifts to the University and guided its establishment. In 1963, the University joined the University of Missouri system after a protracted battle with Luhnow. During the fight, Luhnow insisted that the University must remain privately endowed in order to continue receiving Volker Fund money. He also attempted to install Ivan R. Bierly as the University’s Chancellor (Templeton, interview). Not surprisingly, the University rejected both of Luhnow’s demands. As a result, Luhnow took his marbles—at least those not legally bound to the University—in search of another institution that might let him play. The parting of ways was acrimonious and cost the University dearly. The San Francisco Examiner reported that the Center of American Studies formed with $10 million that “would have gone to the University of Kansas City if it had remained privately endowed. But it joined the Missouri state system for higher education this year. So the Burlingame Center and some other unspecified beneficiaries will share in the final distribution” (“New Study Center for Burlingame,” San Francisco Examiner, August 13, 1963).

75 Luhnow also desired to change the name of the Volker Fund to enhance fund raising efforts. As one early memo for the Center noted, “So long as this remains the William Volker Fund, the fact of its long history of fund-granting will be an important road block to contributions to its programs…” (I. R. Bierly, “Administrative, Policy, Budget Matters for the Center for 12 Months after June 1, 1963,” 14 May 1963, 10, folder 133, WTC Papers).

spiritual foundations rather than using the word Christian. … We sincerely hope that every contact of the staff members of the Center for American Studies will leave no doubt of our sincere dedication as Christians. 77

With this focus on Divine Providence and a stated dedication to Christian commitments, the CAS became a Christian organization and with time it became clear that “Christian” meant “Protestant.”

Former Volker staffers took the news of the Fund’s termination hard. Most viewed the formation of the Center as an attack on their character and believed that Bierly manipulated the ailing philanthropist into believing that his staff a pack of godless anarchists. This assessment was correct as Luhnow’s public statement regarding the founding of the Center clearly attests: “We have found that far too many so-called libertarians in essence are only pure anarchists, refusing to grant dominion to God, to government, or to anyone else—when liberty becomes only license.” 78 Given this type of rhetoric it’s hardly surprising Templeton particularly took the Fund’s termination as a personal insult and viewed it as a major setback for the cause of conservatism. In a letter to William Couch, Templeton registered his anger: “the Center has arisen on the ruptured foundations of nine years of painstakingly developed work on the part of a few of Burlingame expatriates…” 79 Similarly, when Bierly contacted Rothbard and offered him the opportunity to consult for the center, Rothbard sarcastically wrote to Templeton,

77 Harold W. Luhnow to all staff members of Center for American Studies, July 30, 1963, folder 133, WTC Papers.
79 Kenneth S. Templeton to William T. Couch, November 19, 1963, letter in author’s possession.
“They must really be short at CAS to start wooing an anti-Goldwater atheist.” Rothbard denied the request.

On this foundation of sand, Luhnow and Bierly struggled to erect a stable ideological institution. Their first step was to recruit a new staff. One of these new hires was Rushdoony. As I indicated in the last chapter, Bierly first came into contact with Rushdoony while Bierly was a staffer at the Foundation for Economic Education and Rushdoony was an unknown Presbyterian missionary in Nevada. In the intervening years the two corresponded regularly. Rushdoony’s fervent religious commitment and strong antagonism of publication education convinced Bierly that the minister could play an important role in the new organization. For his part, Rushdoony came to the Center with the ambition of molding it on the philosophy of Van Tillian presuppositionalism; he saw it as opportunity to start a Christian college.

Along with Rushdoony, Bierly and Luhnow also hired Couch and Hoggan. They hoped that the two academics could guide the Center’s academic aspirations. They hired Couch to edit an “Encyclopedia of Americana,” a project they hoped would generate

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81 Couch believed Rushdoony aspired to take over the operation of the Center with “allies and disciples”—notably David L. Hoggan, C. J. Miller, Fred Andre, and Gary North—but, “[f]ortunately, Rushdoony became too sure of himself and took positions that others had to oppose or let him run everything. This brought his separation and that of his allies—through whom he still tried to run the place after he had left” (William T. Couch to A. N. J. den Hollander, March 24, 1964, folder 138, WTC Papers).

82 In an effort to garner support for the publication, Couch cast a wide net to find scholars, public figures, and businessmen who might be interested in the encyclopedia. For his troubles, he often received responses that noted the vagueness of the proposed encyclopedia. For example, Henry Hazlett, an editor at Newsweek and a major figure in the development of American libertarianism, responded to Couch’s inquiries for help on the project with confusion: “I am in some doubt about the exact scope of your proposed ‘Encyclopedia of Americana’” (Henry Hazlett to William T. Couch, August 16, 1963, folder 139, WTC Papers). Former Yale professor Ralph H. Gabriel was far more blunt in his assessment of the project: “I do not see how an encyclopedia of Americana can be developed on any such base as suggested in your letter” (Ralph H. Gabriel to William T. Couch, August 16, 1963, folder 139, WTC Papers). The encyclopedia (sometimes also referred to as the “Bicentennial Encyclopedia”) was to be modeled on
revenue for the CAS, but that never found supporters beyond confines of the Center.

Hoggan, a Harvard trained historian, despised the New Deal and would, Luhnow and Bierly hoped, serve as the lead scholar on a team of revisionist historians dedicated to correcting the collectivist and anti-capitalist bias of a generation of U.S. historians. This dream team of religiously, economically and culturally conservative scholars was supposed to reform the American university and with it American culture. Instead, Rushdoony, Couch, and Hoggan couldn’t agree on the “conservative” identity of CAS. As they jockeyed for the mantel of “conservative” it became clear that the Center for American Studies could not achieve the Meyer-Herberg-Nash synthesis and “fuse” into a coherent “conservative” organization.

III. THE FAILURE OF FUSION

During his brief stint at the Center for American Studies it is clear that Rushdoony managed to further heighten tensions by consistently demanding that all fund employees demonstrate their commitment to orthodox Christianity. Further he aggressively pushed the Center and its principals toward the Van Tillian presuppositionalism he advocated in his writings. Not surprisingly this push toward a specific strain of orthodoxy ruffled the Christian feathers of various Catholics and the non-Presbyterian associated with the Center. Finally, as Rushdoony pushed the Fund to accept his interpretation of Van Til’s presuppositional philosophy, many otherwise sympathetic supports of the Fund withdrew.

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Couch’s previous work with Collier’s and the University of Chicago, but it never developed beyond the preliminary stages. It was to function as a supplement and support for the Center’s proposed “Vital Issues” series. The series was to serve as study guides of basic issues in politics, history, religion, and philosophy (“Revised Memorandum of Suggestions,” October 19, 1962, folder 133, WTC Papers). The earliest proposed volumes were to be authored by Center staffers Rushdoony, Miller, Bierly, and Hoggan (“Administrative, Policy, Budget Matters for the Center for 12 Months after June 1, 1963,” May 14, 1963, 10, WTC Papers, 17).
their support fearing the Center had no interest in object scholarship because it has interpreted all facts in advance.

When Rushdoony came to the Volker Fund as it transitioned into the Center for American Studies he worked as a researcher, speaker, and writer, composing internal memos on various topics and traveling to conferences. Before joining the Center as a speaker and researcher, Rushdoony received a grant from the Volker Fund that allowed him to finish *Intellectual Schizophrenia*,83 his first major attack on the philosophy underlying modern education. The Volker Fund had long maintained a keen interest in criticisms of public education and Rushdoony’s writings boiled with vituperative contempt for state-supported schools.84 It was a match made in heaven. Bierly had read drafts of the work, heard him lecture, and recruited Rushdoony to the Fund based on his educational philosophy.

The hiring of Rushdoony resulted in several unintended consequences for the fund and its employees. First, although it’s unclear whether Bierly appreciated it or not, in hiring Rushdoony for his criticism of public education he also hired Rushdoony for his Calvinism. The two—political and religious commitment—were inseparable in Rushdoony’s mind. Further, Bierly was not only getting an unapologetic and zealous


84 After receiving grants and making connections with Volker staffers, Rushdoony was eventually invited to directly participate in conferences sponsored by the Fund. “At the suggestion of Messrs. Bierly and Harper, who have told me of your general and specific interest in the field of education, we are inviting you to participate in a discussion-type conference of about a dozen next month. The directors of the Volker Fund are seeking criticism and suggestions of ways to promote parish and church-related elementary and secondary schools” (Kenneth S. Templeton to Rousas John Rushdoony, June 29, 1960, RJR Library).
sectarian, he was also hiring a Christian apologist whose commitment to Van Til’s apologetic strategy guaranteed conflicts between Rushdoony and others at the fund. Most interestingly, Bierly’s encounter with Rushdoony’s ideas seems to have sparked a renewed interest in religion for Bierly himself. In a series of letters and discussions, Bierly quizzed Rushdoony on the theological foundations of Calvinism. Over time, Bierly began reading Van Til and adopting aspects of his apologetic rhetoric. Rushdoony encouraged the transformation by drafting lengthy annotated bibliographies as primers for Bierly. Bierly responded with probing questions pushing Rushdoony to elaborate on the practical aspects of his theological position. For his part, Bierly was interested in the theology, but seems to have been much less interested in Rushdoony’s specific sectarian Reformed commitments. He was clearly fascinated with Van Til’s presuppositional apologetics and its implications for politics and economics, but Bierly managed to divorce Van Til’s philosophy from his religious polity. As a result, Bierly never fully adopted or, more properly speaking, converted to Rushdoony’s religious worldview; however, he did end up defending Rushdoony against charges of sectarianism in Rushdoony’s hyper-sectarian terms without recognizing it.

85 For example, in 1958 Bierly wrote to Rushdoony, “your letter of December 1, challenges me to a moment of contemplation” regarding the relationship between religion and the law. Expanding on the point, Bierly notes, “I am increasingly conscious of my almost total lack of history and philosophy, to say nothing of specific religious training” (I. R. Bierly to R. J. Rushdoony, December 3, 1958, RJR Library). Rushdoony was more than happy to provide Bierly with the historical, philosophical, and theological training that he lacked. To this end, Rushdoony sent Bierly (and others like him) long letters summarizing his ideas, citing Van Til, and generally plugging his understanding of presuppositional apologetics (R. J. Rushdoony to Ivan R. Bierly, November 23, 1961, and R. J. Rushdoony to Ivan R. Bierly, January 14, 1962, RJR Library). Finally, as late as 1963 when their relationship was strained by Rushdoony’s Calvinism, Bierly nonetheless commended Rushdoony for convincing him “of the relevance of Christian faith to scholarship in the West, and to a conversation on the matters involved among those of us who are thoughtfully concerned about genuinely basic issues today. Rush has been tremendously challenging and helpful to me in the process of the development of my own consciousness of this need today” (I. R. Bierly to William T. Couch, March 13, 1963, folder 132, WTC Papers).
“Is there room for a Roman Catholic in the movement which is rooted and grounded in the Protestant theological perspective?”

Nowhere was Rushdoony’s destabilizing religious commitments more evident than in a series of exchanges between Bierly and Richard M. Weaver. In the exchange, Weaver attempted to protect his friend and confidant, Victor Milione,\(^6\) from an effort by Bierly to force the distribution of a “sectarian” work. Milione was the head of ISI, a small but important conservative organization that distributed conservative literature to college students and professors free of charge. The Volker Fund had traditionally provided large subsidies to ensure that the ISI could continue its program. Traditionally, the ISI had deep ties to anticommunist Catholics (most notably William F. Buckley, Jr., who served as its first president) and was staffed by dedicated, conservative Catholics. Milione was himself a devout Catholic who carefully guarded his religious commitments and was reluctant to concede ground to conservative Protestants.

In 1963 as the Volker Fund was becoming the Center for American Studies, Milione sent a worrisome note to Weaver expressing his fear that the Volker Fund was supporting “sectarian” literature and that it might try to force out anyone who resisted efforts to distribute the work. The work that Milione brought to Weaver’s attention was an early draft of Rushdoony’s *This Independent Republic*.\(^7\) After reviewing Rushdoony’s manuscript, Weaver wrote to Bierly concluding,


7. The text was a spiral-bound mimeograph of a series of lectures Rushdoony had conducted for the ISI at St. Mary’s College of California and the University of Washington. At the two colleges, Rushdoony appeared with speakers that included such mid-century conservative pioneers as Hans F. Sennholz, Felix Morley, and the Volker Fund’s I. R. Bierly. See “ISI Summer Schools, 1962,” *ISI Campus Report*, Winter 1963-1964.
I have to agree with Vic that distributing matter of a sectarian nature would be quite beyond the scope of the ISI. … I should add, as a matter of candor, that it would be a distressing thing to me if the [Volker] Fund were to limit itself to a much narrower field that it has the ability and the means to operate in. This is a position I was trying to make clear at the Windermere meeting.88

Weaver’s note and Milione’s worries about his future as head of ISI indicate that both sensed the change in direction and purpose at the Volker Fund. The letter also indicates that Volker’s intention with the organizations it funded were sometimes less than benevolent. Weaver politely, but nonetheless forcefully challenged Bierly for trying to pressure the ISI to distribute material. If the Volker Fund truly valued the autonomy of the groups it sponsored, then this example may be an aberration. But this seems unlikely since Bierly’s comments make it clear that he was more than ready to remove Milione whose faith was an impediment to Volker’s goals.

Bierly’s response to Weaver’s accusations also make it clear that Rushdoony was the central issue in the dispute. Specifically, Weaver disliked Rushdoony’s Calvinism and feared it would steamroll Catholics like Milione and less committed believers like Weaver himself.89 Bierly responded to the charges by suggesting both Weaver and Milione have confused a religious discussion with a sectarian one. Further, Bierly noted that Milione was well aware of the nature and content of Rushdoony’s Calvinistic take on American history because the ISI had sponsored a series of lectures by Rushdoony in 1962. Bierly then brazenly upped the ante by suggesting that it is Milione and the


89 Couch later remembered that Rushdoony often was less than honest with Catholics with whom he dealt: “I have seen Rushdoony talking in the most amicable way with Roman Catholics that he was using for his own purposes at the same time that he was supporting other people who were making the most vicious attacks on Roman Catholicism” (William T. Couch to A. N. J. den Hollander, March 24, 1964, folder 138, WTC Papers). This suggests that Milione’s resistance to the book may have been a reflection not only of his assessment of Rushdoony’s ideas but also of the Reformed minister’s public behavior.
Catholics who dominate the ISI who are being sectarian: “In fact, Vic made it very clear that it was his own personal difficulty here that was really disturbing him, ‘Is there room for a Roman Catholic in the movement which is rooted and grounded in the Protestant theological perspective?’”

Weaver countered that he had once considered reviewing Rushdoony’s *Intellectual Schizophrenia in Modern Age*, an academic journal helmed by Weaver and Russell Kirk, but concluded,

> despite the brilliant passages it contains, the book was too sectarian for our columns. This was two years before the current issue came up. I must say that my response to the lectures is pretty much the same. I agree with Rush on lots of points, and I wish that millions of people could be brought to see those points. But at the same time, in the midst of matter very sensible and defensible, I come on things that seem to be pulled out of the wild blue—things that really do not emerge from his facts or his reasoning. This makes the work very hard to defend as a scholarly performance, even when one is prone to agree with him, and a sound basis in scholarship is a necessity for our position. So, my present feeling is one of doubt – wanting to be convinced, but not quite convinced.

One is left to conclude that the things Rushdoony “pulled out of the wild blue” were related to his Calvinism, at least in Weaver’s mind. Weaver was and remains one of the revered intellectual voices from mid-century conservatism and therefore his frank assessment of Rushdoony’s work had to have been quite damning to Bierly.

Not content to accept the Chicago professor’s assessment of Rushdoony’s scholarship, Bierly demanded, “could you indicate things that ‘seem to be pulled out of the wild blue.’” Pushing even farther, Bierly then suggested that perhaps Weaver’s vaunted work would wither under similar scrutiny: “I could send Ideas Have

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Consequences to fifty professors of English and Philosophy and get almost as severe criticism as you have leveled at Rush’s lectures. Does this mean that your book has or has not passed the ‘scholarship’ test?”

When Bierly ran the issue by Couch, Couch further aggravated the situation by siding with Weaver, noting, “if I understand the situation, I believe you have the choice of either giving Milione stuff he feels he can use effectively or, if you have enough power, of replacing him with someone who shares your ideas.” Couch suggested the latter would be a poor track and agreed with Weaver’s assessment that he would find it difficult to “to think of an ISI without Vic Milione.” On Rushdoony’s sectarianism, Couch argued, “I think he cuts down sharply on his effectiveness by connecting his argument with particular doctrines that separate him from persons who otherwise would be agreement with him.” That Rushdoony’s entire theological project is founded on separation and not connection was evidentially lost on Couch.

Out numbered and out schooled, Bierly eventually dropped the issue. He ceased agitating for Milione’s ouster at ISI and the organization never distributed Rushdoony’s text. Interestingly, Bierly eventually put the issue to rest by noting that he didn’t really understand the issues involved. “I am conscious,” he wrote,

of the fact that my own lack of a firm grasp of the history of Christian doctrines puts me in a position from which I am not qualified to judge one view from another—and thus I’m anxious and concerned that different views on some of these matters have an opportunity of voice in education circles that has been substantially denied them for many years—at least I can say from personal observation in the classroom and on a university faculty and in my present

93 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
capacity that very few scholars are willing to give hearing to any viewpoint that gives emphasis to the relevance of Christian faith.\textsuperscript{96}

This reversal and plea to his own ignorance leads one to wonder on what basis Bierly assessed Rushdoony’s text as worthy of distribution in the first place.

\textit{“Our Christian Faith”}

By May of 1963, tensions over religion re-emerged within the staff of the Center for American Studies. No longer focused outward at the Center’s Catholic surrogates, Couch found Rushdoony’s Calvinistic wrath aimed squarely at his own religious commitments. The problem first emerged in a draft of version of the new Center’s “Statement of Purpose.” C. John Miller, one of Rushdoony’s Reformed allies at the Center, penned a three-part “Perspective” that he assumed all staffers at the Center would share. First, he cited generic notion of “patriotism” followed by vaguely defined conception of fair and impartial “scholarship.” The third perspective of “commitment,” however, was much more specific: “A respect and commitment to the great creeds, faith of orthodox Christianity as represented in the Apostles’ creed, the Nicene creed, the Augsburg Confession, the Belgic Confession, the Westminster Confession, and the Declaration of Savoy.”\textsuperscript{97} In the margins of the proposal, Couch scribbled, “[Point three] would exclude me.”\textsuperscript{98}

Adding insult to intellectual and religious injury, on the same day Couch received another memo from David Hoggan. Hoggan’s memo explicitly and self-consciously appropriated the contemporary rhetoric of budding conservative movement, titling it

\textsuperscript{96} I. R. Bierly to William T. Couch, March 13, 1963, folder 132, WTC Papers.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
“The American Conservative Concept in Relation to the American Studies Program.”

Hoggan’s memo is notable for two reasons. First, in it he enumerates twelve points that he argues are the “minimum condition” that all staffers at the program must agree upon.\(^99\)

Four of Hoggan’s points are interesting for their religious specificity:

1) That the United States was and is a Christian nation.
2) That belief in the Trinity is indispensable to an individual Christian Faith.

...  
11) That instruction about American traditions cannot be meaningful unless it includes an adequate emphasis on the Christian Origins of these United States and the American Federal Constitution.
12) That further emphasis on Christian values is required if higher education is to meet the challenge of the materialistic creeds.\(^100\)

As whole, the twelve points are quite obviously designed to designate the boundaries of the Center’s religious and political commitments. They also clearly have the intended consequence of excluding all but the most committed Christians from the Center’s staff.

Second, and less obviously, Hoggan’s points are intended to demonstrate that the American “conservative concept” is fundamentally a Christian concept: the list begins with a religious presupposition (“the United States was and is a Christian nation”) and terminates with a theological conclusion. Consequently, both memos are material artifacts attesting to Rushdoony’s influence on the Center’s staff. Through Miller and Hoggan, Rushdoony succeeding in translating the presuppositional philosophical position

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\(^99\) Interestingly, many of Hoggan’s twelve points mirror Frank Meyer’s six key components of American conservatism, which I summarized earlier in this chapter. Most notably, Hoggan and Meyer both insist that America’s conservative principles are founded on the concrete moral foundation of Christianity. Both see this foundation as essential to defending a free economic systems and the autonomy of the individual from centralized authority. Finally, both argue that federalism and the U.S. constitution are the only social mechanisms available that can successfully resist Communism. The two diverge on religion: Hoggan has a specific form of Protestantism in mind, Meyer is more ecumenical in his approach.

\(^100\) David Hoggan, “The American Conservative Concept in Relation to the American Studies Program,” May 28, 1963, folder 133, WTC Papers.
of Van Til into an institutional shibboleth designed to identify only the most fervent of Christians willing to presuppose the reality of God in American history.

Immediately after receiving the two memos, Couch produced an angry memo of his own. Entitled “Sectarianism in the Center,” it clearly attacked the Miller-Hoggan-Rushdoony alliance. The memo declares, “three members of one denomination were proposed for major positions on the staff of the proposed graduate school. This denomination is Calvinistic.” Further, Couch notes that when another Roman Catholic was suggested to edit an important series of publications for the Center “the appointment… was objected to on the ground that he is a Roman Catholic.” Couch suddenly found himself in the same place as Vic Milione—a religious outsider aware that such “Christian” antagonists could not and would not cooperate with a nominal Christian such as himself. Couch set about to prevail upon Bierly that any invocation of specific religious doctrines would lead to two problems for the Center. First, since all of the documentation regarding the Center’s staff’s religious convictions ultimately pointed toward Calvinism, then Couch concluded any reference to “our Christian faith” or “Christian nation” “could reasonably be taken to mean Calvinism” to the exclusion of any other form of Christianity. If this were the case, then Couch himself would have to resign from the Center since “[t]o represent my Christian faith as Calvinism is to falsify.” Second, Couch asserted, “‘our Christian faith’ could be taken by men like [Austrian economist and classical liberal] Ludwig von Mises as a slap in the face.”

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102 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
short, the insistence on Christianity threatened to alienate non-Calvinist Christians and more secular individuals alike.

The central question for Couch was whether Bierly, and ultimately Luhnow, would reject Rushdoony’s attempt to drag the Center into an exclusively Calvinist religious position, or whether Couch could encourage the kind of ecumenicism favored by other conservatives. The answer to the dilemma came quickly. During a staff meeting on July 5, 1963, Bierly insisted on changing the language in the controversial statement to reference only a shared reverence for “God” without a direct appeal to the orthodox creeds and confessions cited by Miller. Rushdoony responded angrily to Bierly’s change, arguing that such an “alteration of Mr. Miller’s statement was a change to a deistic doctrine.”

Further, as tempers flared, Rushdoony insisted that he alone understood the intentions of Luhnow and that Bierly did not have the authorization to make such changes. This audacious and specious claim sealed Rushdoony’s fate with the Center. Couch saw it as final evidence that “Mr. Rushdoony is determined to control the work of the center or to make continual trouble, and then make it appear that others are the trouble makers.” Bierly, who was superior to Rushdoony within the Center’s hierarchy and also had Luhnow’s ear, similarly saw it as direct threat and moved to clamp down on Rushdoony’s activities in the Center. Luhnow, acknowledging Couch and Bierly’s concerns, eventually settled the matter by issuing a statement that clarified “various discussions on our statement of spiritual foundations.” All staffer’s would be expected to affirm the Center’s “intent… to bring a renewed appreciation of Americans

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106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
of the firm conviction of our Founding Fathers in the reality of God and the necessity of looking to Divine Providence for the proper direction of government.”108 While the statement did not depart from the Center’s generic desire “to awaken interest in the American tradition, which… has its roots in the Judaeo-Christian tradition,”109 it clearly deviated from Rushdoony’s religious vision for the Center.

Although this infighting over the exact wording of the “statement of spiritual foundations” may appear an irrelevant relic of a bygone era, it’s important to note that it is actually highly significant, especially when it is seen in the context of Meyer and Herberg’s project of creating a “big tent” for American conservatives. First, and perhaps most importantly, Rushdoony and his confidants lost a battle to depict the United States as an essentially Christian nation built on the foundation of New England Puritanism. While this notion would eventually become widely accepted with the emergence of the so-called Religious Right in the late 1970s, conservatives hardly accepted it in the 1960s. In fact, as Couch forcefully argued, if “the principles of the Founding Fathers” evolved from Calvinism, they only did so a “negative” sense.110 Couch not only prevailed upon his superiors that the ideas of Rushdoony were incorrect, but he also had his adversaries must be fired for holding defending the idea. Second, Couch’s ultimate invocation of

108 Memo directed to all staff members, August 8, 1963; available in folder 133, WTC Papers and also in the RJR Papers.

109 This specific language emerged in the wake of the controversy over the Center’s religious foundation. Couch seems to have penned the phrase and his signature is appended to nearly two dozen form letters containing the phrase. The letters were sent to various scholars and public figures associated with the growing American conservative movement in an effort to generate interest in the Center’s proposed “Encyclopedia of Americana.” Recipients of the letters included such important figures as William F. Buckley, Jr., Frank Meyer, Howard E. Kershner, Victor Milione, Carl F. H. Henry, William J. Baroody, Cleanth Brooks, and Aaron Director. The various letters are available in folders 137 and 139, WTC Papers.

America’s “Judaeo-Christian tradition” suggests that he, Bierly, and Luhnow were willing to concede doctrinal purity in the interest of interfaith political unity. If Rushdoony and his allies in the fund had trouble accepting Catholics as religious allies, then those of a Jewish persuasion were a different matter entirely. As I document in next section, neither Rushdoony nor Hoggan would prove comfortable with the hyphenated “Judaeo-Christian” alliance. When taken as a whole, these points dramatically illustrate the problem of religious pluralism and exclusion Herberg was concomitantly struggling with on the pages of the *National Review*. Even as he labored to create a discourse of Judeo-Christian identity, many in the movement were working at cross-purposes.

By September, the Center terminated Rushdoony’s employment, but allowed him to remain on the payroll. In this interim period, Bierly issued warnings to Rushdoony regarding his use of the Center’s travel accounts “[s]ince your present relationship is that of independent contractor and not employee.”\(^{111}\) In December, Bierly ended Rushdoony’s ability to use the Center’s library to send books as he saw fit.\(^{112}\) And in January 1964, the Center officially terminated its ties with Rushdoony with a $2,475.00 check. In the end, the separation was gentle, giving Rushdoony the necessary resources to write two more books.

*The Strange Case of David Hoggan*

If Rushdoony escaped the Center for American Studies more or less unscathed, his friend and intellectual ally David L. Hoggan wasn’t so lucky. In many ways

\(^{111}\) I. R. Bierly to R. J. Rushdoony and David L. Hoggan, September 30, 1963, RJR Library. Bierly closed the note by further asserting his control over Rushdoony and Hoggan: “I would appreciate it personally very much if each of you would make a point of stopping in to visit with me each time you stop in the Library here—or at least frequently, as I do want to keep in contact closely with you.”

\(^{112}\) I. R. Bierly to R. J. Rushdoony, December 20, 1963, RJR Library.
Hoggan’s offense was far more problematic and dangerous than Rushdoony’s insistence on Calvinist orthodoxy. Namely, Hoggan was a talented scholar with a penchant for fabricating sources in order to defend Hitler as a peace monger who was double-crossed by perfidious Albion, deceitful Poles, and slandered by the nefarious Jews with the crime of Holocaust. This revisionist analysis of the causes of World War II mirrored the isolationist, America First perspective popularized by Harry Elmer Barnes, although Barnes was neither pro-Hitler nor anti-Semitic.\textsuperscript{113} By the 1960s the coalescing conservative movement, with some notable exceptions, had already come down on the side that American intervention in World War II was acceptable and many saw Hitler as an expression of the same evils as those embodied by Stalin and Soviet-style Communism. Men like Barnes found themselves increasingly in the minority, especially when their best allies were the David L. Hoggan’s of the world.

The controversy over religion remained a more-or-less internal dispute, but Hoggan’s support for the extreme right-wing agenda of German Nazism proved far more destabilizing for the Center. Hoggan came to the CAS as a researcher in charge of reviewing books authoring position papers for the fund. Hoggan’s 1948 dissertation,\textsuperscript{114} according to his advisor William Langer, was “a solid, conscientious piece of work, critical of Polish and British policies, but not beyond what the evidence would


\textsuperscript{114} David L. Hoggan, “The Breakdown of German-Polish Relations in 1939 the Conflict between the German New Order and the Polish Idea of Central Eastern Europe” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1948).
tolerate.” But by the time Hoggan revised the manuscript and had a translated edition published in Germany, the dissertation had morphed into a book that, as one reviewer noted, contained “findings [that] differ significantly from those of other scholars.”

Another put the point more starkly: “Neither the thesis nor the method is new, though the extremes to which they are pushed are astonishing. Unwelcome evidence is distorted or ignored, and sources quoted do not always corroborate the deductions said to be based on them. An entire issue of this journal would be required to put the matter right.”

When the media in Germany and the U. S. became aware of the book, CAS had an international scholarly incident on its hands. Couch and Bierly began to hear rumors of the book’s content as Hoggan prepared to go speaking tour to support the book in Germany in 1963. Der Spiegel and Die Zeit ran articles and cartoons mocking Hoggan as a Nazi apologist. Newsweek published an unflattering profile of Hoggan, which noted his frequent mood swings, combative character, and recorded his laughable assertion that he was a “little right of the Republicans.” Bierly fired Hoggan the week the Newsweek article appeared, but the damage was done. Academics who had once supported the CAS


119 Most of these rumors came from those sympathetic to the goals the CAS. Letters rolled in from conservatives—including Henry Regnery, F. A. Heyek, and Felix Morley—familiar with revisionist history who worried that Hoggan was less an historian than an anti-semitic, pro-Nazi agitator (see, respectively, the untitled, undated, timeline of the Hoggan incident that lists the Regnery and Heyek correspondence, folder 138, WTC Papers; and Felix Morley to Ivan R. Bierly, May 16, 1964, folder 138, WTC Papers). Generally speaking, their concerns were well-founded as I outline below.

even through the shaky days of the Rushdoony debacle finally turned against Luhnow and Bierly. Dr. Karl Brandt, the director of Stanford’s Food Research Institute and one of the CAS’s few faculty supporters at the university, wrote a scathing letter to Luhnow about his mismanagement of the Volker Fund. “You surely can give whatever fund there is to any charitable purpose and thus dispose of it,” Brandt scolded,

But thereby you simply set a pitiful end to what was so far a formidable course of battle for real values in our embattled world. In spite of an obvious serious lack of taking well advised and courageous decisions in the last few years, there is still the opportunity to dedicate the Fund to many years of excellent… work and to build a center from which our society can get new orientation and guidance toward our real Christian values.\(^\text{121}\)

Brandt’s criticism came just as Bierly and Couch were desperately trying to “to cloak this program with the prestige of [Stanford] University or of the Hoover Institution”\(^\text{122}\) and this fact was not lost on anyone at Stanford or Hoover.

The Hoover Institution

As they struggled to establish the academic legitimacy of CAS, Bierly and Couch tried to woo Stanford University and the Hoover Institution with an estimated $10 million of Volker’s remaining money. They hoped to secure an institutional home for CAS, but they made a series of demands—including insisting on institutional autonomy within Hoover and Stanford\(^\text{123}\) and installing non-academics such as Luhnow and Morris Cox,

\(^{121}\) Karl Brandt to Harold W. Luhnow, June 16, 1964, folder 138, WTC Papers.

\(^{122}\) David Packard to Morris Cox, September 8, 1964, folder 142, WTC Papers.

\(^{123}\) “I am concerned that your revisions of August 12\(^b\) provide virtually no involvement by the University. In effect, under this arrangement the University does little more than provide housing for the American Studies Program” (David Packard to Harold W. Luhnow, August 28, 1964, folder 142, WTC Papers).
President of William Volker & Co., as directors of the Center\textsuperscript{124}—that neither Stanford nor Hoover were eager to grant. Making matters worse, all of the contacts within Hoover were aware of the problems with Rushdoony and Hoggan and two key faculty advisors from Stanford had publicly criticized CAS as a result of these personnel issues.\textsuperscript{125}

David Packard, co-founder of Hewlett-Packard and a Hoover trustee, served as liaison between CAS and Hoover. He related concerns that CAS would continue in its Volker Fund mode of anonymous research funding that “predetermined” the acceptable results, ultimately leading to the production of “propaganda.”\textsuperscript{126} In a meeting, an unnamed figure involved in the negotiations made it clear that most of the principals at Hoover, including Glenn Campbell the Institution’s director, did not trust Bierly and believed “CAS [is] falling to pieces under IRB [Bierly], [and is] now seeking rescue by the Hoover Institution.”\textsuperscript{127} In short, the figures from Stanford and Hoover knew that Luhnow’s CAS needed them more than they needed Volker’s money. They demanded the resignation of Bierly and insisted on direct control of CAS’s staff.

Fortunately for Bierly and Couch, Luhnow saved them the embarrassment of ever being fired by the Hoover or Stanford. Instead, Luhnow terminated CAS in September 1964. In a fury, Couch and Bierly blamed the ailing Luhnow for the failure of the

\textsuperscript{124}“Preliminary Draft for Discussion of a Proposal for a Center for American Studies Program at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University,” June 17, 1964 and its revision dated June 24, 1964, folder 142, WTC Papers.

\textsuperscript{125}The first was Brandt in the letter cited above. The other was William C. Bark, a professor of Medieval History at Stanford.

\textsuperscript{126}David Packard to Morris Cox, September 8, 1964, folder 142, WTC Papers. Packard’s concerns were well-founded, for as late as August 1964 Bierly was authoring letters that noted he only considered hiring people who “shared our views” (Ivan R. Bierly to Morris Cox, August 28, 1964, folder 142, WTC Papers).

\textsuperscript{127}William T. Couch meeting notes, October 8, 1964, folder 142, WTC Papers.
Center. Couch had already registered his disapproval of Luhnow in May of 1964, asserting, “Mr. Luhnow seems to have believed that Hoggan and Rushdoony could conduct their extreme right wing activities without this fact ever becoming public.”

Further, Couch insisted, “Mr. Luhnow has been torturing Mr. Bierly” with a host of bizarre demands ranging from the attempted takeover of the University of Kansas City to the Rushdoony/Hoggan fiasco. Couch ultimately deemed Luhnow “solely responsible” for the Center’s misdirection.

Unlike Couch, Bierly held his fire until it became clear that Luhnow was not willing to fight Stanford and Hoover to support CAS. Bierly wrote a note of support to Morris Cox, then the head William Volker & Co. and the heir-apparent to the remaining sources of the Volker Fund. Although carefully worded to maintain a sense of loyalty to his long-time boss and libertarian fellow traveler, Bierly finally admitted that Luhnow’s behavior was “in effect repudiating the work of the Fund under his leadership over the years.” Bierly said that he had come to the Fund in 1957 “with a geologist’s sense of time,” hoping to fight a long, protracted battle for conservative, laissez-faire principles,

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128 Luhnow had been severely ill since November 1963 and required frequent hospitalization throughout the winter and spring of 1964 (F. A. “Baldy” Harper to Kenneth S. Templeton, February 23, 1964, letter in author’s possession). Since Bierly and Couch were generally disliked, distrusted, and viewed as incompetent, CAS languished without a strong leader to negotiate with Hoover and Stanford. By the end of 1960s, Luhnow was eventually placed in a retirement facility and turned control of the Fund over to Morris Cox (Templeton, interview).


130 Ibid.

131 Couch meeting notes, October 8, 1964, folder 142, WTC Papers.


133 Ivan R. Bierly to Morris Cox, September 11, 1964, folder 142, WTC Papers.
but he was now leaving a mere ten years later “[p]hysically, mentally, and emotionally… drained.”\(^{134}\)

By December 1964, Bierly had turned to real estate. In a pathetic letter to Rushdoony, his religious mentor turned nemesis at the Center, Bierly invited the right reverend to consider moving to Menlo Park: “The ocean is just a few miles West; the mountains a few hours to the East. The climate is the best to live in that we’ve known. We’re glad to recommend it as a most enjoyable place in which to work or to retire.”\(^{135}\) The erstwhile disciple of free market economics and intellectual brawler was left to conclude, “The change from selling ideas to serving the participants in the real estate market is a natural one.”\(^{136}\)

**CONCLUSION: AN EXTREME RIGHT-WINGER**

The CAS was finally dead, and with it two potential forms of conservatism were similarly dead—or at least temporarily moribund. First, Hoggan’s perverse revision of history, Holocaust denial, and neo-fascism would remain too hot for any respectable “mainstream” conservative to ever publicly embrace. With the end of the CAS, Hoggan’s life became more tightly tied to organizations such as the American Nazi Party, and shadowy figures involved in producing pro-Nazi revisionist history.\(^{137}\) Today,

\(^{134}\) Ibid.

\(^{135}\) Ivan R. Bierly to Rousas John Rushdoony, December 1964, RJR Papers.

\(^{136}\) Ibid.

Hoggan is well-known in some circles for *The Forced War*,\(^{138}\) the revised English edition of his dissertation, but is probably most infamous for his anonymously published *The Myth of the Six Million*,\(^{139}\) one of the first works of Holocaust denial published in the United States. Further, after leaving CAS, Hoggan “reverted to one of his former faults of drinking too heavily” and ended up in jail briefly after he beat his wife “rather severely.”\(^{140}\) He died of a heart attack in 1988. Second, Rushdoony’s vision of a theologically rigorous, religiously exclusive form of conservatism organized by Van Tillian epistemology and Calvinistic sociology would have to wait nearly two decades before any significant portion of the “mainstream” of American conservatism would take it seriously again. Unlikely, Hoggan, however, Rushdoony eventually enjoyed a wide audience for his work.

While a significant portion of this chapter dealt with the wider “conservative” context Rushdoony entered after he left the ministry and not on Rushdoony specifically, it was necessary to focus on this broader context for two reasons. First, as I indicated at the end of chapter one, Rushdoony’s aggressive pursuit of theological purity alienated him from his church’s hierarchy. Since he could no longer easily press his theological concerns within a church or denomination, the potential of working in a well-funded non-profit environment with sympathetic intellectuals must have seemed an appealing option. As one of the most controversial casualties of the Center for American Studies’ implosion, Rushdoony suddenly found himself on the losing side of yet another public


\(^{140}\) Harold W. Luhnow to R. J. Rushdoony, December 26, 1969, RJR Library.
dispute; the emerging mainstream of American conservatism essentially fired Rushdoony because of his exclusivist religious convictions. The combined failures of his Westminster Herald and the CAS effectively ended the first stage of Rushdoony’s development as a missionary, minister, journalist, and academic organizer and forced his separation from many of the most influential and moneyed conservative organizations that emerged in the 1960s. These defeats necessitated a change in focus and strategy on Rushdoony’s part that I will spend the next three chapters exploring.

Second, although he failed to remake the CAS into a clearinghouse for theologically conservative Calvinistic political and social theory, his time at the CAS proved invaluable for his development as an organizer and gave him the time and resources necessary for honing his ideas to a finer point. It put Rushdoony into contact with numerous ministers and political activists throughout California and the U.S. as a whole. Even if the conditions among conservative activists in the 1960s were conducive for William Couch to dismiss Rushdoony as an “an extreme right-winger,” that certainly didn’t mean that Rushdoony was alone on the “extreme” fringes of the right. The conservative milieu of the late 1950s and early 1960s was a dynamic jumble of integrative and disintegrative organizations, leaders, and ideas. In this disorienting environment, articulate leaders with a consistent message could impose order and intellectual clarity not only on what it meant to be an “American,” but also on the seemingly chaotic international environment of the Cold War. From Robert Welch’s John Birch Society to Billy James Hargis’s Christian Crusade ministry, demand was high for information and education from a traditional Christian perspective that could explain a complex world. Rushdoony’s presuppositional epistemological perspective may have
alienated academics, but as I document in the next three chapters, it found its niche with a dedicated minority of Christian conservatives who longed to fundamentally redraw the boundaries between individuals, families, the church, and the state.
Chapter 3: A Christian Renaissance

Dedicated Minorities, the State, and the Counter-Conduct of the Chalcedon Foundation

“Central to just about every one of Rushdoony’s writings is the notion that freedom must preserved at the local level, so that God’s law can be faithfully obeyed by all people, without interference from higher temporal powers. America held a special place in world history because it began as a Christian civic structure. And yet, in our time, it desperately needed to regain its original vision.”

– William Edgar, “The Passing of R. J. Rushdoony” ¹

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

– Galatians 5:1(NIV)

With Rushdoony out at the Center for American Studies (CAS), he found himself in a problematic position. He had lost his job in part because of his Christian convictions. He had also lost the most influential and potentially useful position available to him for building a organization of dedicated, orthodox Christians who would work to turn America back to Christ. He viewed his termination as both a personal and ministerial setback, believing that the Christian orthodoxy of the Center could have had a profound impact on the country. In a letter to Gary North, Rushdoony asked his young acolyte to pray for the ailing Luhnow. “Confidentially, be in pray with respect to the Center. Mr. Luhnow has been seriously ill, enough to endanger the future of the Center, and has been

turning his thoughts towards orthodox Christianity more and more. I believe that if he truly accepts the faith, great changes may ensue. His illness is more or less a secret.”

Not one to sit and diddle, Rushdoony did not wait for prayer to heal Luhnow. He set out to pick up where his project with the Volker Fund and CAS had left off by establishing a new type of educational foundation, the Chalcedon Foundation. Chalcedon was to be the groundwork for a unique Christian college organized and operated by Rushdoony and devoted to instilling in its students an orthodox Christian education based on the philosophical system of Cornelius Van Til.

Undeterred by his dismissal from the Center in 1963, Rushdoony reached out to many of the groups and individuals with whom he had made connections while lecturing and researching at the libertarian organization. He continued to impress upon his audiences the importance of Van Tillian epistemology and its necessity within any orthodox system of Christian thought and action. In 1965 Rushdoony’s post-Volker Fund hustling paid off when a group of Christians from the suburbs of Los Angeles heard him speak. They were so engaged by his analysis of contemporary events and Christian philosophy that they made him an offer: “A group of people said that if I would come down here and hold Bible studies, they would pledge themselves to supporting me at so much [money] each week…. So [my family and I] moved to Woodland Hills [from Palo Alto] in August 1965.” This small Bible study with its meager support allowed Rushdoony just enough security to establish Chalcedon, Inc., a non-profit organization

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2 R. J. Rushdoony to Gary North, January 9, 1964, R. J. Rushdoony Library, Chalcedon Foundation, Vallecito, CA (hereafter cited as the RJR Library).

through which he could lecture and fund raise for his planned college. In October, Rushdoony sat down and wrote a brief report to his community of supporters, which he mimeographed and handed out. He believed that they were entitled to regular updates on his activities since they were ultimately supporting not just a weekly Bible study, but also a far wider and more ambitious movement to change the very nature of American society. He wrote, “What you are doing, in your support of me, is to sponsor a counter-measure to the prevailing trend, to promote by your support, interest, and study, a Christian Renaissance, to declare by these measures your belief that the answer to humanism and statism is Christian faith and liberty.”

The intellectual and organizational foundation of Rushdoony’s proposed “Christian Renaissance” is the subject of this chapter. It begins by exploring the problem of the “Remnant,” an important theoretical issue for mid-century conservatives. The “Remnant,” a concept with its origins in Judaic and Christian eschatology, was an important issue for conservatives who sought to explain how a tiny minority of right-thinking men might use their guiding epistemological principles to limit the size of state bureaucracies so that a very specific concept of liberty might thrive in the United States.

I outline how this concept of the Remnant circulated through the conservative milieu of the 1950s and sixties and how it informed Rushdoony’s notion of the “dedicated minority,” a collection of Christian activists Rushdoony hoped he could bring together in the form of a Christian institution of higher learning. Next, I broaden my discussion beyond the mid-century conservative milieu to situate the problem of the state and its

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reorganizing remnant within the much larger theoretical problems of governance and the secular, two concepts which I draw from the later lectures of Michel Foucault and the writings of the anthropologist Talal Asad. This second section outlines the epistemological foundations of Rushdoony concept of a “Christian Renaissance,” a politicized version of Van Tillian Presuppositional theology, and how Rushdoony developed it into an intellectual battering ram for demolishing the foundations of the modern state. Finally, this chapter closes with a comparison of Rushdoony’s political theology with the activism of Robert Welch, the founder of the John Birch Society (JBS). Here, I explore how the growing networks of right-wing organizations struggled to articulate an answer to the problems of secular governance by joining a byzantine philosophical system with a set of “counter-measures” that Rushdoony would eventually label Christian Reconstructionism, or, more simply, theonomy. Ultimately, I suggest that these counter-measures—whether in the form of Rushdoony’s specific political theology or in the more generalized “remnant” of the conservative milieu—seek the end and the subsequent rebirth of the modern state.

I. **ESCHATOLOGIES OF THE PRESENT**

Rushdoony shared his concern with a dedicated minority of Christian philosopher/activists with most of the activists and thinkers of the mid-century conservative milieu. Within the milieu, most conservatives and libertarians saw themselves as part of a tiny, embattled fringe standing for traditional American ideas and institutions that had been cast aside during the New Deal era and drowned in the wake of World War II. The central question facing those active in the movement became a two-fold conundrum: first, how were they to understand their newfound minority status?
Second, how if at all were they to organize to resist the creeping centralized statism they perceived all around them? The answer to the first question came in the form of the pessimistic social theorizing of Albert Jay Nock.

Remnants

To understand Nock’s impact on Rushdoony and other conservatives it is essential to note that in its broad historical contours American political, social, and cultural conservatism—especially in their explicitly intellectual expressions—often function as apocalyptic eschatologies of the present age. By this I mean to suggest that conservative intellectuals are dominated by a dour pessimism about the current state of affairs and spend much of their time documenting the failures that will ultimately lead to the collapse of the present system and its replacement with something else. But just as the apocalypse of Jesus Christ is long on bloody details about the destruction of the present age and thin on the particulars of the New Jerusalem, so too conservatives prefer to linger on the depredations of the present rather than coherent prescriptions for a future age. For the most pessimistic of these conservative critics, the contemporary moment is on the cusp of a precipice that threatens to tip into a Dark Age. For the optimistic, the contemporary moment can be transcended with the proper education of a base of conservatives who can arrest the advance of tyranny. These notions of decline, fall, and the emergence of a new age are hardly new to Western thought and, of course, are not unique to American conservatism. Most conservatives feed off a long legacy of secular-, Jewish-, and Christian-infused eschatological political theorists ranging from Joachim of

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Rushdoony specifically cites the importance of Nock’s *Our Enemy, the State* to the development of his thought in undirected letter authored in 1959, and another letter to F. A. Harper dated September 19, 1961, RJR Library.
Fiore forward through Hegel, Edmund Burke, de Tocqueville, and Marx among many others.

Forever trapped in the intellectual shadows of Hegel and Marx, most conservatives have secularized the notion the eschaton of the present age, believing that it will revolve around the state—either its emergence, collapse, or dramatic reorientation into another form. For those who remain explicitly loyal to a Christian or Judaic conception of the eschaton, the concept of the dawn of a Messianic kingdom or the fall of a corrupt Babylon is nonetheless reformulated in terms of the modern nation-state. For conservatives in the United States, this has meant that most focus their critical eye on the federal government as both the source of American decadence and, paradoxically, its source for potential cultural and social renewal. The focus on the federal state as the enemy of all Americans that threatens to subordinate them to an anti-individualist, effeminized, and generally un-American way of life has been a recurring theme in the political thought of the United States. The notion has, of course, ebbed and flowed, taking on different meanings in different eras of American history. The contemporary eschatological language of “anti-statism” as both the limit of “true” American individualism and the end of the state has many contributing voices, but few men did more to refine its rhetorical contours than Albert Jay Nock.

Historians often indicate that Nock is a “largely forgotten” or obscure figure in one manner or another. One critic has gone so far as to deem him the “weird uncle” of

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American conservatism.7 Regardless of his exact status, one thing is clear: Nock was a conservative dandy—William F. Buckley, Jr., before there was a William F. Buckley, Jr.8—with a stilted, self-consciously “American” prose style, an enviable intellect, and a penchant for being contrarian out of aesthetic temperament, not ideological necessity. He spent decades as an Episcopal priest and family man, only to abandon his church and family and flee to New York to become a muckraking journalist and anarchist-tinged essayist. In his new career he postured as a cosmopolitan anti-statist who loathed all things common, populist, and pedestrian, a position that has paradoxically informed the aesthetic judgments of a conservative movement that is most often typified by its anti-elitist populism.9

Within conservative circles, Nock is well known for three achievements. First, in 1920 Nock founded the first iteration of the *Freeman* to serve as a “classical liberal and Jeffersonian” counterpoint to the newly established *New Republic* and the *Nation.*10 Although short lived, *Freeman’s* legacy in conservative circles can’t be overstated. It was a critical inspiration for Buckley’s *National Review* and various incarnations of the publication survived Nock’s leadership to publish many of the leading intellectual and cultural critics in the conservative movement. Second, he was the author of *Our Enemy,*

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8 Indeed, John B. Judis suggests that Buckley was so deeply influenced by Nock’s “jaundiced view” of the American democratic experiment that it informed his public persona and contrarian political sentiments; see William F. Buckley, Jr.: *Patron Saint of the Conservatives* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988). Also, for a humorous summary of Nock’s paradoxical and dishonest portrayal of his life in his memoir see Garry Wills, *Confessions of a Conservative* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 26-29.


the State\textsuperscript{11} and Memoirs of a Superfluous Man.\textsuperscript{12} The former manifesto served as his full frontal assault on the New Deal. The latter memoir describes Nock as man athwart his time, an unnecessary individualist in an era of collectivist conformity. Finally, and most critical to my purposes here, Nock contributed one of the most powerful apocalyptic images to American conservatism, the notion of “the Remnant.”

In “Isaiah’s Job,”\textsuperscript{13} Nock explicitly linked his elitist political philosophy to religious eschatology.\textsuperscript{14} The essay recounts an argument Nock had with a “European acquaintance” over the proper way of creating a political movement. During their dialogue, Nock’s friend concluded, “I have a mission to the masses…. I shall devote the rest of my life to spreading my doctrine far and wide among the population.”\textsuperscript{15} In response, Nock pointed his acquaintance to the Biblical account of the prophet Isaiah and the fruitless prophetic mission with which God had tasked him. In Nock’s retelling, God explains His mission to Isaiah in stark, comic terms:

“Tell them what a worthless lot they are.” [God] said, “Tell them what is wrong, and why and what is going to happen unless they have a change of heart and straighten up. Don’t mince matters. Make it clear that they are positively down to their last chance. Give it to them good and strong and keep on giving it to them. I suppose perhaps I ought to tell you”, He added, “that it won’t do any good…. They will all keep on in their own ways until they carry everything down to destruction, and you will probably be lucky if you get out with your life.”\textsuperscript{16}
The demoralized prophet then wonders aloud why God would send him on such a silly, pointless mission. In response, Nock’s God tells Isaiah,

“… There is a Remnant there that you know nothing about. They are obscure, unorganized, inarticulate, each one rubbing along as best he can. They need to be encouraged and braced up because when everything has gone completely to the dogs, they are the ones who will come back and build up a new society; and meanwhile, your preaching will reassure them and keep them hanging on. …” 17

For Nock there was a clear distinction between the “masses”—an undifferentiated “majority” within a society who are either too dumb or duped to see past the current state of things—and the “Remnant,” “who by force of intellect are able to apprehend these principles, and by force of character are able, at least measurably, to cleave to them.” 18

Ultimately, Nock argued that the Remnant is presumed by the nature of history; the prophet doesn’t have to find and foster the Remnant because the Remnant will find him. Besides, appealing to the masses requires a prophetic message to be “so heavily adulterated with trivialities… that its effect on the masses is merely to harden them in their sins; meanwhile the Remnant, aware of this adulteration…, turn their backs on the prophet.” 19 Preaching to the Remnant “is a good job, an interesting job, much more interesting than serving the masses; and moreover it is the only job in our whole civilization, as far as I know, that offers a virgin field.” 20 Thus, while the market for a truly prophetic message is limited, it is stable market and far less fickle than appealing to the masses.

17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., 643.
19 Ibid., 645.
20 Ibid., 649.
Nock had already appointed himself a prophet to the Remnant in 1935 with the publication of Our Enemy, the State, his extended critical essay on the New Deal. While he does not explicitly refer to the “Remnant,” he makes it clear in the book’s conclusion that he is not speaking to anyone with the intention of changing his or her minds.

Instead, the book is addressed to
certain alien spirits who, while outwardly conforming to the requirements of the civilization around them, still keep a disinterested regard for the plain intelligible law of things, irrespective of any practical end. … For these, a work like this…, is not quite useless; and those of them it reaches will be aware that for such as themselves, and such only, it was written.\(^{21}\)

Ultimately, as Nock biographer Michael Wreszin summarizes, those in this superfluous Remnant are
to observe things as they really were and record the observations to enlighten their unknown colleagues and posterity. They were the ‘saving Remnant’ because while they constituted only a minute core of “Intelligez” in a vast plain of mediocrity, the seed they cast would take root in some distant future and their numbers would grow, long after they had gone.\(^ {22}\)

From this perspective, it is clear Nock remained ambivalent about the role his Remnant would or could play in the history of the United States. He explicitly designated the Remnant as a group aware of the potential of individual liberty and wary of statism, but it is far less clear whether the Remnant could ever affect the current era.

Nock’s ultimate ambivalence about the Remnant suggests he would have had little sympathy for an optimistic, post-millennial view of history, but his many mid-century admirers did not share his pessimism. Instead, many in the conservative milieu took up the idea and brazenly self-identified themselves as the Remnant and Nock as

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\(^{21}\) Nock, Our Enemy, the State, 208-209.

\(^{22}\) Wreszin, Superfluous Anarchist, 75.
their prophetic Isaiah. Nock’s concept immediately influenced everyone from Ayn Rand, to Ed Opitz, to William F. Buckley, to R. J. Rushdoony. Each took issue with aspects of Nock’s thought, but all in one way or another resonated with the notion of a prophetic Remnant: Rand developed the apocalyptic tale of John Galt in *Atlas Shrugged*; Opitz organized the Remnant, a group of conservative and libertarian-inspired ministers who embodied Nock’s “alien spirits;” Buckley explicitly took up Nockian rhetoric to describe *National Review* conservatives as “superfluous” “non-licensed nonconformists” “standing athwart history, yelling Stop, at a time when no one is inclined to do so;” and Rushdoony, as I outline below, eventually developed the notion of Christian Reconstruction, a concept that assumes a Remnant of godly men who by the Grace of God will reconstruct the world for King Jesus.

**Hard Core**

Nock’s concept of the Remnant answered the first half of the conservative conundrum: How were they to understand their newfound minority status? They are a Remnant, an amorphous, ambivalent invisible collection of men dedicated to standing against the state and apprehending reality as it “really” is. Nock’s theorizing, however, left the second question unanswered: how might this Remnant organize to resist the creeping centralized statism they perceived all around them? Instead, the conservatives

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were left to sort the finer points of building a popular movement based on the elitist social theorizing of an anarchist misanthrope.

Although the answers came in many forms and were embodied in a host of different organizations, two men and their organizations provided the critical models that Rushdoony eventually adopted and developed into his own model for gathering his vision of a Christian Remnant. Leonard Read’s Foundation for Economic Education (FEE) and F. A. “Baldy” Harper’s Institute for Humane Studies (IHS) emerged in the 1960s as two of the most obvious claimants to the mantel of the Nockian Remnant. Because of their mutual reliance on Volker Fund largess and the revolving door that circulated staff members between FEE and IHS, the two organizations shared aspects of a common vision and became incubators for cultivating Remnant aspirations. In order to understand how Rushdoony’s own vision of “Christian Reconstruction” was related to mid-century concerns about the Remnant, this section focuses on how FEE and IHS institutionalized the abstract and pessimistic theorizing of Nock into the organizing principle of an intellectual movement. This will provide a foundation for comparison of how Rushdoony Christianized the Remnant, yet remained oddly loyal to the generally agnostic, atheistic, and ecumenical aspirations of other conservative activists.

First, FEE, founded in 1945 by Leonard Read with the generous support of $30,000 in Volker Fund money, was explicitly intended to hunt for Nock’s Remnant. Read was friend and follower of Nock who, in the words of the Brian Doherty, “would try to find his Remnant, whoever they might be, through excessive travel and speaking, usually set up for him by local friends and FEE supporters, who would write the

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attendees afterward and mention that FEE did, after all, depend for survival on the voluntary support of those who believed in its mission.”

Unlike Nock, Read maintained a non-elitist interpretation of the Remnant, believing that with the right ideas anyone “could have incalculable effects for the cause down the line.” This perspective mollified the hard, pessimistic edge of Nock’s theory by suggesting that the Remnant not only existed but that it might also be cultivated, grown, and ultimately victorious. The result was that Read worked tirelessly to expound FEE’s “freedom philosophy” to anyone who would listen: in his vision FEE would “conduct, encourage, promote, and support research and study in the general field of economics and related branches of the social sciences, and to disseminate the results of such research and study by all available media of communication, whether written, spoken or pictorial.”

FEE distributed F.A. Hayek’s *Road to Serfdom* and Hazlitt’s *Economics in One Lesson* and other titles that merged serious economic scholarship with heated invective and popular appeal.

In contrast to Read’s bold search for a popular, grassroots Remnant, Floyd Arthur “Baldy” Harper’s Institute for Humane Studies took a different track in its search for the Remnant. Harper had served as a staff member at FEE during the 1950s and was well acquainted with Nock and Read’s Remnant philosophy. Harper eventually left FEE for the Volker Fund where he oversaw that organization’s outreach to scholars and

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27 Ibid., 161.


intellectuals. As he expanded Volker’s work in higher education, the Fund’s trustees encouraged Harper to develop a plan for an organization that would continue to receive Volker subsidies but function independently of the Fund. Harper proposed the Institute for Humane Studies as a separate tax-exempt entity. Harold Luhnow and others at the Fund were initially very favorable toward the project, and supported the IHS “for the purpose of projecting a sharper focus to the Fund’s ten years of work in the humane studies. … [T]he Fund’s directors believed that there was a need to establish an institute devoted solely to promoting research and education in support of individual liberty across the full range of contemporary scholarly discipline.”

Harper would continue the Fund’s work, but also focus more narrowly on cultivating the ideas of a limited subset of the academy, concentrating his attention on the social sciences and closely related humanistic disciplines such as history.

Harper’s vision was a direct response to the problem of the Remnant, which Harper conceptualized as “the hard core” of liberty loving intellectuals. In his proposal for the institute, Harper echoed Nock and Read in his insistence that broad societal changes start with the ideas of tiny a minority and over time reach a critical threshold at which point the minority becomes a majority that dominates a society. “Every successful social revolution,” wrote Harper, “has apparently sprung from a philosophical well-spring of ideology. We shall speak of this function as the ‘hard core’—the sort of function an Institute would be specifically intended to nurture and maintain.”

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31 “The Institute for Humane Studies: Founding and Objective,” n.d., Institute for Humane Studies Library, George Mason University (hereafter cited as the IHS Library).

Read, Harper put the primacy on orthodoxy and the ability of the hard core to see things as they truly are. “The hard core,” he elaborated, “above all else works to uphold the search for truth in its area of concern. It reports findings with absolute and fearless integrity. It never compromises… for the sake of gaining an extra follower, but instead maintains absolute standards of integrity in search and reporting.”

The focus on the orthodoxy of an elite intellectual core resonated with other libertarian intellectuals. They lined up to embrace Harper’s concept and impressed on him the necessity of finding and preserving what remained of this liberty-loving Remnant. In a series of meetings on the proposed IHS Murray Rothbard, one of Harper’s most vocal supporters, told him, “An intellectual ‘hard core’ has been [the] well-spring of every intellectual and spiritual ‘revolution’ in history.” Leonard Liggio, another libertarian who would serve the IHS for decades, seconded Rothbard. “We are in a dark age,” he told Harper, “real libertarians very few in number [and] must be helped and nurtured accordingly.” He continued, “Survival of [the] hard core [is] of first importance.”

As the preceding quotations suggests, Harper’s “hard core” remained loyal to the spirit of a Nockian Remnant but not necessarily its letter. Rothbard and Liggio’s comments indicate a drift from the concept in that Harper and his supporters believed that the “hard core”—although weak and in a precarious position—was not only present in mid-century America but that it could be strengthened and built into a coherent,
organized, and effective cultural force. “Nothing is so vital,” he urged, “in finding our way out of the present plight of humanity, then, as to create and nurture to a maximum a hard core of liberalism. They must be helped in every possible way to do the work for which they are uniquely fitted and vitally needed.”36 This help came in the form of money that the IHS converted into various publication schemes and fellowship programs for individuals in the academy. The IHS, Harper hoped, would serve as a liaison, bringing together the hard core with the rest of society. “By performing this liaison function well,” a history of IHS reported, “we are able to speed up the development of pro-private property analysis, to help advance the research and careers of scholars with whom we work, and all the time enjoy a growing influence on public opinion.”37

_A Dedicated Minority_

With his close association with Read and Harper and the general concern for the Remnant circulating among the Volker staff and those to whom they offered monetary support, it was impossible for Rushdoony to escape the pull of the concept. As with Read and Harper who both tweaked the concept to fit their concerns, Rushdoony too embraced it but altered it important ways. His most specific and salient criticism of Nock, Read, and Harper emerged from Rushdoony’s concern for the _origin_ of liberty. In brief, Rushdoony believed that the concept of the Remnant confused liberty as both a _truth_ and _end_ in and of itself. Such a presupposition was impossible within the Van Tillian epistemological system through which Rushdoony interpreted the world: the ultimate truth is the reality of Trinity; liberty must be a fruit of this truth and cannot be

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presupposed without Christ. It is in this distinction between liberty as truth or liberty as a fruit of the truth of Christ that Rushdoony located the uniqueness of his own social and political mission.

Rushdoony first developed this distinction in a direct response to Harper’s draft proposal for the IHS, Rushdoony politely challenged Harper to more clearly define “the basic perspective of the Institute.” He continued,

In order to further epistemological self-consciousness, there must be a recognition of a basic philosophy…. The Institute could no doubt make room for several philosophies, or it could set out to develop a particular philosophy. It would have to make a decision as to what is its primary concern, liberty (however derived), or truth as such. Of course, the conviction is clearly that liberty is a product of truth. The question is thus one of approach: is the root to be explored, or the fruit to be marketed? My conviction, and of course my approach to the Institute idea, is that the result can be best secured by a development of a root idea and faith. In Christ’s words, ‘first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.’ In short, liberty is not an end in itself but the result of some larger truth. Any organization dedicated to cultivating a Remnant for protecting liberty must neither focus on the Remnant nor liberty as it primary goal. It must focus on the foundational truth on which the Remnant must stand in order to defend liberty.

Rushdoony elaborated this problem in one of his most important essays from his brief stints at the Volker Fund and the Center for American Studies. Although it never saw publication in its original form, it circulated among a small network of businessmen, clergy, and intellectuals. Those who had the privilege of reading it often marked their strong agreement with its contents, and a few of the businessmen who read it saw it as a

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call to action. The essay, “The Strategy of Fabian Socialism,”\textsuperscript{39} emerged from a conversation with Ivan Bierly in the fall of 1961 or winter of 1962.\textsuperscript{40} The essay briefly outlined the history of the Fabian Society, a British organization formed in 1883 that seeks to progress socialism via a gradual war of attrition against capitalism. It analyzed the strategies used by Fabians that eventually led to the rise of the Labour Party in Britain and, in Rushdoony’s eyes, to the injection of socialism into mid-twentieth century American culture. The essay unsubtly conflates most forms of socialism into Fabianism, but explicitly excludes Soviet or Marxist revolutionary communism from the discussion.\textsuperscript{41}

Rushdoony argued that the Fabians’ success in converting both “the ruling class of Britain” and some 2,000 “upper administrative officers in Washington” to socialism emerged from its status as a “thought-and-action group,” which provided “thinking and nurturing action among their followers.” First, Rushdoony argued that Fabians exploited the emergence of the secular European nation-state to convince intellectuals that humans could develop a fair and just state to administer socialism. Next, Fabians avoided internal conflicts by refusing to allow members to engage in “socialist inter-party battles on method.”\textsuperscript{42} The society embraced a pragmatic approach that favored using the mechanism of democracy and capital to further socialism in the long term even if such

\textsuperscript{39} Several versions of this essay exist. Two slightly different drafts (one dated circa January 3, 1962, and another dated February 26, 1963) are available in folder 141, WTC Papers. A copy of the February 26, 1963 draft is also available in box 15, folder Ru-Rz, Howard E. Kershner Papers, Coll. 128, Special Collections, University of Oregon (hereafter cited as the HEK Papers).

\textsuperscript{40} Ivan R. Bierly to William Terry Couch, January 3, 1962, folder 141, WTC Papers.


\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 3.
action temporally undermined the cause. As a result of this gradual pragmatic approach, the Fabians recognized the necessity for committed leaders, an elite who directed not government but also society as a whole. They achieved this goal, Rushdoony argued, by developing a coherent philosophy of government that ensured that Fabian principles survived in British bureaucracy regardless of Labour electoral success. Fabian inspired scholars and activists to cultivate their philosophy through book clubs, research organizations, and most importantly in Rushdoony’s assessment, through the foundation of the London School of Economics. Further, through student groups, special schools and conferences, and international outreach, the Fabian Society built a strong foundation to guarantee success for generations to come.

To many of Rushdoony’s readers, especially those not familiar with the history of gradualist socialism, the summary of Fabianism was no doubt a minor revelation. But, Rushdoony’s real insights emerge at the end of the essay as he turned his attention to the broader conservative movement taking shape around him. As the essay closes Rushdoony offered a meditation on the infrastructure of the conservative movement and series of harsh criticisms of some of the major organizations working to counter the Fabian strategy. Among these, Rushdoony specifically identified James Fifield’s Spiritual Mobilization (SM), the Leonard Read’s FEE, Howard E. Kershner’s Christian Freedom Foundation (CFF), Fred C. Schwarz’s Christian Anti-Communist Crusade (CACC), and Victor Milione’s Intercollegiate Society of Individualists (ISI). Although on the vanguard of the conservative movement, Rushdoony noted that each of these groups falls short on one half of the “action-and-thought” model pioneered by the Fabians. For example, both the CFF and CACC are action groups with weak
philosophical foundations, while SM and FEE focus on ideas but erroneously posit anarchist and Enlightenment ideas to “champion a Reformation cause.” The result? “No comparable thought-and-action group, with a consistently developed philosophy, methodology and program, exists in the conservative sector.” Worse still, the philosophical confusion of conservatives leads to weak action:

Today almost any given conservative group is likely to include Protestant, Catholic, atheist, positivist, Ayn Randian egotist, anarchist, utilitarian, and more. There is little common purpose and much uncommon trouble. It is necessary therefore to define the underlying premises carefully in order to have both unity and freedom. To attempt this will automatically leave many behind—but it will provide the anchor which many today, especially young people, are seeking.

This prescriptive narrowing of the conservative movement on a religiously inflected philosophical foundation seemed to Rushdoony a logical process for encouraging common action based on shared assumptions. He knew the winnowing would leave many behind, but this tiny minority of religious conservative would have the world to gain. “History,” he comforted his reader, “has never been commanded by majorities but only by dedicated minorities, and the need today is a strategy for the development of that minority into an instrument of thought and action power.”

The need, then, was for Rushdoony to convince conservatives that they required something akin to the London School of Economics. This project dovetailed nicely with the goals of the Center for American Studies, which as we saw in the previous chapter, would be “new type of educational institution” intended to create a space for the cultivation of a vanguard of religiously inspired champions of limited government and

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43 Ibid., 12.
44 Ibid., 13.
46 Ibid., 14.
free market economics. With the dissolution of the CAS, however, Rushdoony’s hope to create a dedicated minority of intellectuals and activists based on the Fabian model was dealt a serious blow. He was no longer able to draw on Volker’s fiscal resources and network of conservative intellectuals forcing him to look elsewhere for the necessary resources to develop his vanguard of Christian intellectuals. Further, on a personal level, Rushdoony remained committed to building a dedicated minority of Christian philosopher/activists but he was no longer a minister, missionary, or aspiring religious journalist. He found himself alienated from previous allies and friends who might have shared his new interest in organizing a tiny, committed cohort of American conservative intellectuals into a movement dedicated to resisting socialism, and, more importantly, to laying the foundations for a new religious current in the American academy.

In his Fabian essay Rushdoony defined his concept of the “dedicated minority” by developing it in opposition to Read and Harper’s visions of the Remnant and the hard core. The 1961 essay served as an indictment of the general failure of other organizations in the American conservative milieu and as a plea for the need of an organization founded on Christian presupposition. In this way, the essay was part of Rushdoony’s concerted effort to Christianize the CAS and jettison agnostic and non-Christians such as Read and Harper (not to mention Rothbard). As a result, these criticisms must be seen as part of Rushdoony’s agenda of calling into question the religiosity of many in the conservative movement that I documented in chapter 2. He took each to task for missing certain key elements in the search for and cultivation of a vital minority of
philosopher/activists dedicated to a freedom philosophy. Of Read’s FEE, Rushdoony wrote that it had “played a valiant but faltering role” because it supported a “liberal, anarchist” vision of mankind that assumed the “goodness of man” rooted in “denatured, smorgasbord… Christianity which is both inoffensive and powerless.” Furthermore, even though Harper’s IHS seemed to affirm God, it did so “very vaguely” while also affirming the “the goodness of man, a basic doctrine of environmentalism, Marxist socialism, and Fabianism.” The result is that both organizations were founded on the very philosophical principles that would not only undermine, but ultimately doom the Remnant or hard core.

Rushdoony would therefore systematically work to re-sacralize Nock’s secularized Remnant in order to develop a properly Christian eschatology of the present. In one sense, Rushdoony’s notion of the “dedicated minority” is actually closer to Nock’s vision of the Remnant than both Read’s and Harper’s. The origin of this similarity is directly linked to Rushdoony’s Calvinism: with his belief in predestination and the existence of God’s elect, Rushdoony believed in an invisible Remnant. Again, however, Rushdoony shared Read and Harper’s faith that it would be possible to identify and collect the Remnant. The Remnant, they believed, could and should be identified, gathered, and their power cultivated to change present circumstances rather than simply operate as some dispersed and ineffectual repository of libertarian potential. For his part, Rushdoony believed that if collected and properly educated in Van Tillian epistemology,

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47 Rushdoony would wait until the 1980s before he explicitly took Nock to task; see Rousas John Rushdoony, “The Meaning of Theocracy,” reprinted in The Roots of Reconstruction, 60-63. But even here, Rushdoony is more supportive of Nock than critical.


49 Ibid., 13.
then a remnant could slowly roll back the advances of the federal bureaucratic state and eventually start a Christian renaissance in the United States.

II. GOVERNANCE, THE STATE, COUNTER-CONDUCT

As an organization, the Chalcedon Foundation represented Rushdoony’s hope for finding and organizing a dedicated minority. Rushdoony organized Chalcedon according to the central insight that he developed during his time as missionary in Nevada and that eventually became the foundation of his entire social and political project of Christian Reconstruction: “basic government is the self-government of the Christian man.”

Although on the surface this statement is relatively transparent, this statement is far more complex than it appears. The conditions under which it came to be uttered, captured in print, and finally practiced by Rushdoony and those associated with what would eventually develop into the Chalcedon Foundation must be located in the controversies over the nature and meaning of the state. This section explores the deep epistemological assumptions that formed the foundation of Rushdoony’s political theology and how it related to his concept of the “dedicated minority” and the problem of Christian self-government. I unpack Rushdoony’s foundational assumptions about the nature of government, the structure of the secular or humanistic state, and how Rushdoony’s theological presuppositions formed a complex network of thought, conduct, and social organization that he would refine and develop into the radical social agenda that we now know as Christian Reconstruction.

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In order to comprehend the origin of the Chalcedon Foundation and how it came to embody the concept of “Christian self-government,” I need to trace three interconnected controversies. First, what is the “state” and how might “Christian self-government” operate in opposition to it? Second, what is a dedicated minority of Christian men and how may it be constituted? Third, and finally, if the dedicated minority can be formed, what are the practices whereby it may be perpetuated, maintained, and grown? Each of these questions emerged from the problem of the Remnant that Nock originally posed during the 1930s and from the Remnant’s ability to end the state as we know it. The remainder of this chapter takes each of these problems and traces how Rushdoony’s answer to each question homed in on a central concept in Rushdoony’s thought and life—Biblical law.

Christian Self-Government and Man

To begin, let’s parse Rushdoony’s supposition that “basic government is the self-government of the Christian man” into its two moments, the first related to self-government and the second to man or the male Christian. First, like many astute “conservative” observers of the growth of the post-War federal government, Rushdoony implicitly distinguished between those explicitly political forms of state power that we might refer to as “government” and a broader, more amorphous concept of government that orders and structures human relations in various spheres of life. While most mid-century conservatives did not specifically distinguish between government and the state, most were grappling for a language that activated such a distinctions. Most commonly, this was couched in the concept of the “individual” and the traditions, values, intuitions, community standards, and economic rules that operated outside of or in resistance to the
state and that created the necessary space to allow this political creature to exist and thrive. In this way, Rushdoony wrote of self-government, family government, rules governing economic transactions, the governing of educational institutions, or the forms of regulation and control normally associated with state functions.

Rushdoony’s wider understanding of government or governance suggests that it is important to keep in mind Michel Foucault’s warning that “government” should never be reduced to its “specifically political meaning” that he traces to the to sixteenth century. Before government was captured by the state,

we can see that “to govern,” covers a very wide semantic domain in which it refers to movement in space, material subsistence, diet, the care given to an individual and the health one can assure him, and also to the exercise of command, of a constant zealous, active, and always benevolent prescriptive activity. [Government] refers to the control one may exercise over oneself and others, over somebody’s body, soul, and behavior. And finally it refers to an intercourse, to a circular process of exchange between one individual and another.  

Rushdoony takes this wider sense of government as his starting place, and then develops it into ever-widening concentric spheres that emanate from and envelope the Christian man. But each of these spheres of governance—which I will develop below—is contingent upon the self-government of the self-consciously Christian male operating as God’s vicegerent over Earth.

Second, self-government is the condition for all other forms of government, and for Rushdoony it emanates from discrete, individuated men; that is, from unique creatures created by God as males who are governed by the normative gender roles inscribed on

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Rushdoony wrote,

man was created as Adam, alone, and allowed to remain alone for some time, to know his calling as God’s vicegerent and image-bearer before he knew himself in marriage and society. … In a sense, “privation” and isolation, such as was not the case with the animal creation, was the first condition of man in Paradise and the ground of his status as man. As a consequence, marriage, the family, the church, state, and every other God-ordained institution, while God-given and necessary in their respective spheres, were under man and never prior to him as the creature and image-bearer of God.52

Thus, when Rushdoony wrote of the Christian man he specifically referred to men and not to men and women. His justification emerged from his reading of Genesis 1:26-28 in which God established the role man must play in governing the earth: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’”53 Woman, Eve, according to Rushdoony, was only granted to Adam after he had proven himself capable of this work, which Rushdoony defined as the project of dominion. God’s command that man exercise dominion over the earth required multiple forms of work that Rushdoony distilled to “manual labor, agriculture, and science.”54 Through Adam’s classification of creation (Genesis 2:19), man gained the necessary means for “subjugating and developing the earth and bringing it under the dominion of and into the service man.”55 It is only at this point when man

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53 Genesis 1:26-28 NIV.
55 Ibid.
“had a tested maturity in terms of his work” that God provided Eve as a “helpmeet” in the project of dominion.\(^{56}\) As a helpmeet, women cannot themselves exercise dominion.

Furthermore, while many Christians today interpret this Genesis “mandate” as either nullified by the Fall, or as a command for humans to serve as benevolent stewards of the earth, Rushdoony argues that it is actually a *commandant* to “subdue all things and all nations to Christ and His law-word.”\(^{57}\) He argued that Christ’s law-word, as embodied in the laws of Moses, provides the ethical framework that allows Christians to exercise dominion because mankind’s fall into sin did not abrogate the dominion mandate given to man by God. To the contrary, God merely cursed work, according to Rushdoony, meaning man “returns to the earth in frustration and death”\(^{58}\) because the curse alienated work from God’s dominion commandment. With work alienated from the task of dominion, “[i]t can lead to the brutalization of man. As man is degraded by his sin and his sinful society into a slave of work whose work is bondage rather than liberation.… The response of man to man becomes a form of mutual urges to degrade and defile the other person.”\(^{59}\) It is in this degraded state that all men find themselves in the modern world. In fact, in societies that actively reject God and his Word, men become more and more degenerate until they confuse the project of *dominion* with the oppressive *domination* of other human beings and nature.

The non-Christian man (that is, anyone who does not live according to requirements of self-government outlined in the bible) exercises a fell form of dominion.

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 18.  
\(^{58}\) Rushdoony, *Revolt Against Maturity*, 18.  
\(^{59}\) Ibid., 19.
If, as I explained in chapter 1, mankind’s most basic sin is a desire to determine right from wrong independent from the mind of God, then, Rushdoony argued, men have purposefully and consciously rebelled against “one of the most important things for us to know,” namely that our world—all aspects of it from our physiology, our diet, our social relations, and so on—“is a world under God’s law.” When fallen humans seek to “be as God,” they attempt to combine the sacred and the profane, the divine and the created in a grotesque parody of the original dominion mandate. In terms of self-government, this means that the individual will lead a sinful, self-destructive life that will lead to addiction, adultery, homosexuality, meaningless labor, etc.

In the arena of political government, the state becomes the site where all of man’s defiance of God is mixed, amplified, and concretized into an institutional form. In Rushdoony’s words, the state is the “realm where man can assert and has repeatedly asserted his maximum defiance of God. The state has claimed sovereignty and set itself up as God and as man’s savior. … It has claimed the right to govern other law spheres, such as religion and economics, and the state has acted as there were no absolute law in the universe, only man-made law.” By devouring all other spheres of life the man-made state denies all other forms of God-sanctioned governance—of the individual, the family, religion, the church, economics, etc.—by seeking to control and plan men. This push for planning and control undermines all spheres of Godly governance, but most radically undermines the self-government of the individual, Christian man.

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60 Rushdoony, *The Roots of Reconstruction*, 570.
61 Ibid., 571.
The themes of control and planning emerged early in Rushdoony’s thought and were directly related to the time he spent as a missionary in Owyhee. As we saw in chapter 1, long before he began his career as a published Christian cultural critic, Rushdoony’s letters from Owyhee overflowed with contempt for state-intervention in lives of individuals. His primary topic of concern was the way in which science and magic converged in the minds of Paiutes at Owyhee and the bureaucrats that administered life on the reservation. In Rushdoony’s assessment, the problem on the reservation could be located in the fact that both “the attitude of magic and science is control of the cosmic powers.” Building on this assertion, Rushdoony concluded, “the so-called ‘primitive religions’ are neither primitive nor religions.”62 Both the medicine man and the modern bureaucrat are “technical expert[s]”63 who are concerned with the same thing: control over the chaotic flux of nature and the lives of men entangled in this apparent flux. Magic and science align with the state against true religion, which requires “submission” to God and as opposed to the “control” sought via magic and science. The former respects the sovereignty of God, while the latter asserts the sovereignty of man.

This distinction between control and submission, domination and dominion is ultimately founded on Van Til’s distinction between epistemological autonomy versus epistemological theonomy. Rushdoony represents the regenerated Christian man and his fallen, unregenerate other in terms of epistemic unintelligibility.64 Rushdoony’s entire

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62 R. J. Rushdoony to Orval Clay, February 24, 1945, RJR Library.
63 Ibid.
64 As J. Z. Smith argued in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), the are “three basic models of the ‘other’” employed in Western thought: “(1) The
project—in terms of writing, teaching, political organization, and Christian
Reconstruction—is based precisely on this presupposition that all non-Christs
worldviews, whether humanist, Hindu, or what have you, will devolve into the total
barbarism of utter meaninglessness. In order to be understood, all non-Christs must
be rendered intelligible by filtering them through the epistemological project outlined by
Van Til. Otherwise, the Christian must try to approach the non-Christian via autonomous
reasoning, a path that must ultimately cede more and more ground to man’s first sinful
desire “to be as God,” a process that must ultimately collapse into the very
meaninglessness the Christian is attempting to avoid.

From this line of reasoning, Rushdoony concludes that any political order that
either downplays or openly denies God’s sovereignty is so suffused with man’s original
desire to “be as God” that the individual sin of a man becomes the collective sin of all
men governed by such a system: “This basic sin, which is sin in its essence, manifests
itself not only in man but in man’s institutions. During most of history, the state has been

‘other’ represented metonymically in terms of the presence or absence of one or more cultural traits. (2)
The ‘other’ represented topographically in terms of center and periphery. (3) The ‘other’ represented
linguistically and/or intellectually in terms of intelligibility” (231). Smith suggests that models (1) and (2)
“imply complex reciprocal relationships” between “us” and “them.” In contrast, the third model assumes
that the “other” “is unintelligible and will remain so” (237). In terms of the third model, the lack of
reciprocity between self/other and us/them means that “we” must always speak for the “other” because it
can never speak intelligibly for itself. Rushdoony’s whole epistemological project might be understood as
a hyper-refinement of this third model.

In fact, Rushdoony defines hell in terms of epistemology. It is not a realm of unspeakable
tortures envisioned by so many Christians. Instead, Rushdoony’s visual metaphor for Hell is a garbage
heap of chaos; alienation from God is a jumble of objects and meaningless trash: “The biblical words for
hell are gehenna or hinnom, or, the Valley of Hinnom, which was the city dump of Jerusalem. It was a
place of fire and worms, the fire consuming the trash, and the worms devouring waste material. A city
dump is a place of miscellaneous objects, unrelated one to the other, and so an emblem of
meaninglessness” (Rousas John Rushdoony, To be as God: A Study of Modern Thought since the Marquis
de Sade [Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2003], 211). When hell is understood in these terms, it is
possible to imagine a literal hell on earth when barbarism (literally, the linguistic bar-bar nonsense of non-
Christians) comes to dominate all human relationships. Further, Rushdoony argues that individuals can be
embodiments of the meaninglessness of hell (211). I deal with this latter point in more depth in chapter 4.
man’s central institution and therefore the central manifestation in corporate form of man’s original sin. As a result, the state has repeatedly presented itself as man’s savior and god. The product of this collective sin is the pagan or non-Christian state, which is not an outgrowth of God’s plan of dominion, but rather of man’s fallen urge to dominate and control all of the created world.

*Chalcedon and the State: The Secular, Biopolitics, and Governmentality*

The problem of the state as either an expression of dominion or domination is therefore both an epistemological problem and an ontological problem for Rushdoony. In attempting to know the world, man seeks to control it and this process of controlling the world implies a sinful effort to re-create the world in his fallen image. In identifying this problem, Rushdoony reaches a conclusion that has odd resonances with Foucauldian notions of biopolitics and governmentality. Although I must state explicitly that I am not arguing that Rushdoony’s analysis of the state is Foucauldian, or that Foucault’s is Rushdoonian, I do believe that Foucault’s analysis of the logics of governmentality can provide us with a helpful interpretive grid for approaching what might otherwise appear to be an unintelligible Christian perspective on the logic and practice of statist governance. Further, juxtaposing Rushdoony and Foucauldian analyses of governance might suggest useful ways that the two may prove mutually illuminating without insisting the necessary inferiority of one in relation to the other.

To begin this analysis, it is instructive to start with anthropologist Talal Asad’s explicitly Foucauldian genealogy of the “secular” nation-state. While Rushdoony

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preferred the term “humanist” to indicate the de-sacralized, human-centered state, he often used the term interchangeably with “secular,” and would have found much to agree with in Asad’s work. As Asad has argued, the western nation-state emerged from the progressive disengagement of religious authority from territorial sovereignty. According to Asad, this disengagement created and is created by the emergence of a new epistemic category, the secular. If the modern nation-state seeks to subsume and transcend “the different identities built on class, gender, and religion, replacing conflicting perspectives” by unifying them under the experience of the citizen, then secularism functions as a medium that redefines and transcends the “differentiating practices of the self” that are articulated via class, gender, and religion. Asad contrasts this attempt to mediate a transcendent citizen-subject with “the process of mediation enacted in the ‘premodern’ societies” which also include mechanisms “in which the state mediates local identities without aiming at transcendence.” Asad thus refuses to limit secularization to the privatization of religion, something Rushdoony similarly rejected for similar reasons—secular humanism is no more or less private than Christianity and in fact demands equally exclusivistic claims about what constitutes the public and private spheres.

If we accept Asad’s assessment then the secular emerges as an epistemic modality that temporarily solidifies to create an “exclusive space” that constrains religion to private belief and action in order to map, classify, and regulate various facets of human

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68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
It is in this epistemic logic that Asad finds an ally in Rushdoony, and vice versa. Both see the secular (or “secular humanism”) as a complex medium that subsumes and redraws a network of differentiating practices that pre-modern states rarely bothered administering and instead left to other components of society to govern. This secular space creates a homogeneous field in which other differentiating categories are leveled and stripped of their claims to exclusivity and uniqueness. Instead of competing with the state for transcendence, the secular allows the state to nullify these “differentiating practices of the self.” For Asad, the secular functions as a mechanism of biopower: it severs religion from its traditional public manifestations, and privatizes the cognitive and disciplinary structures of religion in order to administer bodies, mediate risk, and manage life.

With Asad’s Foucauldian genealogy of the secular in mind, we may now return to Rushdoony’s distinctions between dominion and domination, religion and magic/science and suggest their resonances with Asad’s biopolitical interpretation of the secular. First and foremost, both perspectives share the assumption that the modern state reflects an epistemological shift in the way human beings think about and interpret the world. Second, this epistemic shift led to practices that had only a limited relationship to the practices of caring for and cultivating the self and its relationship to society in the non-modern world. Rushdoony would rehearse these basic assumptions in his efforts to

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70 Ibid., 201.  

71 The concepts of biopower and biopolitics were introduced in Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 139-144.  

establish magic and science as the tools of a non-Christian state.  

Specifically, he argued, “The purposes of modern science are increasingly those of magic, the exercise of total control. The essential goal of modern science is knowledge in order to have prediction, planning, and control.” While it’s unlikely that Asad would ever conflate science and magic or agree that the modern state’s essence is rooted in the corporate sin of all men, the basic insight common to both perspectives is that the modern epistemic shift in the relationship between knowledge and power has led to a desire to predict, plan, control, and generally modulate the lives of a state’s citizens via various disciplinary techniques.

If the secular is understood in terms of biopolitics, this returns us to the problem of governmentality. In Foucault’s later works—specifically his lectures in the late 1970s and early ‘80s—“governmentality” becomes a central problem linked to biopower (those “numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the

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75 It’s far more likely that Asad would agree with Foucault’s assertion that the “state” has no essence: “The state is nothing but the effect, the profile, the mobile shape of a perpetual stratification…, in the sense of incessant transactions which modify, or move, or drastically change… decision-making centers, forms and types of control, relationships between local powers, the centrality of authority, and so on. In short, the state has no heart… in the sense that it has no interior” (Michel Foucault, The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1978-79, ed. Michel Senellart, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana, trans. Graham Burchell, Lectures at the Collège De France [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008], 77).

76 I understand there to be a distinction between biopower and biopolitics as Foucault developed the terms. Biopower encompasses a wide array of technological and disciplinary techniques that emerged in the early-modern period in medicine, economics, penal systems, educational institutions, etc. that took the individuated human body as its site of action. Biopolitics “attends to the biological processes of the collective social body,” where the techniques of biopower are aggregated and concentrated as the tools of the state. I draw this distinction from Jonathan Xavier Inda, “Analytics of the Modern: An Introduction,” in Anthropologies of Modernity: Foucault, Governmentality, and Life Politics, ed. Jonathan Xavier Inda (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 5.
control of populations” and to bio-politics (the “political response to all these new procedures of power” related to the cultivation of bios, or life). Biopolitics as it is institutionalized and deployed by the state becomes a particular, situated expression of what Foucault would eventually identify as governmentality. The concept of governmentality, as Thomas Lemke points out, grew from Foucault’s exploration of the problem of power/knowledge:

The semantic linking of governing (“gouverner”) and modes of thought (“mentalité”) indicates that it is not possible to study the technologies of power without an analysis of the political rationality underpinning them. In other words, there are two sides to governmentality…. On the one hand, the term pin-points a specific form of representation; government defines a discursive field in which exercising power is ‘rationalized’. This occurs, among other things, by the delineation of concepts, the specification of objects and borders, the provision of arguments and justifications, etc. In this manner, government enables a problem to be addressed and offers certain strategies for solving/handling the problem. On the other hand, it also structures specific forms of intervention. For a political rationality is not pure, neutral knowledge which simply ‘re-presents’ the governing reality; instead, it itself constitutes the intellectual processing of the reality which political technologies can then tackle. This is understood to include agencies, procedures, institutions, legal forms, etc., that are intended to enable us to govern the objects and subjects of a political rationality.

Foucault located governmentality in the forms of pastoral power developed in Christian Europe during Middle Ages. He argued that the pastorate “gave rise to an art of conducting, directing, leading, guiding, taking in hand, and manipulating men…

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77 Foucault, History of Sexuality, 140.
78 Ibid., 145.
collectively and individually throughout their life and every moment of their existence.”

More simply, the pastorate was “an art of ‘governing men.’”

As the Protestant Reformation weakened the pastoral power of the clergy, the art of governing men was ultimately usurped by the secular state. By the sixteenth century, the state had taken up questions about the conduct of men as its central, organizing purpose. Before the sixteenth century, Foucault suggests that we could speak of various forms of governing men’s conduct—forms of conduct and counter-conduct that were neither universal nor totalizing—but after the sixteenth century these variegated and multitudinous forms of governance were brought steadily under the control of the state. These processes of monopolizing modalities of governance lead Foucault to conclude that there were and are many forms of governance that fall outside of the state. In fact, he insists that the “state is only an episode in government… at any rate, the state is an episode in governmentality.”

It is precisely at the nexus of governance and the secular state that Rushdoony located his Chalcedon Foundation and the project of Christian Reconstruction. It is for this reason that a Foucauldian genealogy is not only relevant but also has the potential to be so illuminating for interpreting Christian Reconstruction. By enrolling the concepts of the secular, bio-politics, and governmentality as allies in this discussion, I believe they provide a rich set of tools for eliciting the subtleties of Rushdoony’s epistemological and political project. When mobilized, they allow us to see that Christian Reconstructionism is only a possibility within the kind secular space that Asad delineates. That is, the

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81 Ibid.
82 Ibid., 248.
secular has by and large created the very conditions under which a social and project like Reconstructionism may not only exist, but thrive. Setting aside any supply-side interpretation of religion in the U.S., the secular does not create a vacuum that religious entrepreneurs may then fill, but rather the secular is perhaps best understood as an assemblage, a milieu or medium through which certain social spaces are organized, structured, and limited. In this sense, the secular plays in important role in the formation of and maintenance of the nation-state precisely because a nation-state “clearly requires demarcated spaces that it can classify and regulate: religion, education, health, leisure, work, income, justice, and war.” Religion provides a challenge to the secular because it can also be constituted as a milieu that is similarly capable of organizing and constraining the social. It is for this reason that the secular and the religious stand in opposition against one another and cannot both occupy the same position of prominence within a society.

Christian Reconstructionism does not emerge as a viable political project until the secular has achieved the remarkable feat of labeling, regularizing and otherwise structuring a giving society. It is for this reason that Reconstructionism emerged in the wake of Abraham Kuyper’s concept of sphere sovereignty. The notion of spheres (i.e., family, church, educational institutions, etc.) is itself a product of the governmentalization of society that emerged in the wake of a pastoral order. As such,

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83 That is, the notion that American religious leaders are entrepreneurs who use the vacuum created by the first amendment as a veritable “market” in which to hock their spiritual wares.


85 See chapter 1 for my discussion of Kuyper and his relationship to Rushdoony’s political theology.
Reconstructionism doesn’t emerge because of the disengagement of religion from the secular, but rather only becomes a possibility only when the secular has managed to desacralize the social order by constraining the various spheres of a polity into their elemental components. Such a process makes a polity governable and, when subsumed under the transcendent political order the state, no sphere may claim prominence over any other. The secular then, is not a part of the state; it is not a necessity of the modern state. Instead the secular is necessary for certain kinds of social and political relationships that other governing milieus (say, religion, race, ethnicity, or gender) would neither cultivate nor maintain. That being said, it is important to note, as does Asad, that “the concept of the secular cannot do without the idea of religion.”86 Here the verb (do) is significant because religion is the vitalizing force, the will to power, the élan vital within the secular. This is not to say that secularism is religious (or a form of religion), but that the secular milieu only has meaning in a context in which religion either played a pivotal role in disengaging from the social, the political, and cultural, or in contexts in which it was forcefully expelled from and resistant of a hegemonic secular milieu.

As a result, if the secular cannot do without religion, neither can religious movements like Reconstructionism do without the secular. The very condition for a religious project like Reconstructionism is the secular. Without the regularized, standardized, and leveled social order provided by the modern state and its concomitant ways of governing, the progressive, imperial, and universalistic aspirations of Reconstructionism would be largely meaningless. This isn’t to say that Reconstructionism does not resonate with the ancient imperial claims of the Christian

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Church, but only to note that Reconstructionism—with its focus on a fundamentally individuated society, existential and religious *anomie*, its concepts of progressive, productive Dominionism, and its focus on epistemological relativism and reflexivity—is not an expression of some pure, rarified theocratic urge. It is, in fact, part and parcel of a governmentalized American society that emerged at a specific moment in history; Reconstructionism neither stands in opposition to it nor stands outside of it in some holy utopic non-place.

*Chalcedon and the Revolts of Conduct*

In his genealogy of the concept of governmentality, Foucault locates pastoral power as the “embryonic point” in which governmentality entered into politics.\(^87\) This leads Foucault to argue that the relationship between religion and politics and Western society shouldn’t be understood as a conflict between church and state but instead as a struggle between “the pastorate and government;”\(^88\) the conflict is not between Pope and Emperor, but between the minster of souls and the minster of government. In terms of pastoral power, the Protestant Reformation introduced a series of “revolts” of “counter-conduct” that fundamentally undermined the pastorate’s ability to govern the conduct of human beings. This opened a space for the state to steadily assume many of the pastorate’s modes of governing and conducting humans. Assuming the basic accuracy of Foucault’s model, I would like to pick up his concept of counter-conduct to suggest ways in which movements like Christian Reconstructionism are accretions of certain counter-


\(^{88}\) Ibid., 191.
conducts that operate to undermine the authority of the modes of governance monopolized by the modern state.

To begin, Foucault settles on the term “counter-conduct” for two reasons. First, it references the “active sense of the word ‘conduct’” pointing toward the activity of conducting others, “but it is equally the way in which one conducts oneself…. let’s oneself be conducted,… and finally, in which one behaves… as an effect of a form of conduct.” Second, “counter-conduct” references “the sense of struggle against the processes implemented for conducting others.” In the medieval era, revolts of counter-conduct largely took a religious form, but with the collapse of pastoral governance and “inasmuch as many pastoral functions were taken up in the exercise of governmentality” in political institutions, revolts of conduct therefore more frequently “occur on the borders and edge” of these very political institutions. While Foucault’s analysis then turns to focus on the non-religious counter-conducts that emerge at the edge of political institutions, he suggests that religious counter-conducts still remain salient forms of revolt in a regime of post-pastoral governmentality. It is this suggestion that I want to pick up, and use to situate Rushdoony’s project of Christian Reconstruction.

By situating Christian Reconstruction as counter-conduct we can view it as systematized set of practices that operate as both a negation of the dominate modalities of governing human relationships as embodied in the modern nation-state and as an

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89 Ibid., 201.
90 Ibid., 193.
91 Ibid., 201.
92 Ibid., 198.
93 Ibid., 197.
affirmation of a series of alternative or seriously reordered modes of conduct that are either short-circuited or suppressed by the modes of governmentality instantiated in the nation-state. The counter-conduct of Reconstructionism can be located on three interrelated levels that have profound implications for how human beings are understood and how they are incorporated as social, political, and cultural creatures. These counter-conducts can be found at three levels: 1) the epistemological/theological level; 2) the level of the individual human being; and, 3) at the level of organized groups or communities. By addressing the specific practices associated with each of these levels, we can begin to pull this discussion of the organizational foundation of the Chalcedon Foundation together and explore how Rushdoony enrolled allies into his open resistance of the modalities of governance manifested in mid-century American society.

Level 1: Epistemological/Theological

At its foundation, Rushdoony envisioned his project as an epistemological one. From his embrace of Van Til’s presuppositional apologetics, to his constant pleas to the “epistemological self-consciousness” of Christians, Rushdoony built Reconstructionism on the notion that human are created beings bound by that fact to think God’s thoughts after Him. Since the Bible provides the only concrete and reliable pattern for this project, it becomes the central reference point for all knowledge. The Bible provides the all known and needed facts upon which man many reason and through which he can understand the world and his place in it. Since the Bible begins with the stated fact that man is created being, Rushdoony concludes, “man has a short history, not a long

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94 Here I follow Foucault’s suggestion that we will find evidence of counter-conduct at the level of doctrine, individual forms of behavior, and in “strongly organized groups” (ibid., 204.).
unknown past. That short history is extensively documented in Scripture…. Man is therefore subject to explanation by a documented record, not a long and hypothetical past."\textsuperscript{95} The consequences of this fact are far reaching because it makes psychology a “branch of theology” that speaks directly to humanity’s desire to know. This will to knowledge is a created fact of man’s nature: “Knowledge is important to man. To surrender the possibility of knowledge is an abdication of life, of the present and the future.”\textsuperscript{96} But to know is to “surrender” to God’s knowledge.\textsuperscript{97} Knowing independently of God ultimately leads men to try to command and control reality, a sin that is most cogently manifested in modern man’s assumption that “knowledge is power” which led man on “eager quest for power through knowledge.”\textsuperscript{98}

Thus, the first practice of Rushdoony’s counter-conduct is interpretative process that governs the total psychology of men in terms of the knowledge present in scripture. This means that all aspects of a man’s life and his processes of thought must be brought in accord with a specific way of reading and interpreting the Bible. In this sense, his project is fundamentally Protestant, and rooted in the long-established concepts of \textit{ad fonts} and \textit{sola scriptura}—returning to the letter and scripture alone as not only the basis of one’s faith but also as the basis for one’s place in the cosmos. In terms of midcentury American religious culture, this practice of bringing one into accord with scripture makes Rushdoony’s project is one of the most fundamentalist of the then fashionable forms of fundamentalism.

\textsuperscript{95} Rushdoony, \textit{Revolt Against Maturity}, 5.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
Level 2: The Individual

As a consequence of the scriptural fact that man is a created creature whom God required to know himself in the world before he could know himself as a social creature, Rushdoony locates all agency in the individual man. This has deep implications for how human beings must act in relation to the world and act in relation to one another. It is only through the individual thoughts and actions of discrete, godly agents that history is able to unfold and progress towards God’s final goal for all men: dominion over the earth and the establishment of the Kingdom of God. While Adam had direct contact with God unmediated by sin, modern men have no such luxury and must therefore be brought into accord with God’s plan via a community capable of raising up Godly men to self-conscious awareness of this calling to dominion. Thus, although individual men are the agents of God’s plan, their agency is contingent upon network of governing institutions—especially the church, the family, schools, and a properly Christian-constituted state—that work in unison to create the conditions necessary for Godly men to thrive.

Level 3: The Community

Fallen men can only realize their calling to dominion within the context of various governing institutions. These institutions provide the mechanisms through which a regenerated man (that is, a man who has been saved by the grace of God) may in turn be justified in order to execute dominion in all spheres of life and in turn become governors themselves. Rushdoony develops his notion of community in explicit counter-distinction to the modern state, which as we have seen, he interprets as totalitarian system that greedily subsumes all forms of governance under its domination. But if the state now dominates all men and forever alienates them from their commandment to exercise
dominion, then Rushdoony is left with the problem of proposing an alternative way of organizing human social relationships that at once retains the sovereignty of the individual Christian male while also providing a constraining social matrix that denies the autonomy of individual action and instead renders our actions prisoner to the Word of God.

At this point we must return to Rushdoony’s basic distinction between autonomous man and theonomous man. The latter is a man whose actions are not a manifestation of his self, but rather emerge from his negotiation between his self and the constraint of God’s law. He argues that Biblical law provides the ethical framework that allows Christians to ameliorate the curse of the Fall. Through the law the reconstructed Christian, or Dominion Man as Rushdoony fondly called him, could “take dominion” over the planet and “reconstruct” all of life in Christ’s image.

At the level of the state, the law and dominion require a specific ordering of social relationships that will ensure that it cannot be raised to the level of deification seen in both ancient pagan states and their modern, totalitarian decedents. Of course Christianity provides the necessary mechanisms for limiting the state and allowing all other spheres of governance to reconstruct men, but Rushdoony had in mind a specific historical development of the Christian political tradition as his model—namely the Colonial and post-Revolutionary-era United States. In a move reminiscent of Frank Meyer’s insistence that the framers of the U.S. constitution reconciled the Christian conception of liberty with Western tradition, Rushdoony’s reading of the history found evidence that the civil structure of the early New England and Southern colonies was, “almost from [their]

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inception, a Protestant restoration of feudalism.”\(^{100}\) As such, Rushdoony argued that this “American feudal system” undermined the “Babel-like unity” of the centralized nation-state emerging contemporaneously in Europe. This decentralized feudal order assured that the “state was thus placed under God, not in the being of God as in paganism.”\(^{101}\) Therefore Rushdoony argues that the American Revolution was an anti-statist “counter-revolution,” which denied the concept of human sovereignty, distrusted the “people” (“democracy,” Rushdoony explains, was never the intent of the Constitution’s framers),\(^{102}\) and established a social environment in which Dominion Man could thrive.\(^{103}\)

This colonial-era social environment was in fact founded on a series of decentralized, independent, but interconnected Christian theocracies that rested on the “sovereignty of God and His kingship.”\(^{104}\) With Christian liberty under God’s law (and not humanity’s), colonial men were free to serve the three-fold office of king, prophet, and priest under God’s law: “As king, his is to exercise dominion in the name of God over all creation; as prophet, he is to interpret all things in terms of his sovereign God; as priest, he is to dedicate all things to his sovereign, God.”\(^{105}\) Men are called by God to exercise these offices of dominion in every sphere of life. Faith in and dedication to God’s final sovereignty dictates that no sphere can be made subservient to the other.


\(^{103}\) Ibid., 10.

\(^{104}\) Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic*, 84, 96, 135-140.

\(^{105}\) Ibid., 84.
Therefore, every sphere provides a check to the potential tyranny of the others. With the state stripped of any and all of its transcendent claims, new spaces for community and theonomous governance are opened in the spheres of self-government of the individual, the family, the church, and the economy. It is in this sense that Rushdoony wrote of the church and family as the instruments of “anti-Babel;”¹⁰⁶ that is, at every turn, a true Christian family and church provide a check to refuse the absolute and totalitarian claims of the state on the lives of men.

Rushdoony, like so many conservatives in his generation, knew that the federal government of the Cold War-era was not that of the post-Revolutionary period. For Rushdoony, the end of the American feudal empire came in fits and starts until a conspiracy of Unitarians and socialists united to unify the federal state into a monolithic government that stripped all other spheres of their equal claim to delegated sovereignty under God’s law. This conspiracy realized its goal with the defeat of the Confederacy during the Civil War. Since the time of Lincoln, the forces of an elite urbanized bureaucracy have been slowly rolling back the rural, feudal Christian character that the Constitution was designed to protect and they have replaced it with a paganized state.

If Rushdoony’s historiographic project had simply ended with this narrative, then he would have been left with the absolute victory of Satan over and against God’s plan for humanity. He, of course, did not end his narrative with Satan’s victory, but instead developed a systematic plan for de-paganizing the state and returning it to the form of the de-centralized, neo-feudal communities he believed thrived in the early U.S. We now return to where we started: with an eschatology of the modern state. By outlining a

¹⁰⁶ Rushdoony, Christianity and the State, 11.
mutually reinforcing network of doctrine, individual practice, and community constraints, Rushdoony proposed a coherent strategy for undermining and ultimately reorganizing the federal state into something profoundly different than the one most Americans are familiar with. As they stood in the 1960s, however, Rushdoony’s ideas were essentially an idiosyncratic and nebulous set of prescriptive musings about the relationship between men and their governing institutions. He was left with the singular problem of enrolling allies who shared his ideas and were willing to implement them into their everyday lives. Furthermore, Rushdoony had already tried to implement his project at the Center for American Studies only to find himself and his allies fired and their reputations maligned. In short, he needed to reorganize his ideas and to deploy them in a space that was more favorable to his goals, one that allowed him the freedom to engage in his counter epistemological, interpretive, and political program without the necessity of compromise with other groups that shared some of his goals and ideas but departed with him on basic theological, epistemological, and practical grounds. That space eventually solidified into the Chalcedon Foundation.

III. THE COUNTER-CO锹NDUCT OF THE CHALCEDON FOUNDATION

As I have argued, Rushdoony’s entire project is based on shifting humanity’s epistemological frame of reference away from autonomous reasoning and towards a God-centered, theonomous mode of thought that is restricted by Scripture and predicated on thinking God’s thoughts after Him. This mode of presuppositional reasoning means that all facts only have meaning in relationship to God. Consequently, the first action any reconstructed man must take is bringing his thoughts in line with God’s. This means that all of history must be interpreted in terms of God’s word. The result of this reasoning is
that all aspects of scholarship, especially in terms of historical study, must be interpreted through God’s plan for humanity. It is in this nexus between historical interpretation, human agency, and divine will that Rushdoony sought to reinterpret human history in order to create an explicitly Christian mode of being and acting in the world. The foundation for this action came from an unusual source: the Creeds and Councils of the early Christian Church.

For Rushdoony, human social order rested on the proper understanding of the implications of the proceedings of all of the early ecumenical councils of the Church. Of these councils, none was more important to Rushdoony’s political project than the Council of Chalcedon. The outcome of this Council held in A.D. 451 was the most comprehensive statement about the person of Jesus Christ. In part, the Confession of Chalcedon reads, “We confess that one and the same Christ, Lord, and only-begotten Son, is to be acknowledged in two natures without confusion, change, division, or separation. The distinction between natures was never abolished by their union, but rather the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved as they came together in one person and one hypostasis.” Rushdoony interpreted the Confession as an attack of any human institution that claimed to represent the soterial functions of Christ. In other words, the Church could not save Christians because such an action would represent the confusion of the “two natures” (i.e. the human and the divine) of Christ. Similarly, the state could make no transcendent claims of sovereignty over human beings. “Chalcedon,” he concluded, “handed statism its major defeat in man’s history.”

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108 Ibid., 53.
the millennial kingdom, ruled by the all-sovereign King Jesus, could both save and rule men.

From Rushdoony’s profoundly Calvinist perspective, the vast arc of human history displayed humankind’s willful rebellion against the proceedings of Chalcedon: humans, according to Rushdoony, long to find in their own institutions the mechanisms for salvation, a possibility denied by the Council of Chalcedon. Before the Council, Rushdoony argues that human beings typically attempted to understand salvation in terms of “self-deification.” In order to transcend human existence and the flux of nature, mankind opted for either self-deification in terms of individual, mystical union with the divine or corporate-deification through the union of the individual with a body-politic that was itself believed to be divine. Within the Roman context, in which officials tolerated and eventually embraced Christianity, some in the Empire moved to conflate Church and State because of the long-standing “Roman statist theology,” which held that the Empire “was the voice of God.” This suggested that the Christ’s humanity and divinity could be conflated: “If the two natures of Christ were confused, it meant that the door was opened to the divinizing of human nature; man and the state were the potentially divine.” Any attempt to reconcile this problem then had massive implications not only for Christians, but also for all of humanity.

The Definition of Chalcedon refused to accept self- or corporate-deification as an orthodox solution to the problem of Christ and man’s relationship with Him. For Rushdoony, the council stood as a bifurcation in human history. On one side of

109 Ibid.
110 Ibid., 54.
111 Ibid.
Chalcedon lay all pagan institutions; on the other, the possibility for a truly Christian state. Thus, Chalcedon, “separated Christian faith from the Greek and pagan concepts of nature and being. It made clear that Christianity and all other religions and philosophies could not be brought together.”112 This epistemological bifurcation had political implications: “Chalcedon prevented human institutions from professing to be incarnations of the deity and able to unite two world in their existence. The state was reduced to a human order, under God, and it was denied its age-old claim to divinity for the body-politic, the ruler, or the offices.”113 This binary division of history into two orders, one pre- and the other post-Chalcedon, became the animating force behind everything Rushdoony thought about, preached, and worked toward for the remainder of his life. The Chalcedon Foundation embodied his effort to convince all Christians of his interpretation of the Definition of Chalcedon and to reorganize society based on its de-divinizing implications.

Leaving aside whether Rushdoony’s interpretation of Chalcedon is “correct,” I can simply say, as Molly Worthen does, that his view is not quite as “eccentric”114 as a superficial reading might suggest. Worthen accurately points out that the theological battles ostensibly settled by the Council were not merely pie-in-the-sky ruminations about the abstract nature of Christ, but would have had political implications for the bishops haggling at Chalcedon: “in some ways Rushdoony’s reading is closer to the understanding of the fourth and fifth centuries, when Christology was not an abstruse

112 Ibid., 56.
113 Ibid.
debate among churchmen, but a matter of immediate political concern. One’s view of Christ shaped one’s view of Caesar.” Rushdoony can therefore be understood as mobilizing Chalcedon as both a rhetorical tool and a political one in a fight over the contemporary understandings of the nature and meaning of the state. The modern state represented the most perverse manifestation of this desire for auto-salvation. The biopolitical prerogatives of the modern state—those concerned with population management, production, consumption, debt, risk, etc.—created the context for such social engineering projects as rehabilitating criminals, the redistribution of wealth, etc. in order to save men from their own fallen nature. Rushdoony viewed such developments as not only hubristic but ultimately as open rebellion against the will of God. The accuracy of his assessment is far less important than its discursive implementation and whether or not others were willing to accept it and repeat it as a reasonable interpretation of the past via the present and present via the past. Further, Rushdoony’s reading of the Council’s Definition of Christ can be embodied in a host of material forms: the body of Christ, the body of the created creature, the body-politic of a properly constituted Christian state, and those social structures that counter-balance and ultimately resist totalitarian political organizations.

*Constituting Chalcedon*

Through his careful interpretation of the Definition of Chalcedon, Rushdoony enlisted King Jesus as his primary ally in the battle against the American federal government. But neither Christ nor Rushdoony could stand alone in this fight. They needed an organizational base to resist the state and they needed the resources to support

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115 Ibid., 408.
the resistance. Rushdoony had already failed to convince the principals at the Center for American Studies of the correctness and viability of his project, but this was hardly a deterrent from continuing the struggle. In 1964 Rushdoony began a slow, steady fight to convince anyone who listened to him of the validity of his assessment of Chalcedon. This process can be broken into three basic components: 1) organizational, 2) educational, and 3) individual regeneration. I address each component below.

Organizing Chalcedon

The Chalcedon Foundation required Rushdoony to marshal a vast array of resources and enroll an army of supporters, many of whom only supported him in theory but not necessarily in practice. In his tireless pursuit to build his dedicated minority and reconstruct America, Rushdoony used a host of resources that need to be touched, however briefly, before moving on to discuss his lecturing, writing, and educational efforts. The two most important tools that Rushdoony deployed to organize his foundation were the American legal system and a cottage publishing industry\textsuperscript{116} that allowed Rushdoony to stay in touch with disparate supporters.

In terms of law, Rushdoony retained the services of Gaston, Keltner, and Adair Attorneys at Law to secure tax-exempt status for Chalcedon. As a non-profit tax-exempt organization, Rushdoony could use Chalcedon to support his lecturing, researching, and writing without ever being prisoner to the oversight of men such as Harold Luhnow again. Initially incorporated as Chalcedon, Inc. in early 1965,\textsuperscript{117} Rushdoony sought

\textsuperscript{116}I return to both of these points and develop them more extensively in chapter 5.

\textsuperscript{117}Gaston, Keltner, and Adair Attorneys at Law to Los Angeles County Clerk, April 20, 1965, RJR Library.
501(c)(3) status for Chalcedon as an educational institution. His early hope was that Chalcedon would develop into a Christian college with a full-time staff of lecturers and researchers who would be dedicated “to the orthodox Christian faith” “within the tradition of the Council of Chalcedon.” In a letter to the IRS, Rushdoony developed his plans in some depth, taking broad swipes at the prominent Christian colleges. He reported that most Christian colleges simply give their students “warmed-over Harvard and Chicago lectures.” Chalcedon College would “revise” the liberal arts curriculum into an explicitly “Christian liberal arts curriculum” founded on the presupposition that “[m]an cannot usurp the role of God in relationship to the world.” Before gaining official tax-exemption status in 1968, Donald K. Watson notes that Rushdoony “channeled” contributions through other, already exempt, conservative organizations and churches. Rushdoony was the primary recipient of these funds…. With this income [Rushdoony was] able to work on books to be published by the Presbyterian and Reformed Published Company and write and submit articles for both Christian and conservative, secular publications. Additionally, Rushdoony could afford to travel widely on speaking engagements.

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118 U.S. Treasury Department, Internal Revenue Service to Chalcedon, Inc., May 18, 1965, RJR Library.
119 Gaston, Keltner, and Adair Attorneys at Law to Chief of the Audit Division of Los Angeles County, September 12, 1965, RJR Library.
120 R. J. Rushdoony draft of a letter to H. J. Grant, n.d. [drafted in response to Gaston, Keltner, and Adair Attorneys at Law to R. J. Rushdoony, September 14, 1965], RJR Library.
121 Ibid.
In August 1965, Rushdoony secured $3,600 in combined contributions from Phil Virtue and Walter Knott of Knott’s Berry Farm fame. He used the money to move from Palo Alto to Woodland Hills, a district of Los Angeles, and start Chalcedon in earnest.

In terms of publishing, in October 1965, Rushdoony began self-publishing a “one page mimeographed newsletter,” which he sent to his small circle of supporters. He later explained, “I had a number of people who were going to support me, and I would make a report and make it available to them and all others interested.” This mimeographed newsletter was “collated and stapled on [Rushdoony’s] dining room table,” and eventually went on to become Rushdoony’s long running newsletter, The Chalcedon Report. In 1966, Rushdoony used this yet-to-be-named publication to announce the formation Chalcedon, Inc. to his supporters, noting that it would work to raise money, “purchase land towards building and conducting a college… and a graduate division in key fields.” The Chalcedon Report eventually developed into one of the most important aspects of Rushdoony’s ministry, both in terms of its longevity and in terms of the information it distributed to his allies.


124 I discuss the political and cultural context of Woodland Hills in the next chapter.


126 Ibid., 52-53.


Educating for Chalcedon

To create his dedicated minority, Rushdoony picked up exactly where he had left off after being fired by the Center for American Studies. He continued his three-fold mission of writing, lecturing, and preaching. To support this ministry, Rushdoony needed money and means, which he found through tireless work and resourceful bootstrapping. His appeal at this point was based on a simple binary construction: “Our choice today is between two claimants to the throne of godhood and universal: the state, which claims to be our shepherd, and savior, and the Holy Trinity, our only God and Savior.”¹²⁹ The state, ruled by “scientific planners,” will be judged by God and its sins punished, leaving all men a simple choice of “whether we will be among those judged, or among those, the saved Remnant, who undertake even now the task of reconstruction.”¹³⁰ Rushdoony took this joint appeal of resisting the state and individual spiritual reconstruction to four primary audiences: ministers, businessmen, college students, and housewives.¹³¹ He worked primarily in California, although he did take frequent trips to the east coast, the south, and throughout the west.

In 1965, Rushdoony began an intensive series of public lectures to secular organizations (i.e., those not explicitly connected to churches or para-church organizations) throughout the state of California. Most of these groups had been long-active in right-wing political activism, but all had been especially energized by Barry

¹²⁹ Rousas John Rushdoony, “Chalcedon Report, No. 1,” in reprinted in Roots of Reconstruction, 545


¹³¹ Rushdoony wrote to Robert Welch, the founder of the John Birch Society, that his largest audience was college students. He listed his second largest audience as ministers. R. J. Rushdoony to Robert Welch, March 21, 1966, RJR Library. I discuss Rushdoony’s work with housewives in chapter 4.
Goldwater’s 1964 presidential campaign.\textsuperscript{132} His correspondence offers only a few concrete glimpses of these extensive travels that laid the foundation for Chalcedon. For example, in the early months of the year, Rushdoony was an active lecturer in Ed Opitz’s Remnant group, deliver speeches on at least one occasion to a Remnant meeting in Riverside, California.\textsuperscript{133} The lecture brought Rushdoony to the attention of Robert D. Norton, Vice President of Coast Federal Savings and Loan Association, an organization active in supporting the rightward drift in California politics. Norton invited Rushdoony to participate in Coast Federal’s Guest Speaker Program, which had previously included other conservatives such as Ludwig Von Mises and Edmund Opitz. Rushdoony accepted the opportunity and spoke on the relationship between business and Christian ethics.\textsuperscript{134} For his troubles he earned a free trip from Palo Alto to Los Angeles, earned a $150 honorarium,\textsuperscript{135} and spoke to about “60 managers”\textsuperscript{136} at Coast Federal.

In the same year, Rushdoony spent a significant amount of time lecturing to many right-wing student groups, including the Yuba County Young Republican meetings. Just as his talks to organizations such as Coast Federal were tailored to his audience, Rushdoony typically spoke to Young Republicans about radical elements on California’s university campuses. In April of 1965, Antonia Fiske of the Yuba County\textsuperscript{137} Young Republicans called Rushdoony to lecture on “The Religion of Revolution” and its

\textsuperscript{132} See chapter 3 in McGirr, \textit{Suburban Warriors}.

\textsuperscript{133} Robert D. Norton to R. J. Rushdoony, March 12, 1965, RJR Library.


\textsuperscript{135} Robert D. Norton to R. J. Rushdoony, March 12, 1965, RJR Library.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{137} Yuba County is located in north-central California about forty miles north of Sacramento.
relationship to the “negro movement” and Free Speech Movement at the University of California, Berkeley. She put Rushdoony in front of “20 or 30” likeminded Republicans and distributed his pamphlets and encouraged them to buy his books.\textsuperscript{138}

Individually, such meetings in front of sixty businessmen here or twenty Young Republicans there meant little. In the aggregate, however, these lectures put Rushdoony in front of hundreds, perhaps thousands of people a year. Between January 1965 and May 1966, Rushdoony lectured in Seattle, Washington; Houston, Texas; Redding, California; Anderson, California; at Jackson Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi; and participated in “[v]arious seminars held in different parts of the country.”\textsuperscript{139} By December 1969 Rushdoony would record that he had spoken 151 times during the year in front of church groups and other organizations.\textsuperscript{140} He also authored 2,016 pieces of correspondence, read 261 books and published three of his own.\textsuperscript{141} This sort of tireless work effort and his follow-up on all of his lecturing and written work (as indicated by his voluminous personal correspondence) ensured that Rushdoony was always on the mind of those with whom he came into contact. These connections with ministers, businessmen, and political activists put Rushdoony in front of wide variety of women and men with the resources capable of supporting the establishment of the Chalcedon Foundation.

\textsuperscript{138} Antonia Fiske to R. J. Rushdoony, February 27, 1965; Antonia Fiske to R. J. Rushdoony, March 23, 1965; and Antonia Fiske to R. J. Rushdoony, April 8, 1965, RJR Rushdoony.

\textsuperscript{139} Rushdoony was a meticulous bookkeeper of his writing, reading, and lecturing. He no doubt recorded all of his pre-1969 activities, but I did not find these records in his library.

\textsuperscript{140} Summary of activities in 1969, R. J. Rushdoony journals, RJR Library.

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
To better understand Rushdoony’s educational efforts in 1965 and 1966 it is useful to compare them with those of the John Birch Society. Although Chalcedon was not organized like the JBS, the two organizations shared certain affinities and, not surprisingly, appealed to similar audiences. Chalcedon must be, much like the JBS, understood as a public education foundation that spoke of politics, not as a political organization focused on education. By taking a moment to reflect on the connections between the two organizations, the similarities between the two become apparent, but more importantly, it helps bring into sharp contrast why Rushdoony believed his Chalcedon Foundation was so essential and how it could function within the context of the broader American conservative movement.

Founded by Robert Welch, a candy maker (manufacturer of the “Papa Sucker,” now known as the “Sugar Daddy”), the JBS was named for a Baptist missionary and air combat intelligence officer who survived WWII but was killed ten days after the war ended by Chinese Communists. Welch believed Birch was the first victim of “World War III.” As he wrote in *The Life of John Birch*, “With his death and in his death the battle lines were drawn, in a struggle from which either Communism or Christian-style civilization must emerge with one completely triumphant and the other completely

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142 Jonathan M. Schoenwald argues that the JBS was hardly grassroots; it was organized like a corporation with a CEO (Welch), regional recruiters, and a staff responsible for communicating the Society’s positions on various issues. Local chapters were allowed to act autonomously, but the Belmont, Massachusetts, office discouraged too much autonomy by regional directors. See Jonathan M. Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing: The Rise of Modern American Conservatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 75-84. In contrast, to this scholarly assessment, Rushdoony argued that the strength of the JBS emerged from its grassroots structure. Specifically, he likened it to the cellular structure of the ancient Christian church, which organized the growing church in the homes of converted Christians. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, 1:746-747.

destroyed.”

Later, in the *Blue Book*, a collection of speeches that Welch gave over two days in December 1958 that “set forth the background, methods, and purposes of the JBS,” Welch clarified the nature of this struggle:

Communism is not a political party, nor a military organization, not an ideological crusade, nor a rebirth of Russian imperialist ambition, though it comprises and uses all of these parts and pretenses. Communism, in its unmistakable present reality, is wholly a conspiracy, a gigantic conspiracy to enslave mankind; an increasingly successful conspiracy controlled by determined cunning, and utterly ruthless gangsters, willing to use any means to achieve its end.

Today the organization is best known precisely for the sort of elaborate and strangely compelling conspiracy theories spun by Welch in his attempt to explain this “struggle” with Communism and how it could play out in the lives of everyday Americans.

To fight this cosmic battle between Christian civilization and Communist barbarity, the JBS focused the vast majority of its attention on public education and the dissemination of information that Welch deemed crucial. As he explained to the first meeting of the group,

The only thing which can possibly stop the communists is for the American people to learn the truth in time. It is to contribute my small bit to such an awakening that I have given up most of my business responsibilities and most of my income, in order through my magazine [*American Opinion*] and speeches to bring some inkling of truth to as many people as I can reach.

JBS material focused tightly on the theme of self-education, so that works such as the *Blue Book* and its annual *White Books* were filled with impassioned pleas for Birchers to engage in “intensive study” so as to “better informed” than most Americans and thus

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144 Robert Welch, *The Life of John Birch: In the Story of one American Boy, the Ordeal of his Age* (Boston: Western Islands, 1960), 135.


146 Ibid., 22.

147 Ibid., 26.
become leaders in a nation-wide resistance movement against the Communist conspiracy.\textsuperscript{148} Welch’s appeal to autodidacticism encouraged Birchers to de-contextualize everything that they had known, and to recode it in terms of the guiding metanarrative of an insidious Communist plot. Any sign, from the launch of Sputnik to the presence of \textit{Grapes of Wrath} in a high school library, could be enrolled in a chain of signifiers and recoded in terms of Communist conspiracy, or any other conspiracy whether it be Jewish, Catholic, or even alien—the only limit was the historically situated, collective imagination of the Birchers.\textsuperscript{149}

Since the fate of the Western world and with it humanity itself, rested on the dissemination of information, the JBS organized massive letter writing campaigns, petition signings, literature distribution events, and phone drives. Welch relied on cells organized by local chapter leaders who read his monthly bulletins and followed the goals he set therein. Welch summarized,

from the beginning, the Society has devoted its total energy to the purpose set forth in the Blue Book, and emphasized on its last page: \textit{To create understanding}. Even the projects we have initiated for specific action have all been designed to cause more people to study and understand what was taking place. Education has been our only strategy, truth our only weapon.\textsuperscript{150}

Thus, Birchers dutifully sought understanding: they read the papers, watched the news, and, with equal diligence and fearlessness, they hammered the flotsam and jetsam of the popular media and their everyday lives into the metanarrative of Communist conspiracy.

\textsuperscript{148}Ibid., 26-27.

\textsuperscript{149} Here I allude to Mark Fenster’s suggestion that conspiracy theories function as a form of “hyperactive semiosis,” see \textit{Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), xvii; see his chapter 4 for a full development of the suggestion.

\textsuperscript{150} Emphasis in the original. Robert Welch to R. J. Rushdoony, December 7, 1965, RJR Library. The passage of the \textit{Blue Book} to which Welch refers, reads in part, “All we must find and build and use, to win, is sufficient understanding. Let’s create that understanding and build that resistance, with everything mortal men can put into that effort—while there still is time” (\textit{Blue Book of the John Birch Society}, 167.).
The organization was important for connecting conservatives, encouraging women to become local activists, and for spurring these local activists to action at both the national-level and at the mundane level of school board meetings, primaries, and other local events.

The JBS became a target of derision because of its secret member list, widely known conspiracy theories, and pressure tactics. For many observers, especially academics and journalists, the JBS set the gold standard for the proto-typical “paranoid,” “extremist,” “right-wing” organization.\(^\text{151}\) This image of dangerous extremism, however, seems at odds with the JBS’s emphasis on public education first, and political action second. This self-understanding of the JBS’s purpose and mission has largely been accepted by recent studies of the organization. For example, historian Jonathan M. Schoenwald, largely attests to this self-assessment that the JBS was primarily an educational operation, noting, “The JBS’s most appealing ideological point was that it connected all of the disparate pieces into a coherent whole and helped average Americans make sense out of a jumble of facts and opinions.”\(^\text{152}\) Similarly, sociologist Sara Diamond suggests that the JBS was neither as radical nor as dangerous as many on the left during the 1960s feared: “Tactically, the Society’s emphasis on letter-writing campaigns and literature distribution are hardly the kinds of activities that could be described as extremist or undemocratic.”\(^\text{153}\) In this sense the JBS functioned as a reform


\(^{152}\) Schoenwald, *Time for Choosing*, 79.

\(^{153}\) Diamond, *Roads to Dominion*, 55.
organization that operated outside of the normal channels of power—such as the Republican Party or other well-established right-wing organizations—and instead focused on educating members on how to think about contemporary political and social issues. It did require that members reassess what they believed that they knew about current issues, and it forced them to think about those issues in ways many of their contemporaries interpreted as antithetical to mainstream positions and even as dangerous.

Not surprisingly, Rushdoony, who was himself engaged in an effort to encourage Americans to alter their perceptions of the world, found much to admire in the JBS. During the 1960s he actively engaged Robert Welch and the JBS. In a letter to Welch, Rushdoony stated his profound admiration for Welch, writing, “let me express my very great respect for your work, and for you personally. I regard you as the clearest and most courageous public figure of our day. I have read your publications for years with essential agreement.”¹⁵⁴ Welch returned Rushdoony’s respect by commissioning articles from Rushdoony to appear in Welch’s *American Opinion*,¹⁵⁵ the official publication of the JBS. Further, Welch requested Rushdoony’s feedback on educational material produced and distributed by the JBS and many in the Society’s Belmont, Massachusetts, headquarters were reading and circulating Rushdoony’s writings.¹⁵⁶

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¹⁵⁶ Marian P. Welch to R. J. Rushdoony, February 28, 1966, RJR Library, specifies that those in the office were reading Rushdoony’s *The Religion of Revolution*, (Victoria, TX: Trinity Episcopal Church, 1965), a pamphlet that was circulating widely among those on the right in the 1960s.
Rushdoony and Welch met for the first time in March 1966 during one of the two men’s frequent speaking engagements. In the letters the two men exchanged following their first meeting, Rushdoony noted the extent of the Society’s influence on his work. “I have made, over a period of years now,” Rushdoony wrote, “extensive use of JBS materials, with increasing respect for your work.”

At the same time, Rushdoony carefully distanced himself from the Society, telling Welch that he needed to remain “unaffiliated” from the JBS because it “is necessary for a time yet to circulate as an independent in order to gain access to many of the clergy” who were not sympathetic to the JBS. This did not mean that Rushdoony had been “independent as far as my allegiances,” which he placed solidly in line with those of Welch and others in the JBS.

In order to make this point, Rushdoony wondered, “would it be possible for me to make a contribution equal to that of home members and receive the Society materials on that basis without formal membership.” Rushdoony paid the $24 annual fee and became officially unaffiliated with the JBS.

In the end, Rushdoony was careful to draw Welch and the JBS close, be he also distanced himself from the Society when it suited him. In fact, Rushdoony often undermined the organization in his private correspondence and warned people away from the JBS whenever an opportunity presented itself. Interestingly, Rushdoony believed that the weakest aspect of the JBS was Robert Welch himself and the tight control he

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158 Ibid.
159 Ibid.
160 See “Dues Schedule,” available in *Blue Book of the John Birch Society*.
maintained over the organization: “One of the strong points of the JBS is the centralized authority. It is also one of its weakest points. It makes for strong concerted action, but it also makes the limitations of one man, Robert Welch, decisive.”

In fairness to Welch, Rushdoony added, “We can expect Welch… and Rushdoony, and every other man, to have their shortcomings and limitations,” but the balance of his letter is critical of Welch and his tight control over the JBS. To a potential Chalcedon backer weighing the possibility of sending significant support to Rushdoony, Rushdoony wrote, “I am not a member of the John Birch Society, nor have I ever been a member. … I have high regard for these organizations, which is not always to imply agreement, but I believe that as a clergy man and writer it is necessary to maintain my independence.”

Ultimately, one can conclude that Rushdoony did agree with aspects of the JBS agenda, but that he was also working at odds with the organization. Rushdoony’s son, Mark, later said of his father’s ties the JBS, “Many of his early supporters were in the John Birch Society and the Goldwater movement, and they were disillusioned with the loss of Goldwater. … My father was trying to turn their attention to a different focus, to a more theological view, a moral view of culture, civilization.”

In short, Rushdoony’s problem with the JBS went beyond Welch’s management of the organization, and was ultimately tied to its lack of a clear theological underpinning. The JBS was “anti-Christianity” in Rushdoony’s assessment since it did not explicitly recognize the presuppositional assumptions that

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163 Ibid.
164 R. J. Rushdoony to J. Vard Loomis, December 5, 1965, RJR Library. Rushdoony authored this letter before he paid the home chapter fees and became an unofficial member of the JBS, but one is left to consider how honest this assertion is given the strong ties Rushdoony cultivated with the Society.
165 Worthen, “Chalcedon Problem,” 403.
Rushdoony believed must undergird an educational organization. Consequently, he could cooperate with Welch, and even agree with the candy man’s assessment of Communism, but Rushdoony believed that the JBS was ultimately doomed to failure if it did not address the souls of men.

Regeneration

Rushdoony’s criticisms of the JBS and its method are telling: the organization was addressing the right issues, but it did not have a proper epistemological framework in place for interpreting political facts. Within this context, Rushdoony was fond of noting, “There is no such thing as brute factuality, but rather only interpreted factuality.” 166 Since facts cannot speak for themselves, it was not enough for Welch to simply put his painstaking research in front of conservatives. He also needed to provide the necessary framework for interpreting those facts. In terms of history, Welch was right to see a conspiracy at work driving forward a communistic agenda on the world stage, but he was wrong about its source: “The Bible as a whole presents a view of history as conspiracy, with Satan and man determined to assert their right to be gods, knowing, or determining, good and evil for themselves.” 167 But this conspiracy of Satan and man is doomed to failure because “the certainty of the Son’s victory.” 168

CONCLUSION: BIBLICAL LAW

It is in Rushdoony’s specific interpretation of God’s plan for victory that the true novelty of Chalcedon emerges. By the time Rushdoony had produced six of his monthly

167 Ibid.
168 Ibid., 156.
“Chalcedon Reports,” a latent theme in his newsletter had become the animating force behind the publication: Biblical law as the condition for Christian victory. Rushdoony had long focused in his writing on Biblical law, citing it in his first book on Van Til and every book thereafter, but by the time he founded the Chalcedon Foundation in 1965, Rushdoony began specifically citing Old Testament legal standards as examples of precedent for interpreting contemporary social and political issues. Debt, torture, love, over-population, the state, and patriotism were all subjected to Rushdoony’s reading of Biblical law. His monthly newsletters all share one common theme that he worked tirelessly to impress on his supporters: “One of the most important things for us to know, in understanding our world, is that it is under God’s law.” Through the sixties and seventies, Rushdoony tried to impress this insight on the supporters of Chalcedon by outlining what a social order structured by the normative standards of Biblical law would look like and how it could work on the lives and bodies of tiny minority of Christian women and men who would in turn raise up a new generation to Christ. In the next chapter I turn to summarize this all-encompassing Biblical law-order and assess how it related to broader conservative concerns about the nature and limits of the sinful individual and the abstract concept of the state.

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It is often wrongly stated or implied by both his critics and his supporters that Rushdoony’s focus on Biblical law did not begin until after the founding of Chalcedon and the publication of the *Institutes of Biblical Law*. In fact, everything Rushdoony had published beginning with *By What Standard* had had Biblical law as an implicit theme.

Chapter 4: Lex Rex

Familialization, Biblical Law, and the Transmodern Constitution of Man

“… [E]very law-order is a state of war against the enemies of that order, and all law is a form of warfare.”
– R. J. Rushdoony, The Institutes of Biblical Law¹

“Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”
– Romans 13:10 (KJV)

Books molded the contours of R. J. Rushdoony’s life. When Rushdoony and his family moved from Paulo Alto to Woodland Hills, he took his library with him. As with all of his previous moves this required a considerable amount of planning and a certain amount of sacrifice. In order to accommodate several thousand volumes and his large family, rather than lose living space to his books, the family enclosed a patio on their new home and created a new room dedicated exclusively to Rushdoony’s library. As his son Mark remembered, “When we moved to Los Angeles to start Chalcedon in 1965, Dad was forty-nine. We had to enclose a large screened-in patio to house the books. Still, they took up much of the rest of the house and the garage.”² A decade later when Chalcedon was a fully functioning non-profit, no single room or house could contain Rushdoony’s collection, so he built a freestanding 1,300 square foot library to house his nearly 40,000 volumes.

Rushdoony accumulated this massive library because he was a compulsive book buyer who often went on special trips in search of new books, preferably hardcovers because he found paperbacks “distasteful” because of their “disposable nature.” He scavenged for them wherever he could and squirreled them away, but he was no collector. Each book was a joy and a pleasure. As a missionary on the Duck Valley Reservation in Nevada, an approaching book—so rare and wonderful to him in that isolated outpost—would force the expectant Reverend to wait for the stage of weekly mail. “After he received it from the driver,” a member of his congregation remembered, “he would return to the house by crossing the road and then across the footbridge and in the yard without looking up. This weekly event took on a life of its own as several folks wouldn’t miss it if their lives depended on it.” As he matured and he focused his attention on writing and lecturing, Rushdoony depended more and more on books so he took them everywhere. Again, to M. Rushdoony: “If he had to wait anywhere for even a few moments he would open the book and continue reading where he had last stopped. He briefcase full of books on speaking trips and would come home with several read and indexed.”

In all these ways and so many others, books structured Rushdoony’s life. They determined the size and nature of his and his family’s home. They organized the hours in his day, demanding his time and attention. They disciplined him. And, in return, he organized them by imposing a structure and totalizing coherence on their cacophonous

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3 Ibid.
white noise of informational chaos. He wrote in his books, indexed them, imposed his formidable if idiosyncratic intellect on them:

When he read a book, he would use a six-inch ruler and a pencil. He would neatly underline, using the ruler (never freehand), an important piece of information. Sometimes he would double-underline something of particular importance. Longer passages he would mark with a single (or double) line in the margin parallel to the edge of the page. An exclamation mark, or an “x” in the margin would denote a particularly significant passage or statement. He then would write a reference to the marked passage in the back of the book.⁶

He noted the date and location where he finished reading every book and logged each completed volume in his journals.

His discipline went far beyond marginalia and paratextual annotations: he carefully and methodically Christianized ever text; a process ordered by the Van Tillian presuppositional philosophy that he used to determine the outcome of every thought, ensuring its accord with the mind of the Creator. Of course, this meant that Rushdoony’s encounter with his dear books was circular, a closed loop structured from beginning to end by a single book: the Bible. Thus, a kind of intertextuality governed Rushdoony’s very being: the Bible structured his approach to information and determined the way he read every text he encountered. In turn, his drive to read and write about what he read was determined by his calling to bring the hearts and minds of all men into accord with scripture.

This chapter explores the complex relationship between Rushdoony’s ideas, his life and family, and the most important book in his life. It focuses generally on how he opened himself to the Bible and allowed it to structure his life via Biblical law. Specifically, it explores how Biblical law became the formative matrix through which

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⁶ Ibid., 10.
Rushdoony developed the conception of theonomy—a term derived from the Greek words *theos* (God’s) and *nomos* (law)—that governed not only his life, but also the lives of his family and those who opted to submit themselves to his disciplined reading of scripture. The chapter moves through three steps. First, I discuss the cultural and political context of Woodland Hills and the greater Los Angeles area. This section introduces the reader to the book clubs, bookstores, and family-centered civic organizations that greeted the Rushdoony family in southern California and I argue that it was a particularly fertile environment for Rushdoony to sow his vision of a Biblically-ordered, family-based form of conservatism.

The next two sections step back from the particularity of southern Californian conservatism to explore how Rushdoony conceptualized of Biblical law as a medium for governing the minds of body of sinful men. This discussion moves between two poles: autonomy/theonomy. To illustrate Rushdoony’s conception of autonomy, I present his reading of the sin of homosexuality as the ultimate expression of autonomous man’s sin against the Biblically structured system of godly dominion. I explore Rushdoony’s assessment of the works of the Marquis de Sade and the consequences of conscious, sinful autonomy by comparing it with Michel Foucault’s conception of transgression. With the limits of transgressive autonomy fixed in the body of the homosexual deviant I then move to the theonomic pole and outline the solution to the problem of embodied sin: regeneration through the Grace of Christ and reconstructed holiness through the prescriptive limits of the law of God. As the chapter closes, I argue that Rushdoony must be situated within the context of modernity and can be profitably understood as a figure who worked to undermine aspects of modern American culture while simultaneously
affirming and reinterpreting certain core components of modernity. Finally, I use all of this material in an effort to complete the argument I began in the previous chapter by suggesting that, when yoked together, Biblical law and the family form a governmental nexus of counter-practices that operate through a process of differentiation to create a reconstructed self that is the ultimate goal of Rushdoony’s project of Christian Reconstruction.

I. **FAMILIALIZING CONSERVATISM**

Before discussing Biblical law, the family, or modernity, let’s return to the topic of books. If books made Rushdoony, then it shouldn’t be surprising that Christian Reconstruction as we know it today may not have taken shape the way it did if it hadn’t been for a chance encounter between the son of an FBI agent and an employee in a “patriot bookstore” that just so happened to stock quite a few copies of books authored by R. J. Rushdoony. In the fall of 1964, a young college student named Gary North walked into the Betsy Ross Book Shop and saw some of Rushdoony’s books on the selves and this chance encounter with Rushdoony’s texts inadvertently started a conversation that bequeathed Biblical law to American culture.

*Gary North and the Betsy Ross Book Shop*

In the winter of 1962, during the second semester of his junior year at the UCLA, Gary Kilgore North read Rushdoony’s *Intellectual Schizophrenia* after a friend in his

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Christian fraternity lent him a copy. North had grown up in southern California, the only child of FBI Special Agent, Samuel W. North, Jr., and Peggy North. Father Samuel was so conservative that, as his son later recalled, “when the U.S. Government suggested that employees drive with their lights on out of respect to the anniversary of Martin Luther King’s assassination, dad drove home that evening with his lights off, risking a ticket and a collision.” Several years before the elder North’s perilously dark drive home, his son was so excited by his exposure to Rushdoony’s criticism of state-sponsored education—and a fleeting citation of Mises’s *Human Action*—that he sent Rushdoony a letter sometime in the spring of 1962, and the two began corresponding about everything from economics to the Kingdom of God.

As their correspondence developed, North and Rushdoony had their first opportunity to meet during a series of summer lectures that Rushdoony delivered as part of an Intercollegiate Society of Individualists series at St. Mary’s College, located near

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8 These details about North’s exposure to Rushdoony’s are from Gary North, email to the author, December 10, 2008.


12 Gary North and Gary DeMar, *Christian Reconstruction: What it is, What it isn't* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), ix. North appears to have written Rushdoony for the first time in March of 1962. Although I could not find a copy of North’s original letter, Rushdoony’s response, dated March 16, 1962 (R. J. Rushdoony Library, Chalcedon Foundation, Vallecito, CA [hereafter cited as the RJR Library]), indicates that North wrote to Rushdoony to inquire about the latter’s effort to reconcile Christian principles with libertarian economic theory.
San Francisco, California.\(^{13}\) At St. Mary’s Rushdoony lectured to North and at least nineteen other students during the two-week session. Other lecturers featured at the conference included such notable right-wing academics as Hans F. Sennholz, Felix Morley, Francis Graham Wilson, Stefan T. Possony, and Ivan R. Bierly.\(^{14}\) Of the lectures North later recalled, “I listened to Hans Sennholz on economics, and I slept through Francis Graham Wilson’s Socratic monologues on political theory. … Rousas John Rushdoony lectured for two weeks on what became This Independent Republic…. I was so impressed that I married his daughter—a decade later.”\(^{15}\) After the St. Mary’s ISI lectures, Rushdoony encouraged I. R. Bierly to hire North as a summer intern at the Center for American Studies in 1963.\(^{16}\) “I was paid $500 a month to read,” North remembered, “which was the best job I have ever had.”\(^{17}\) At the CAS North and Rushdoony became part of the Calvinist alliance that helped to destroy the Center. But the partnership between the forty-seven-year-old Reverend and the brash, combative twenty-one-year-old North survived the end of the CAS to become a long-term friendship as Rushdoony developed into North’s spiritual and political mentor.

During their earliest interactions, North was a political conservative and recently converted dispensational evangelical.\(^{18}\) After their work together at the CAS, North

\(^{13}\) North, “It All Began With Fred Schwarz.”


\(^{15}\) North, “It All Began With Fred Schwarz.”

\(^{16}\) North had contacted Baldy Harper in 1961 when the CAS was still formally organized as the Volker Fund, but was not officially hired by until after the Fund restructured into the CAS and I. R. Bierly had replaced Harper at the head of the organization. Gary North, email to the author, March 17, 2007.

\(^{17}\) North, “It All Began With Fred Schwarz.”

\(^{18}\) First, North noted, “I am a conservative. I would also regard myself as a fundamentalist, in that I hold to the traditional orthodox view of Jesus Christ as divine and Lord of the World” (Gary North to
began to drift toward Reformed Calvinism. Rushdoony helped the process along when he recommended North for entry into Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia to study under Cornelius Van Til. The seminary accepted him and North enrolled in the autumn of 1963. If his letters from this time are any indication, it was profound mistake. After about two months of classes North angrily wrote Rushdoony, “Am I disgusted. I am taking fifteen hours a week of sheer boredom. This is worse than any year of college I had. I am working, but what impossibly dull material.”

A month later, North simplified the situation: “I want out of Westminster.” In a series of letters he attacked everything from the rambling lecture style of Cornelius Van Til to the quality and work ethic of his fellow students. Making matters worse, North did not yet quite consider himself a Presbyterian (the official denominational affiliation of the school) and longed for “an independent Bible church” as opposed to the “cold orthodoxy” of east coast Presbyterian churches that lacked “evangelical spirit” and that ordained men who couldn’t “preach their way out of a paper bag.”

Finally, North missed his parents, Sam and Peggy, who had only recently converted to Christianity along with their son. Although Rushdoony convinced North to stick through two semesters, North testily abandoned the seminary in 1964 and eventually settled as a graduate student in economics at the University of California, Riverside.

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19 Gary North to R. J. and Dorothy Rushdoony, October 15, 1963, RJR Library.
22 Gary North to R. J. Rushdoony, April 18, 1964, RJR Library.
24 Ibid.
After North dropped out of Westminster to seek a secular graduate degree in southern California, he became a frequent shopper at the Betsy Ross Book Shop located in Westwood Village, a shopping center in L.A.’s Westwood district. North was impressed with the bookstore. In a letter to Rushdoony he wrote, “The Betsy Ross shop has a good selection of books. The little lady who does the buying is apparently well informed, or at least she has some good people advising her. Much Rushdoony, little Possony.”

On one such visit in 1964 North suggested to an employee at the store, Grayce Flanagan, that she might want to contact Rushdoony and passed along his information. As a result of North’s suggestion, Rushdoony agreed to travel to southern California and talk to Women for America, Inc. the organization that owned the Betsy Ross.

Using Education (and Housewives) as a Weapon

When Rushdoony travelled to southern California to address the women of the Betsy Ross Book Shop, he found himself speaking to a group significantly different from the intellectuals and activists he had worked with at Spiritual Mobilization, the Foundation for Economic Education, and the Center for American Studies. The emergence of groups like Women for America, Inc. pointed to a complex phase transition taking place on the American right. The right was moving farther and farther away from its rarified origins in the exclusive moneyed circles of white, anti-New Deal businessmen

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25 Gary North to R. J. Rushdoony, July 23, 1964, RJR Library. Stefan Thomas Possony was a mid-century conservative intellectual, economist, and military strategist who worked at the Hoover Institution. He is most famous for conceptualizing of the Strategic Defense Initiative, or so-called “Stars Wars” program developed in the 1980s. It’s not clear which books North’s letter refers to, but Possony wrote extensively on U.S./Russian interaction and the threat of Communist propaganda. If North’s observation was honest and accurate, then it might suggest that more people were reading Rushdoony (at least in the L.A. and Orange County area) and requesting his books than one might assume.
and male college-educated intellectuals and transitioning into a self-consciously popular movement in which women—especially housewives and young professionals—were playing an important, if not dominating role. While much of California was awash in the welter of this new form of grassroots conservatism, Los Angeles and near-by Orange County formed an especially volatile milieu of book clubs, stores, and civic groups dedicated to kick-starting a new, self-consciously “conservative” movement. Many of these “kitchen table activists,” as historian Lisa McGirr has called them, were women who had the time and expertise required for creating a loose network of organizations and dedicated activists who concerned themselves with the influence of foreign Communism in the American heartland.

As historian Michelle Nickerson points out, conservative study groups organized by housewives began to form in southern California in the 1950s. Initially during the 1950s these groups were casual meetings organized as informal “study groups” designed to turn members into “experts” on subjects ranging from textbooks to communism. These clubs spread rapidly throughout the 1950s with 123 sprouting up in southern California by the middle of the decade. They had a “distinctly feminine style of political organizing,” focused on “luncheons and coffees, getting-out-the vote drives, and

26 This point is highly debatable. Much recent scholarship has focused on either reifying or deconstructing the duality between the elite, intellectual origins of American conservatism during the 1930s, forties, and fifties and its transition into a populist, grassroots movement in the 1950s and sixties. It is a distinction worth making for historiographic and heuristic purposes, but it is nearly impossible to maintain it when one begins to track the ways in which money, intellectual ideas, and “kitchen table activists” formed an autopoietic circularity that makes disentangling the parts from the whole nearly impossible.


29 Ibid., 58.
monthly newsletters.”

“Over the 1950s,” Nickerson reports, “right-wing activist women increasingly adopted the study group model as a way to foster a more militant conservatism that went beyond Eisenhower’s ‘Modern Republicanism.’” The attention these groups paid to adult education both resonated with and helped create a demand for the John Birch Society, which as we saw in the previous chapter was similarly focused on small local chapters involved in studying anti-communist material. “By the 1960s,” Nickerson notes, “women had long been mixing domesticity and politics, mainly through political clubs,” but, she continues, “housewife activism came even further out into the open in the early 1960s. Around that time, women began opening patriotic bookstores and libraries in the greater Los Angeles area.”

In 1961, the non-profit organization Women for America, Inc. joined this trend and opened the Betsy Ross Book Shop to distribute right-wing literature in the Los

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30 Ibid., 59.
31 Ibid., 58.
32 In fact, as the historian Jonathan Schoenwald has argued, the JBS was the crucible for forming the sensibilities and expertise of conservative citizen-activist-housewives:

Although most researchers agree that the majority of JBS members were men, women played critical roles in chapters leaders and members. Since many of these women were homemakers, they felt they could devote their time to the fight to roll back communism and liberalism. Knowing that women had not only the time, but also the energy and acumen to take on such responsibilities, coordinators often targeted them specifically. Consequently, women’s confidence grew as their rosters filled, and their projects gained momentum. For these women, the society acted as a liberating agent, clarifying their political priorities, illustrating their potential as contributors to a cause, and helping women to enter the realm of political organizing in the early 1960s (Jonathan M. Schoenwald, “We Are an Action Group: The John Birch Society and the Conservative Movement in the 1960s,” in The Conservative Sixties, 28).

Rushdoony would profit from the associations of many of Women for America’s association with the JBS because of experiences in organization and activism it provided for many of his eventual followers in southern California.

33 Nickerson, “Moral Mothers and Goldwater Girls,” 59.
34 Ibid., 60.
Angeles area. Women for America, according to Nickerson, “billed itself as ‘an organization dedicated to the defeat of totalitarianism using education as a weapon.’ In addition to running the book store, they also raised money for ‘patriotic’ libraries and sponsored ‘Americanism’ quizzes for college students in Los Angeles.”

As an indication of store’s solid place within the mainstream of “fusionist” conservatism, William F. Buckley, Jr., spoke at the shop’s grand opening, and one of its employees told a reporter that the store had no intention of “getting into the extreme right orbit.”

After Rushdoony’s presentation to Women for America, a group of women associated with the organization offered Rushdoony a deal: they would pay him a small but reasonable fee to move to the Los Angeles area and run weekly Bible studies for the women associated with the shop and anyone else who might be interested. The money would provide just enough support that Rushdoony would not have to seek outside employment to cover his family’s expenses and he would therefore be free to research, write, and lecture full-time. Rushdoony recognized the potential in this agreement and accepted it. In order to maximize the arrangement, Rushdoony immediately sought tax-exempt status for his new “educational foundation,” Chalcedon, Inc. As he awaited IRS approval, he channeled all of the money for Chalcedon through Walter Knott’s

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37 Dee Dickson, “They’ll Fight the Reds Through Books,” *Los Angeles Herald & Express* July 20, 1961, quoted in ibid.
Americanism Education, Inc. an organization with ties to the Betsy Ross Book Shop and Women for America.\textsuperscript{38}

\textit{Fighting for Freedom in America’s Living Rooms}

Rushdoony’s agreement with Women of America is an indication of just how much the mid-century conservatism had changed since he began his ministry on an isolated reservation in Nevada. The mid-century focus on the systematic creation of conservative ideas developed in response to the ideas promulgated by the Liberal establishment was coming to a head in the form of organizations like Women for America and the Betsy Ross Book Shop. When Rushdoony stepped into this milieu, he brought his unique presuppositional message—that is, his instance that conservatism needed a clearly formulated and rigorous \textit{Christian} epistemology—and it appears to have immediately resonated with Women for America. Rushdoony’s talk appears to have convinced\textsuperscript{39} those in attendance that his ideas could form the foundation for a movement that would change the course of American history. At once elitist and populist, intellectually sophisticated and readily comprehensible by any literate Protestant, Rushdoony preached a message that resonated with the ideas dominating popular conservatism in southern California. Rushdoony had been pitching this message for nearly fifteen years to intellectuals and movement organizers. Only a few of them got it and of that few, fewer still were willing to buy his message wholesale. Suddenly, however, in the context of the southern California popular conservative renaissance,


\textsuperscript{39} I have found no record of the talk itself, but only references to it in numerous books and letters.
Rushdoony found a small, dedicated minority of women and men who were not only willing to listen to him, but were also willing to fund him and put his ideas into practice.

This dedicated minority was inspired by an intense desire to save the United States from the threat of collectivist Liberalism, a fight that was ultimately bound up in an amorphously conceptualized but nonetheless real concern for the loss of individual freedom to an increasingly-centralized federal government. For the women and men associated with Women for America and the Betsy Ross Book Shop, this fight was not some abstract struggle of the forces of freedom against those of tyranny, but rather a visceral, embodied fight that was located not simply in the individual citizen-subject, but more concretely in the familialized citizen-subject who finds meaning and purpose in the domestic sphere first, and in the discrete, autonomous sphere of individuality second.

Material produced by the John Birch Society, for instance, drew attention to the domestic nature of this structuring familial sentiment when it warned its members, “The battle for saving our Republic could well be won or lost in our living rooms.”40 Domestic organization—that is, activism centered in and concentrated on the home—therefore was emerging as the engine of the conservative movement, especially in places like southern California. Consequently, conservative women and men organized conservatism not simply as a political movement but also as a familial movement that found its motivating impetus more and more in the home and the domestic sphere, and less and less in the broader expanses of international intrigue or even national political action. As I described in chapter 3, this activism focused on education—whether in the form of the re-education of adults or the proper education of children—designed to inoculate

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students against the virus of social collectivism. But as fears of an international communist conspiracy waned in the face of growing domestic turmoil in the 1960s and 1970s, conservatives turned more of their focus to the family as the microcosm of America’s domestic angst and as the potential check against social and moral disintegration.  

Unlike many on the right who initially looked to external threats to American freedom but later transitioned to concerns about internal enemies to freedom, Rushdoony had long maintained that the federal government should be the primary target of conservative concern. As I outlined in chapter 1, this concern emerged from his work on the Duck Valley Indian Reservation in Nevada. For instance, in an exchange with one of his charges on the reservation, a Paiute identified only as “Pete” told Rushdoony “that as [Pete] saw it the Indian was fit only for Reservation life and the white man [is] ‘ripe for the reservation,’ waiting for some superior man to drive him there. [Rushdoony] added that the white man, with his increasing predilection for a dictated economy, was rapidly bent on turning the world into a Reservation.”  

Pete agreed vigorously, adding, “Only a lazy son-of-a-bitch wants rights. A man wants freedom and justice, and he can take care of himself.” Of the “white man” Rushdoony and Pete concluded, “the German and the Japanese failed to put him there [on the Reservation]: the next people might succeed.” Rushdoony’s conversation with Pete was a microcosm of the central

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42 R. J. Rushdoony to Dave Stowe, January 2, 1946, RJR Library.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.
problem that would haunt Rushdoony over the next two decades as he addressed conservative groups like Women for America; namely, how might he cultivate the “freedom and justice” necessary for a man to thrive, especially when he believed that the American constitutional system no longer provided for either? His answer was at one moment shocking and at another perfectly in line with sentiments of activists seeking to save the Republic in living rooms throughout southern California: he became an outspoken advocate for the familialization of conservatism, a complex process that would cultivate freedom as a “formula for resistance” against a monolithic federal government via the cultivation of a familial structure that relocated the governance of the individual from the social and public spheres into a domestic one structured by the constraints of his interpretation of Biblical law.

Here I borrow the concept of familialization from the work of host of feminist-inspired scholars writing of changes made to the Anglo-American welfare state during the 1980s and nineties. In a sociological study of neo-liberal welfare reforms, Gøsta Esping-Andersen defines “familialization” in terms of American “pro-family” politics as

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45 This is my phrase for conceptualizing Rushdoony’s project. He did not use the phrase.

46 Nikolas S. Rose, in his genealogy of freedom as a form of government, argues that within the Western Liberal tradition, “we can distinguish freedom as a formula of resistance from freedom as a formula of power. Or rather, to be more circumspect, between freedom as a it is deployed in contestation and freedom as it is instantiated in government” (Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999], 65). This parsing of freedom as contestation and government is useful precisely because it implies that even when deployed as a form of contestation, freedom implies that the individual must be governed: “philosophical reflections on freedom, then as now, were always linked to the invention of certain ways of trying to govern persons in accordance with freedom. The value of individuality operated both as a critique of certain ways of exercising power, and as that which certain strategies of power sought to produce” (68). This reciprocal relationship between contestation and government captures the ways in which freedom both structures conservative conceptualizations of the state and their ambivalent relationship to its organizing force in their lives.
“a conservative effort to restore traditional family values.”

“A familialistic welfare regime,” he continues, “is therefore one that assigns a maximum of welfare obligations to the household.” Familialization is coterminous with the processes of privatization and decentralization associated with a broader Liberal (or neo-liberal) discourse of “freedom,” which moves social responsibility out of the public sphere and relocates it into “the private market or to the unpaid work of (usually) women in households, and to some extent to volunteers.”

Thus, as sociologist Kate Bezanson notes,

Both privatization and familialization shifted costs to the family/household. In the case of familialization, the assumption was that work should be forced back to where it ‘belonged,’ in the family/household unit. Both privatization and familialization relied and built upon an existing gender division of labour, taking place in the context where most households consisted of dual [wage]….

While these authors formulate the processes of familialization, privatization, and decentralization as a response to the well-established welfare state policies of the late twentieth century, there is no reason to see them as limited to this period, nor is there any reason to limit familialization as response to the welfare state. In fact, if we return to Foucault’s warning against limiting the concept of governance to its capture and instantiation in state forms, then we can see that mid-century conservative efforts to familialize, privatize, and decentralize conservatism prefigured and structured later efforts to dismantle the welfare state.

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48 Ibid.

49 Kate Bezanson, *Gender, the State, and Social Reproduction: Household Insecurity in Neo-Liberal Times* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 42.

50 Ibid.

51 In point of fact, there is actually a documentable relationship between the mid-century process to familialize conservatism that Rushdoony helped to initiate and efforts in the 1980s and nineties to re-
bring conservative activism into the living room were early manifestations of family-centered counter-conducts that sought to resist the authority of the state to govern the lives and bodies of conservative women and men. Mid-century activists were the first to familialisate conservatism by bringing it out of the academy and out of the political process and into the home. This process affected one of the most significant changes to governance in twentieth-century America, of which welfare reform is simply one minor component.

When seen within this framework, the arrangement between Rushdoony and Women for America emerges at the vanguard of a broader trend in conservative circles to relocate political action and social reform into the domestic sphere. For Rushdoony, political activism and social change could happen in all spheres of life, but the farther these changes were removed from the family, the less effective they became. As a result, he worked to convince Christians—especially theologically conservative, evangelical Protestants—that they needed to rethink three primary elements of their theologies of society, culture, and politics. First, the family must be viewed as an incubator for the progressive expansion of an aggressive, imperial form of Christianity, not an inward-looking social institution that attempts to withdraw from the world and avoid conflict.

familialisate the American federal welfare system. Marvin Olasky, editor of the Christian magazine the World, Provost of The King’s College in New York City, author of Compassionate Conservatism: What It Is, What It Does, and How It Can Transform America (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), and sometimes advisor to President George W. Bush, is one the primary theoreticians behind the drive to familialisate, privatize, and decentralize public welfare. His early writings on American history and the relationship between the state and charity were directly influenced by Rushdoony’s own writings. Further, while Olasky distanced himself from aspects of Rushdoony’s thought, he did maintain close relationships with some of Rushdoony’s intellectual heirs. For a summary of Olasky’s relationship to Rushdoony and other Reconstructionists, see Michelle Goldberg, Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 109-113. Further, on an institutional level, the processes of familialisation that I discuss in this chapter eventually concretized into the many organizations in the late 1970s and early eighties such as the Heritage Foundation and any number of smaller groups that sought to reformulate public policy in terms of familialized values developed during the 1960s.
with non-Christian spheres of society. Second, if the family is an instrument of progressive, expansionistic dominionism, then its historical purpose only makes sense in terms of a post-millennialist eschatological framework: the family is the primary instrument for securing God’s Kingdom on earth and pre-millennialist fantasies of a Rapture and a cataclysmic apocalypse are flights from reality. In this view, dispensationalism exhibits an anti-Christian desire to reject the vicarious authority and responsibility granted to men by God. Third, following each of these points, Rushdoony insisted that the primary status of the family in God’s post-millennial victory means that all other areas of life must be brought under the standard of God’s law or else they will become rivals to and threats against the family and God’s final victory. Therefore, in Rushdoony’s familialized project, the family becomes not only the medium for dominion but also expands as a function of dominion. The family, from this perspective, is both the condition of dominion and the product of it.

This circularity, however, was not sui generis. Rushdoony created his unique vision of familialization through the complex interweaving of his public activism, organization building, and epistemological reframing. In terms of the first two points (I’ll spend a considerable amount of time on the last point in the next two sections of this chapter), Rushdoony began speaking to women long before he started Chalcedon or officially engaged in the project of Christian Reconstruction, and he continued reaching out to female supporters long after their establishment. This point is critical because, unlike many of the more elitist and intellectual projects on the right, Rushdoony took an

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52 For a fuller discussion of the differences between pre- and post-millennial Christian eschatologies, see chapter 6 below.
open and inclusive approach to bringing women into the movement and he started early. This may have partly been do to his early cooperation with the John Birch Society which had so obviously reaped the benefits of the dedicated citizen-housewife, and also to his sincere belief that Christian women are partners in dominion who are men’s vicegerents in the domestic sphere. Women therefore formed the backbone of the Reconstructionist movement. Through their activism in the home and their critical role in educating children via the pedagogical strategies enumerated by Rushdoony, women became the mothers of Christian Reconstruction; the organizing and structuring domestic agents who make the Christian family possible.

The result of his willingness to target conservative women and make them agents in the project of Christian Reconstruction means that many of his early audiences were not only businessmen and male college students, but also conservative women’s groups and home bible study meetings organized by women in the living rooms of his supporters. Between 1964 and 1970, Rushdoony spoke at least 115 times to various

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This number and those that follow are based on entries in Rushdoony’s ledger of his speaking engagements. Rushdoony was normally a meticulous note taker and it appears that he tried to enter all of his lectures into a single ledger or to record them in his personal journals. My numbers, however, are approximate because Rushdoony often entered engagements out of chronological order, entered large blocks of lectures to signal organization—such as a Christian college—as a single entry, or he entered ambiguous entries that no doubt served his purposes but that are less than perfect for an historian trying to trace his exact itinerary for a given year. Further, there are only a few entries for 1965 and none for 1966. This lost year may be a function of his move to the L.A. area and the establishment the Chalcedon Foundation because it appears to have been a transitional period during which Rushdoony was trying to balance his work as pastor and a public lecturer. Gary North notes that in roughly this period Rushdoony “preached Sunday mornings in Orange County for a small congregation of a tiny denomination, the Anglican Orthodox Church. He had to drive over two hundred miles each Sunday to meet his speaking responsibilities. In the late 1960’s, he abandoned this part-time ecclesiastical employment, so his mornings were open” (Tithing and the Church, 152). Even with these caveats in mind, his entries are numerous enough and clear enough to get an excellent overview of when, where, to whom, and on which topics he spoke.
groups. Of these 115 times, Rushdoony spoke to women’s groups three times and to private home bible study groups sixteen times. These latter meetings were particularly important because they were organized as home bible studies for the benefit of a small collection of regular supporters. For example, he frequently lectured in Cupertino, California, at the home of “Dr. Simpson,” normally to parties of thirty or less. Similarly he notes speaking at homes that he simply identifies as belonging to “Muller,” “Norman Pulty,” “Wilson,” and “Baliff,” with most audiences numbering fewer than thirty. Although it is not clear from his records who attended, these home bible studies were likely made up of women and men who shared his theological position or who grew to agree with him over time as they regularly attended his talks. The subjects of the talks suggest that they were aimed at well-educated audiences interested in Christian perspectives on popular culture, homeschooling, anti-communism, hard money economics, JBS-style conspiracy theorizing, and revisionist history.

It is difficult to assess what sort of influence these home Bible study meetings had on their audiences, but their frequency and the stable (if small) attendance numbers indicate that most of the regular attendees formed the bedrock of Rushdoony’s economic

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54 It is extremely likely that Rushdoony spoke to women’s groups far more frequently than this number indicates. His ledgers indicate that he spoke at various breakfast, coffee, and morning clubs that met on weekday mornings, often in a specific person’s home or community center. Although these engagements may have been with business leaders and men’s groups, the context and lecture titles (normally on education or patriotic issues) suggest that his audiences were predominately female. The following are the lectures that Rushdoony clearly delivered specifically to women’s groups: the Pasadena Women’s Club on “The Strategy of Subversion” (June 20, 1964) to the Woodland Hills Republican Women on the topic of “The Moral Foundation of Money” (October 19, 1967); and to a Ranch Women’s Meeting on “Productivity and Work” (May 19, 1969). It is also worth noting that Rushdoony’s speaking engagements with women’s groups accelerated after 1970, so that in 1970 alone he spoke to four different women’s group and spoke to one of these groups at least three times on separate issues related to education, money, and Christian history.

55 There is no need to list all of the titles, but few will illustrate: “This Christian Republic” (September 13, 1964); “Psalm 2: Conspiracy and History” (October 25, 1964); “Revolutionary Art” (April 10, 1967); “The Soviet View of Money” (April 11, 1967).
and social support. It was to these early supporters that Rushdoony began sending mimeographed copies of a newsletter that would eventually be known as the *Chalcedon Report*. As I noted in the previous chapter, the *Chalcedon Report* was designed to keep his supporters up-to-date on his speaking, teaching, and writing endeavors that fell outside of the context of his Bible study sections and regular meetings with his supporters. Rushdoony’s son, Mark, remembers that the *Report* began as a simple, single-page letter: “To keep his supporters informed of his activities, my father began what was simply called the *Newsletter*. It included an essay and a report on his activities, so that the end of each Newsletter reported on the number of talks given, chapters written, and his travels.” Over time, Rushdoony’s family and supporters began “to refer to [the newsletter] as ‘the report.’ Because [Rushdoony] saw his supporters so frequently at meetings throughout southern California, the *Newsletter* soon became less of a report on activities than a monthly essay.”

M. Rushdoony’s recollections are significant because they point to the familial and collective effort behind the creation of both the *Report* and of Chalcedon’s activities more generally. First, Rushdoony relied heavily on his own family’s labor for the production of the *Report*. According to M. Rushdoony, the *Report* was largely a family effort comprised of himself and other family members, including his wife Darlene and his step-mother Dorothy. The younger Rushdoony makes it clear that Chalcedon was a shoestring venture that operated out of the Rushdoony’s living room and kitchen.

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Second, the Chalcedon Foundation needed a regular influx of volunteer labor to produce the monthly newsletter and stuff the requisite envelopes. As M. Rushdoony indicates, this obviously included the Rushdoony family, but also required the help of the many others, especially the female supporters of Chalcedon.

This combined familial and collective production of Chalcedon is clearly indicated in Rushdoony’s personal journals, which are full of notations indicating the monthly editing, printing, and mailing of the *Chalcedon Report*. This process normally took several days and was a team effort between the Rushdoony family and, at least initially, women associated with Women for America and employees of the Betsy Ross Book Shop. 59 So, for example, on February 24, 1970, Rushdoony wrote *Report* no. 55. Since Rushdoony wrote in longhand from an old-fashioned inkwell, the responsibility fell to his wife Dorothy to proofread and type the monthly letter. 60 Once typed, on March 2, Dorothy and Rushdoony went to the Flanagan’s to run off the mimeographs. Finally, on March 4, Dorothy took the copies to Peggy North’s and the two stuffed envelopes and completed the monthly cycle. This is only one instance of a monthly process that did not significantly change until Chalcedon began using a mailing service in the mid 1980s. 61

Until the process was mechanized and professionalized for the purpose of efficiency, it is clear that Rushdoony relied on his family and network of supporters such as Peggy North, Grayce Flanagan, and others to provide material and logistical help to keep the

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59 As I indicated earlier in this chapter, Rushdoony came to southern California after he was contacted by Grayce Flanagan, an employee at the Betsy Ross Book Shop and member of Women for America. The Flanagan family became important early backers of Rushdoony and Chalcedon.


61 Rushdoony, “My Recollection of Chalcedon’s First Forty Years,” 30.
Chalcedon Foundation running. As M. Rushdoony’s recollections suggest, this process contributed to the cultivation of a sense of shared purposes between the Rushdoony family and its supporters. Further, it also suggests that Chalcedon was developing into something of an extended family organized around the nucleus of the Rushdoonies and extending out through a extended network of supporters, many of whom where themselves tightly bound families seeking to cultivate a uniquely Christ-centered vision of civic and private life.

“God shall triumph mightily”

This form of familialized Christian conservatism was aimed at the future, not the past. The purpose of the Chalcedon Foundation was neither to save America through political action, nor to call the country back to its historically Christian roots. The first goal is myopic and present-focused, while the latter is pointlessly nostalgic. On the fortieth anniversary of the foundation of Chalcedon, M. Rushdoony succinctly summarized the “future-oriented” purpose of Chalcedon:

Its purpose was not to convert non-believers, but to teach believers. Its purpose was always to train Christians to be faithful to the law-word of God. Chalcedon was self-consciously established to fill a large void in Christianity. The church was so busy focusing on the ‘fundamentals’ and the ‘simple gospel’ that it tended not to go beyond preaching the gospel and baptizing. Chalcedon was to be a ministry about faithful obedience, about the other half of the Great Commission: teaching men to observe all things Christ commanded.63

It was this focus on the future that led Rushdoony to some of his most profound and innovative ideas of the late 1960s. Specifically, in the 1960s he began to expound upon

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62 Ibid., 5.
63 Ibid.
the latent theme of the importance of Biblical, or Mosaic, law that ran throughout his writings, but that had, up to that point, remained largely undeveloped.

As Rushdoony worked to found Chalcedon in 1965, he also began to develop a systemic Protestant casuistry that grew out of his recognition of the positive limitations of the presuppositional apologetics of Cornelius Van Til. That is, up until this point he had seen Van Til’s system as purely negative: it demolished modern philosophy and its anthropocentric image of man, but it did not build anything to replace the humanistic system it destroyed. Gary North, in his typically vivid prose, makes this point better than I can:

Van Til was analogous to a demolitions expert. He placed explosive charges at the base of every modern edifice he could locate, and book by book, syllabus by syllabus, he detonated them. One by one, the buildings came down. But he left no blueprints for the reconstruction of society. He saw his job as narrowly negative: blowing up dangerous buildings with their weak (schizophrenic) foundations. This narrowly defined task was not good enough for Rushdoony. He recognized early that there has to be an alternative to the collapsed buildings. There have to be blueprints. But where are they to be found? Step by step in the 1960’s, he concluded that the source of the missing blueprints is Old Testament law. 64

This conclusion, as North notes, grew from Rushdoony’s interpretation of Van Til’s antithesis between autonomous and theonomous reasoning. In this binary opposition, intellectual autonomy—self-rule of the mind—emerges as sinful pretence, whereas theonomy—God’s rule of the mind—is the only source for legitimate knowledge.

Rushdoony had made references to the importance of Biblical law as the necessary foundation for theonomous reasoning in his earliest works in the 1950s, but it was not until he moved to Woodland Hills that he refined this focus and began offering an expansive rereading of modern American culture through the lens of Biblical law. His

64 North and DeMar, Christian Reconstruction, xi-xii.
first public lecture on the topic appears to have been in 1969 at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California, where he capped several days of lectures with a chapel discussion of “Biblical Law.” In the same year, he completed the first five chapters of what would eventually become the first volume of *The Institutes of Biblical Law*. By 1970, Biblical law (and related topics such as “Christian Reconstruction”) had become a frequent topic in his public lectures and Bible study meetings. As 1970 closed, he recorded that he had completed a staggering fifty-four chapters of the *Institutes*, the vast bulk of the nearly 800-page tome. The mission of Chalcedon and his calling by Women for America was coming into focus as Rushdoony developed a unique theology that identified Biblical law as the primary structuring force in human life.

It was in the late 1960s, then, that Rushdoony began openly arguing that Biblical law was the only valid foundation for a viable American conservatism. In 1966, in a small pamphlet entitled *Preparation for the Future*, Rushdoony reflected on the coming collapse the American economic system and urged his readers to buy silver and gold, carefully selected parcels of land capable of supporting crops and livestock, and other goods with inherent value such as guns, alcohol, and tobacco. The pamphlet was clearly

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65 RJR Ledgers, January 30, 1969, RJR Library.

66 This suggests that Rushdoony wrote the body of the *Institutes* in less than three years. I find it incredible that anyone could read the *Institutes* in such a timeframe, let alone write it. Rushdoony’s literary output was nothing short of awe-inspiring. Aside from these fifty-four chapters on Biblical law, in 1970 Rushdoony also penned two monthly columns (the *Report* and an article for a monthly magazine aimed at rural Californians, *The California Farmer*) and authored multiple book reviews, chapters, and articles for several other book projects and magazines. He also authored 2,435 individual pieces of mail and lectured and preached a combined 213 times. In the midst of this endless, graphomanic output Rushdoony also managed to read 226 books in full. This information is available in his year-end summary for 1970 in his journals, RJR Library.

aimed at a more or less secular audience, and it closes with a vicious and vivid
description of the coming collapse: “Eight major dams provide most of America’s
electricity: these will be targets of action. Gasoline will be poured into the sewer systems
and ignited to burn out city’s communication lines. Meanwhile, it is expected that most
American’s will be ‘cream puffs’, mere victims who will ‘sit and wait for [the] television
to come on’.” For Rushdoony this nightmare urban scene of collapse was the
inevitable outcome of a social system governed by lawless men—men who opted to
follow their own wills rather than the law of God. While he does not use the phrase
“Biblical law” in his conclusion, it is clear that he wants to refocus his audience’s
attention away from “increasing racial and leftist revolutionary violence” and to the true
source of such nihilistic lawlessness: antinomianism. “Basic then to preparation for the
future,” he wrote,

is to believe it is absolutely in God’s hands, not in the hands of the enemy, and
that God shall triumph mightily. We shall share in that victory. We must prepare,
therefore, not for survival but for victory. We must begin now to build the
institutions for Christian liberty, to establish new and true churches, to teach children in the fundamentals of Scripture, and to instruct them in Christian
American Constitutionalism. We must begin to believe in and understand the
Scriptures.

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68 The pamphlet was originally distributed through Leonard Read’s organization, The
Pamphleteers, which specialized in publishing libertarian-themed literature, which it cheaply distributed to
a wide array of conservative audiences throughout southern California.

69 Rushdoony, Preparation for the Future, 23.

70 The August 1965 Watts Riots obviously helped motivate Rushdoony to write Preparation for
the Future, although he does not directly reference the uprising in the text. Rushdoony moved his family to
Woodland Hills about a week after the riots. It is impossible to conceive that the event did not weigh
heavily on his mind as he moved to a city poised so precariously on the edge of racial and political chaos.

71 Rushdoony, Preparation for the Future, 22.

72 Ibid., 23.
This plea to prepare for the future in terms of Scripture must be understood in terms of its complex relationship between a perceived antinomianism associated with social and racial unrest and a properly governed Christian order structured by Biblical law and founded on the family. In the next two sections of this chapter, I analyze this relationship between antinomianism and a Christian family order.

II. **Antinomianism: Modern Man**

The nihilistic self-destruction Rushdoony foresaw in *Preparation for the Future* was grounded in his belief that human beings, especially modern men, are engaged in a fruitless but nonetheless very real and consequential war against the will and law of God. This perceived war grew from Rushdoony’s understanding of Van Til’s autonomy/theonomy division of epistemological presuppositions. As Rushdoony formulated the basic contours of his system of Biblical law and the project of Christian Reconstruction, he began to clearly develop a theological system that rejected any mind/body dualism as the ontological source of sin, and instead insisted on the intertwined relationship of epistemological sin and embodied sin. When wedded together—theonomy conjoined with the embodied reality of sin—Rushdoony recognized the necessity of a Godly mechanism capable of constraining a man’s body and mind. This meant that Van Til’s project was sufficient only on a theological and philosophical level; it remained insufficient in terms of politics, cultural, and society. Rushdoony took it upon himself to refine and expand Van Til’s narrow presuppositional project to develop a social and political theology designed to combat humanity’s sinful desire to “be as gods.” In this section, I will focus on antinomianism, or the sin of autonomous men, and will then turn to theonomy in the final section of the chapter. My discussion of
antinomian autonomy begins with a discussion of sex and homosexuality. While this may seem to be a tangent from my discussion of familialization and the Biblically structured theonomy that opened the chapter, it isn’t. I will outline how Rushdoony’s construction of homosexuality provides a normative baseline from which his legalistic Christian conception of the family and Christian Reconstruction emerge.

*The Epistemology of Sadean Man*

Rushdoony saw all sex that took place outside of the institution of marriage as a manifestation of mankind’s desire to deny the ultimate sovereignty of God. This led him conceptualize of all forms of non-heterosexual, non-monogamous sex as a corrupt expression of dominion that focused on power and was ultimately a product of autonomous—as opposed to theonomous—epistemological presuppositions. As a result, most of Rushdoony’s writings on popular sexual culture systematically elevate any form of sex outside of the marriage bed into a form of warfare. Whether it be pornography or homosexuality, bestiality or rape, incest or sadomasochism, Rushdoony presented it all to...

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73 Oddly enough, Rushdoony was highly influenced by his wide reading in a body of literature that developed in Western Europe and the United States during the nineteenth and twentieth century on the subject of *magia sexualis*, or sex magic. For example, his library contained numerous books on magic and notable works by such figures as Aleister Crowley. Further, at the time of his death, Rushdoony was writing a manuscript on magic that contained numerous references to the relationship between sexual transgression and magic. This focus on the magical power of sex is significant because it points to the historically situated nature of Rushdoony’s cultural criticism. In his study of sex magic, Hugh Urban notes, “it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century… that we see the birth of a detailed, sophisticated, and well-documented system of sexual magic. That is, for the first time we see not just the use of erotic symbolism to describe the nature of spiritual union, but more specifically, the use of physical intercourse and genital orgasm as a source of magical power believed to have real effects in the material world” (emphasis in the original; Hugh B. Urban, *Magia Sexualis: Sex, Magic, and Liberation in Modern Western Esotericism* [Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006], 2). Further Urban suggests that this material was directly related to the explosion of scientific study of human sexuality during the same period (1-20). This suggests, as I develop below, that Rushdoony’s own interest in the demonic, magical power of sex was itself conditioned by an understanding of sexual efficacy that is actually quite modern and does not necessarily have the timeless, universal historical antecedents that Rushdoony suggests. Consequently, it points to the historically contingent nature of Rushdoony’s thought especially as it relates to sex and homosexuality.
his readers in the most vivid detail possible with the intent of establishing sexual sin as neither a regression in man’s nature to some primitive state nor the product of some normative natural standard over which men have no control. Instead, for Rushdoony sexual deviance is best understood as co-terminal with an humanistic effort to murder, erase, or otherwise overthrow the sovereign Christian deity.

In Rushdoony’s reading of history, no single figure did more to combine an epistemological rebellion against God with sexual practice than the Marquis de Sade. “The dominating motive,” Rushdoony declared, “of Sade’s life was his war against God. Because the Bible told him that man is made in God’s image, Sade had to do everything to defame and deface that image in his intense hatred of God. … The action in Sade’s writings is always anti-God and, then, anti-man.”

In a series of studies, Rushdoony represents Sade’s writings as literary representations of the very limits of God, life, and humanity. Further, Sade becomes Rushdoony’s archetype for a man so in rebellion against God that he becomes a microcosm of Hell unleashed upon the earth. Sadean man, is an aggressive, hyper-masculine, hateful creature that revels in causing pain and indulging in any and all actions that will deform the image of God inside of him and all of those around him.

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Here, I believe it would profitable to compare Rushdoony’s reading of Sade alongside that of his contemporary, Michel Foucault. Interestingly, and not coincidentally, both men turned to Sade in order to understand the complex relationship between language, epistemology, the “death of God,” and the male body. In the case of Foucault, Jeremy R. Carrette explains that the French philosopher focused on “the Sadeian male paradigm” in order to develop his interests in “language, the Nietzschean thematic of the death of God/death of man, and sexuality.” The Sadean male Foucault discovered was strikingly similar to the one Rushdoony believed he had uncovered: it “is a male sexual construction built on the themes of death, domination, sodomy, pain, and ‘theological’ anger… towards the restrictions imposed on the male body by traditional Christianity.” Although Rushdoony would have more or less agreed with this assessment of Sade, the two would have obviously parted company over Sade’s ethical implications: where Foucault perceived the Sadean male as an affirmation of new mode of thinking and the related bodily practices, Rushdoony interpreted the Sadean paradigm as a radical negation and as the height of nihilistic naivety and blasphemy.

Despite their obvious and fundamental disagreement on the ethical implications of Sade’s sexual practices, both men agreed that Sade represented a seismic upheaval in Western thought, a change that intertwined sexual deviance with the rejection of God’s

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76 Although ten years Foucault’s (1926-1984) senior, both authors produced their most important works during the 1960s, seventies, and early eighties. While it’s unlikely Foucault ever knew about Rushdoony, Rushdoony was well aware of Foucault’s work and cited Madness and Civilization in Rushdoony, Institutes of Biblical Law, 1:444.


78 Ibid., 75.

79 Ibid., 74.
centrality to the rules of morality. Here, it would not be a stretch to suggest that Rushdoony would have agreed with Foucault’s assessment that the Marquis’s life and writings point to the modern development of the concept of “sexuality” as, in Foucault’s words, “both the object and instrument” of “ultimate transgression.” Further, both men assumed that “sexuality” is embodied in the male form. That is, both Rushdoony and Foucault developed their understandings of the construction of sexual normativity and its transgression in terms of a violent, dominating male body that acts on the passive forms of others—whether male, female, or non-human.

To clarify this connection it is useful to turn to Foucault’s early writings on Sade because they provide a clear illustration of the relation between maleness and sexual transgression that Rushdoony’s believes is the logical end of Sade’s ideas. Foucault saw his own “A Preface to Transgression” as an exploration of Sadean literary themes in the writings of George Bataille. In the essay he argued that the modern concept of sexuality emerged from the intersection of the “death of God” and the centrality of language in modern epistemology. As Foucault summarized,

[sexuality] is tied to the death of God and to the ontological void which his death fixed at the limit of our thought…. Since Sade and the death of God, the universe of language has absorbed our sexuality, denatured it, placed it in a void where is establishes its sovereignty and where it incessantly sets up as the Law the limits it transgresses. … In [sexuality’s] dark domain, we now encounter the absence of God, our death, limits and their transgression. But perhaps it is also a source of light for those who have liberated their thought from all forms of dialectical language….

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81 Carrette, Foucault and Religion, 61-84.

82 Foucault, “A Preface to Transgression,” 70.
Thus, Foucault suggests that the death of God opens a new space for the modern concept of sexuality. Once sexuality is released from the constraints of the normative standards of God’s law, it becomes entangled in language and is at once conditioned by linguistic constraints and in turn conditions the way we speak. As he later developed this argument, this linguistic turn led to the an unending proliferation “of discourses concerning sex” and eventually developed into “an institutional incitement to speak about [sex], and to do so more and more; a determination on the part of the agencies of power to hear it spoken about, and to cause it to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail.”83 But this institutional drive to speak of sex and force it to speak found a limit in the form of the very bodily practices that “sexuality” had liberated from the God’s law.

Foucault suggests that Sadean transgression is a hyper-masculine, misogynistic combination of rape, torture, and the erasure of the both the victim and perpetrator. In pushing language to its limits by using it to represent such “impossible” acts, the transgressive performances of Sade highlights man’s impossible and ultimate “impotence,” both linguistically and physically.84 This impotence emerges on two levels. First, language always fails the transgressor so that ultimately the desire to subsume sex into discourse gives way to an indivisible remainder: a laugh, a scream, a fart, a shrug; a non-sensical, non-representational, non-dialectical language that marks the erasure or

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84 This discussion of the “impossible” and the “impotence” of men and language is drawn to Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*, 76-79.
absence of the “sovereign subject” of modernity.²⁵ Second, transgression pushes the body to its impossible and exhausted limits where it is left broken and limp, flaccid and lifeless in the face of intense pleasure and pain. In both cases, all that is left is the body. In the first instance the body is an un-representable riddle to language. In the second, it is an object to be dominated and used, tortured and abused. Thus Foucault suggests that the concept of sexuality opens up a gap between language and body.

Foucault focuses on this gap or rupture between language and body, according to Carrette, in order to problematize the ontological status of language in modern thought. In the wake of philosophical modernism, language lost its relationship to God and, consequently, its capability to unproblematically refer to things and to signify the ordered cosmos. But with God dead, it is no longer God that grants authority to words and gives meaning, but it is language itself. Wrote Foucault: “our interpretation… proceeds from men, from God, from knowledge or fantasies towards the words that make them possible; and what it reveals is not the sovereignty of a primal discourse, but the fact that we are already, before the very last words, governed and paralyzed by language.”²⁶ Or, as Carrette clarifies, “In the Modern era it is words that make God, ‘men’ and knowledge possible.”²⁷ For Foucault, Sade marked a transitional figure between what Foucault

²⁵ Foucault, “A Preface to Transgression,” 69.
²⁷ Carrette, Foucault and Religion, 17.
dubbed the “Classical Age” and modernity\textsuperscript{88} (“between our prehistory and what is still contemporary”).\textsuperscript{89} Sade, Foucault explains,

holds sway precisely upon their frontier. After him, violence, life and death, desire, and sexuality will extend, below the level of representation, an immense expanse of shade which we are now attempting to recover, as far as we can, in our discourse, in our freedom, in our thought. But our thought is so brief, our freedom so enslaved, our discourse so repetitive, that we must face the fact that that expanse of shade below is really a bottomless sea.\textsuperscript{90}

Therefore, as a transitional figure, Sade’s ideas at once signal the birth of man as an object of knowledge by freeing humanity from the authority of God, but also his ideas function to demonstrate the ultimate impotency of this concept by simultaneously signaling the inevitable death of man since man’s ontological status rested on the flimsy foundation of language alone.

At base, even as he worked to undermine the notion of a universal, autonomous subject, Foucault succeeded, purposefully or not, in reifying a “certain culturally ‘undifferentiated’ male perspective”\textsuperscript{91} in his reworking of Sade. He succeeded in constructing sexual transgression as an aggressive drive associated with violence, domination, and death.\textsuperscript{92} Rushdoony’s work shares this same masculine fascination with domination, and like Foucault, he recognizes its ultimate impotence in relation to knowledge and language. In fact, it could be argued that both thinkers are actually after

\textsuperscript{88} For his part, Rushdoony called Sade “the first self-consciously modern man” (Rushdoony, To be as God, 4).

\textsuperscript{89} Foucault, The Order of Things, 304.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 211.

\textsuperscript{91} Carrette, Foucault and Religion, 65.

\textsuperscript{92} Not surprisingly, this has led many authors, especially those influenced by feminist theories to argue that Foucault’s death of man is “constructed at the expense of women” (ibid., 74). Further, as Carrette notes, Foucault displayed a tendency common to many in the twentieth-century French avant-garde to “tame” Sade and use him as a screen to project their own subversive projects (see, ibid., 65-74).
the same thing: the death of man. The man they both seek to murder is the Kantian subject; that is, the modern philosophical construction of man that is at once the “subject and object of ‘his’ own knowledge.” This philosophical construct, in Foucault’s words, has killed God and now “must answer for his own finitude; but since it is in the death of God that he speaks, and exists, his murderer itself is doomed to die; new gods, the same gods, are already swelling the future Ocean.” Rushdoony’s resurgent, reconstructing God is certainly one of those swelling this future Ocean.

It is in this sense that I locate Rushdoony and Foucault as mutually reinforcing thinkers whose critical assessments of modern philosophy resonate together, yet whose conclusions function to negate each other. They share in an analogous project, and therefore I find in Foucault’s “archaeology” a way of conceptualizing what Rushdoony is attempting to do with his project of Christian Reconstruction. Rushdoony’s project is a systematic attempt to exact judgment and divine penalty upon modern philosophy, the murderer of God. In fact, I would argue that a plausible reading of Rushdoony’s entire

93 Rushdoony was aware of the theme of the “death of man” in Foucault and summarized the idea thusly, “Not surprisingly, Foucault… has proclaimed the death of man…. Foucault is logical: without the structure of God’s truth, man cannot live, and the only conclusion which remains for man is suicide” (Rushdoony, Institutes of Biblical Law, 1:444). Here, Rushdoony obviously confuses Foucault’s criticism of philosophical anthropology with the created, natural being of human bodies. This confusion should not distract from the fact that Rushdoony, through his reading of Van Til, blamed Kant for the philosophical revolution that made philosophy anthropocentric (Rousas John Rushdoony, By What Standard? An Analysis of the Philosophy of Cornelius Van Til [Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1959], 46-51). Therefore, even though Rushdoony misread Foucault’s mystical prose, the two men approached a similar conclusion via strikingly different presuppositions and philosophical rhetoric.

94 Carrette, Foucault and Religion, 80. As Alan D. Schrift notes, the “man” Foucault seeks to end should be understood as a “technical term”: “‘Man’ is thus the being who serves to center the increasingly disorganized representations of the classical épistemè and who, as such, comes to be the privileged object of philosophical anthropology. … Only by understanding Foucault’s talk of ‘man’ as designating a foundational concept of Kantian anthropology can we make sense of his saying that ‘man is a recent invention, figure not yet two centuries old’” (Alan D. Schrift, “Foucault and Derrida on Nietzsche and the End[s] of ‘Man’,” in Michel Foucault: Critical Assessments, ed. Barry Smart, vol. 2 [London: Routledge, 1994], 281).

95 Foucault, The Order of Things, 385.
philosophical, theological, and political project would be to interpret it as one of the few sustained popular projects written from a theologically conservative Protestant perspective that seeks to completely undo modern philosophy by using God’s law to discipline and restructure the entire edifice of modern philosophy.

The similarities cannot be pushed too far, however. Unlike Foucault, Rushdoony does not see this ultimate impotence of modern philosophy as a possible ground for cultivating a new subjective or post-subjective identity. Instead, Rushdoony works forward from Sade to recast domination in terms of his Biblical construct of dominion. This point is critical: it is tempting to interpret Rushdoony’s social theory as little more than a reactionary attempt to return to some imagined pre-Enlightenment, medieval worldview. This position becomes largely untenable, however, when one considers how his entire system is mobilized by a critical assessment of a network of modern and high-modern philosophical, political, and social developments. The challenge is to see Rushdoony’s attempts to destroy Sadean man as a point of departure that is activated and made possible by certain historical and cultural contingencies.

Rushdoony’s Christian social theory is neither self-contained nor sui generis. It is conditioned by a network of historical factors that make some aspects of Christianity—specifically Calvinism—relevant while others fall into the background, as they are irrelevant to undermining modern “man” and re-construction the new subject position of

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96 There are other notable projects in this genre of Protestant apologetics. Most obviously the oeuvre of Francis Schaeffer falls squarely into this genre, and, not coincidentally, he studied under Van Til at Westminster Theological Seminary and was an associate of Rushdoony. Schaeffer’s books remain bestsellers and, undoubtedly, were more “popular” in terms of sales and style. The combined weight of Rushdoony and Schaeffer pushed many evangelical Protestants to take a greater interest in questions of epistemology and cultural production. Evidence (although not direct citations) of their ideas can be seen in such books as Tim F LaHaye, *Mind Siege: The Battle for Truth in the New Millennium* (Nashville, TN Word, 2000).
the *dominion man*. Rushdoony’s project is a progressive process of creation and recreation propelled through history towards an eschatological *telos*. It is not a return to a primitive Eden or to a medieval Geneva; it is a future oriented process of establishing the Kingdom of God on Earth. Through Biblical law, he attempts to shackle the possible—and probable—transgressive excesses of the male body. He insisted that by returning to the law, men can overcome the limits of both language and body and “reconstruct” dead—that is, unregenerated sinful man who is dead to God and to himself—into a new being: dominion man. This is the essence of Christian Reconstruction. It reconstructs a fallen man, a man who tries but fails to find meaning in language, the body, or in the violent domination of other men. The regenerated man is thus free from the anxiety of the impotent antinomian pervert.

*The Burning Out of Man: Embodying Antinomianism*

In 1984, Michel Foucault died of medical complications related to AIDS. While his untimely death escaped Rushdoony’s comment, it did not escape Roger Schultz, Chair of the History Department at Liberty University. Writing in Rushdoony’s long-running *Chalcedon Report*, Schultz noted that Foucault was a “notoriously debauched homosexual who loved San Francisco’s sadomasochist scene.”97 Schultz also indicates Foucault’s intellectual connection with Sade and directly connects both men’s sexual practices and their respective deaths—one of a disease possibly related to his sexual activity, the other in prison—directly to their philosophical presuppositions. He then takes the Rushdoonian step of extrapolating from their particular manifestations of

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epistemological perversity to argue that they embodied the “basic nature of the modern spirit.”98 This last point is important and needs to be explored as a logical extension of Rushdoony’s ideas about philosophy. In the previous section I traced how and why Rushdoony located sin in the intellectual presuppositions of modern epistemology. In this section I want to extend this discussion and attempt to locate the embodied, biopolitical implications of this epistemological sin. As with Foucault, Rushdoony believed that the failure of modern philosophy throws men back on their bodies. Since all the contrivances of philosophy are insufficient to give man meaning, man is ultimately stripped naked by modern philosophy and left bare and exposed before God and the world, and, in the most extreme cases, the bare body is so evacuated of the vestments of God that it burns with the fires of Hell.

1) Sin in the Mythical Body of Man

One of the most striking images in all of Rushdoony’s writings can be found in his first book, By What Standard. Early in the text, Rushdoony appropriates Hans Christian Anderson’s story, “The Emperor’s New Clothes,” to illustrate the embodied implications of epistemological sin. In Rushdoony’s retelling the emperor is swindled by “certain clever philosophers” who offer to make him a garment that will expose “to him the fools and knaves of his realm.”99 As the philosophers dress him in his invisible robes, the emperor realizes that “he obviously was a fool and knave,”100 but he proceeds

98 Ibid.


100 Rushdoony, By What Standard, 19.
nonetheless and struts into the streets displaying his “pot-bellied nakedness”\textsuperscript{101} to his subjects: “As he paraded down the street, he felt the sun on his bare back, and light breeze on his naked shanks, and he knew that he was fully exposed, whatever the sycophants said concerning his magnificent robes.”\textsuperscript{102} The zealous joy with which Rushdoony describes the emperor’s “bulgy and bloated nakedness”\textsuperscript{103} points to the importance of the story as both a spiritual metaphor and as an identification of emperor’s nakedness with the nakedness of humanity following its fall into sin. In the latter sense, the emperor’s nakedness is part and parcel of Eve and Adam’s recognition of their nakedness in the Garden, but unlike the shameful awareness of their great sin, the emperors of modern philosophy are so “hardened in their revolt” against God that they “parade openly, claiming to be dressed in the very garment of God, with royal garb.”\textsuperscript{104}

Aside from the corporeal nudity of modern philosophes, in the same work, Rushdoony uses another embodied debacle to illustrate how modern man’s philia for gnosis has become a perverted eros: “A certain bridegroom went joyfully to bed one night, confident that his seven years of labor were crowned with victory and that it was his beloved Rachel whom he embraced in the dark of the bridal chamber, but, ‘in the morning, behold, it was Leah.’”\textsuperscript{105} This, of course, references Jacob’s double-crossing by Laban. Laban tricked Jacob into marrying his daughters and raising a brood of nasty,

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 1.
vindictive children who rejected their father’s authority. As with the corpulent, bloated body of the emperor, Rushdoony here returns to the body to conceptualize epistemological sin. Here,

the analogy points further to the conscious and perverse embracing of Leah and the insistence that she is Rachel. Some contemporary thinkers self-consciously attempt to reason from non-Christian premises…. They embrace Leah and call her Rachel. They posit, for example the God of existentialism and insist that he is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

In short, for Rushdoony, modern philosophy is a bed trick, a crafty switch in which a thinker attempts to think in terms of God (or man or from some other foundational epistemological presupposition), but always, in the end, winds up with lying with Satan.

2) Sin in the Pervert’s Body

While these examples may seem tame metaphors that deploy familiar textual sources to illustrate a sermonic point, such a conclusion would be a misreading of Rushdoony’s purpose in using them. As we already saw in the previous section, Rushdoony turned to the literary work of the Marquis de Sade to locate the essence of modern philosophy. This turn to Sade marked a development in Rushdoony’s philosophy in which he turned away from mythical and fantastic manifestations of sin to illustrate his ideas. Instead, he continued to locate sin in the entwined mind/body, but he began to seek concrete, empirical examples of man’s rebellion against God’s created order. Once

107 Rushdoony, By What Standard, 179.
located, Rushdoony then worked to connect these sins to non-Christian philosophical standards and therefore to Satan.

For Rushdoony, nothing crystallized the embodied rebellion of individual men more obviously or makes their lack of self-governance more apparent than the sin of homosexuality. Rushdoony is perhaps most infamous for his suggestion that a “godly order” ¹⁰⁹ would execute male homosexuals ¹¹⁰ for their transgression against Christ’s law-word. Rushdoony never wavered from this judgment in his books and he publically reiterated the point during numerous media appearances in which interviewers attempted to force him to rethink his original position.

In the case of his books, Rushdoony specifically took up his critics in the introduction to the second volume of the *Institutes to Biblical Law*. There he noted that the first volume was “met with intense hostility at times.” In a defiant and unusual passage, Rushdoony explained the source of this hostility:

> the comments on homosexuality outraged many. No other aspect led to more intense (if covert) opposition, slander, and sheer venom. Dr. David A. Noebel has observed to me that the church has perhaps been the central area of infiltration by homosexuals. I find this readily believable in terms of my experience. The homosexual clergy are sometimes great champions of love in the pulpit and savage practitioners of hatred on the sly. ¹¹¹

This passage is unusual for two reasons. First, Rushdoony had a well-known policy of never responding to critics in writing because he believed it allowed his “enemy [to]

¹⁰⁹ “God’s penalty [for homosexuality] is death, and a godly order will enforce it. Not surprisingly, a culture deeply infected by homosexuality will remove the penalties against it” (Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, 1:425).

¹¹⁰ Lesbians cannot be executed for the crime of homosexuality because their crime is a manifestation of the apostasy of men who have abdicated their duty and “moral authority” to enforce God’s law in the family. In other words, women neither have the moral or spiritual agency necessary to be punished for sexual crimes. See, Ibid.

determine my agenda for me.” Second, his reliance on the *ad hominem* suggestion that homosexual clergymen were singularly responsible for the attacks on the *Institutes* is bizarre and demonstrably absurd because many heterosexual clergy also disagreed with him on this point.

Next, in terms of wider media exposure of his defense of the death penalty for homosexuals, Bill Moyers famously asked Rushdoony if he would impose the death penalty for homosexuality and other offenses. Rushdoony evasively responded, “I wouldn’t…. I’m saying this is what God requires. I’m not saying that everything in the Bible I like. Some of it rubs me the wrong way. But I’m simply saying this is what God requires. This is what God says is justice; therefore, I don’t feel I have a choice.”

Several years later, in a less measured and much more heated response to a similar question, Rushdoony retorted, “Homosexuals are losers. … They are losers and suicidal. It’s an academic question and I have no personal interest in the subject—it’s boring and not relevant to the realities of the world.” The critical response to his position on homosexuality clearly disturbed Rushdoony and on these occasions it led him to abandon his normally polite public persona. Of all the controversial things Rushdoony drew criticism for and to which he never publicly responded, it is befuddling that his critics on his position on homosexuality so disturbed him.

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While Rushdoony’s unusually personal responses to his many critics suggests that they are right to home in on Rushdoony’s judgment on homosexuals as a troubling microcosm of the potential human cost of a Reconstructed society, I would suggest that they do so for the wrong reasons. Given Rushdoony’s love of ancient legal standards, it’s neither particularly interesting nor significant that Rushdoony highlights Deuteronomic mandates to kill homosexuals; it is, however, interesting to try to understand why Rushdoony adopts this position because it sets him at odds with the vast majority of conservative Protestants, even those who might otherwise be more or less sympathetic to his other interpretations of Biblical law. First, unlike many of his contemporaries who pay lip service to tolerance and acceptance when dealing with certain forms of sin (i.e., “love the sinner, hate the sin”), Rushdoony is explicit that Biblical law not only implies bigotry and prejudice, but also requires it in many instances. Second, unlike many of his contemporaries on the Christian right, Rushdoony carefully elaborated a—albeit idiosyncratic and theologically problematic—reasoning for his position on homosexual activity because he argued that it is the final and most depraved embodiment of a pagan and non-Christian desire to invert, pervert, and generally deform a Godly ordained cosmos.

Like many socially conservative Christians, Rushdoony believed that masculinity was in decline and under assault in American culture. Michael Lienesch summarizes this

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115 Homosexuality was clearly one of these instances for Rushdoony. He is clear that, in his reading, Biblical law presupposes that a homosexual is not only a sinner, but is also “an enemy of the law” (emphasis in the original; Rushdoony, Institutes of Biblical Law, 1:90). Most socially conservative Protestants would agree with the former categorization, but few would use the latter. It implies that the law cannot regenerate homosexuals because they are always-already outside of the law and are therefore not human on some fundamental level (I develop this point at length below). Also, Rushdoony is clear that the law has declared open warfare on homosexuals, a fact that implies that they must be destroyed (92).
shared sentiment in a study of literature produced by a wide array of mostly Protestant
Christian conservatives writing in the late-twentieth century:

Again and again the books denounce the decline of Christian manhood. Symbolizing this decline, and symptomatic of their fears about the fragility of heterosexual masculinity, is homosexuality. The latter, they contend, is unbiblical and unnatural. It is also, like the biblical Sodom, emblematic of a civilization’s decline. Most troubling of all is that homosexuality has become an ‘epidemic,’ prevalent enough to be found even within the church itself.116

While this summary generally resonates with Rushdoony’s ideas, he rapidly parted company from many of his fellow socially conservative Protestants in that he neither shared the sentiment of “many of these writers” who claim to have “nothing against homosexuals as individuals” and are “prepared to love them and pray for their salvation,”117 nor did he adopt the notion that homosexuality is a “developmental disorder” or “lifestyle” that can be corrected with therapy and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.118 As Tanya Erzen notes in her study of the Christian ex-gay movement in the U.S., many leaders in the Christian Right—figures such as James Dobson of Focus on the Family, Beverly and Tim LaHaye, and Jerry Falwell—came to adopt a “change is possible” perspective that essentially “privatized” homosexuality.119

117 Ibid., 84-85.
119 Ibid., 190 and 202. Erzen points out that this position developed in the 1990s and slowly emerged of other contesting constructions of homosexuals by those on the Christian Right. Most notably, she points out that Billy James Hargis popularized the “homosexuality as communism” theme during the 1960s and eventually gave way to “a backlash against feminism and gay liberation, and the idea of ‘special rights’ and the ‘promotion of homosexuality’” in the 1970s and eighties (Ibid., 190). Martin Durham, The Christian Right: The Far Right and the Boundaries of American Conservatism (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 43-62, offers a similar periodization of the development of this discourse. Rushdoony never adopted any of these strategies for conceptualizing homosexuality, but he was sympathetic to all of them except for the most recent “hope for healing” moment that has developed.
That is, many socially and culturally conservative Protestants came to view homosexuality as a matter of personal choice and individuated religious conviction and not a complex expression of genetics or environmental factors. Further, this process of privatizing homosexuality as an individual moral and religious choice worked to depoliticize homosexuality by undoing and resisting the tendency within feminist and queer social theory to problematize the social construction of gender and sexuality by insisting that the “personal is political.” This broad push to depoliticize homosexuality—and sexuality more generally—never appealed to Rushdoony and, in fact, he insisted that homosexuality was not only a matter of personal sin, but was a singular expression of mankind’s declaration of open warfare on God and His law-word. For Rushdoony, homosexual men are so inhuman that they are little more than the walking dead, creatures that are so debased and morally corrupt that they are literally embodiments of Hell on earth.

For Rushdoony, sexual acts, especially those that subvert, pervert, or invert those ordained by the law of God, are incredibly powerful and dangerous. Extrapolating from the example of ancient fertility cults, Rushdoony argues that for sinful men, sexual chaos is powerful and endlessly productive: “In the fertility cult and its ritual festivals, regeneration is found in chaos. ... The gods themselves are a product of chaos, and all things rise and fall, often in unceasing cycles, but chaos remains. Chaos is ever fertile, ever potent, and when order and maturity become too pronounced in a culture, a return to

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120 Erzen, *Straight to Jesus*, 199.
121 Ibid., 140 and 162.
revitalizing chaos is necessary.” Rushdoony developed the concept of the “cosmic f—” from his study of pornographic magazines and avant-garde writers from the 1960s. Although Rushdoony does not directly cite him, Rushdoony’s “cosmic f—” is similar to the concept of erotism developed by Georges Bataille in *Erotism: Death & Sensuality*. (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986). Like Bataille, Rushdoony suggests that sex provides man with the ability to temporarily tap into some excess of power that at once subsumes and dissolves a person’s discontinuous subjectivity and imprisonment in the trap of language. Unlike Bataille, Rushdoony sees this subjective dissolution in erotism not as ephemeral transcendence, but rather as suicidal auto-abnegation. The structural similarities between Bataille and Rushdoony’s ideas (and therefore Rushdoony and Foucault’s) may be attributable to the fact that Rushdoony’s reading of the works of Sade leaned heavily on English translations of French criticism of Sade’s work that would have themselves been heirs of Bataille’s critical reappraisal of Sade.

It should be noted that Rushdoony reserved his most heated rhetoric for homosexuals, but he believed that heterosexuals were equally capable of this fallen, relentless desire for sadistic sex. He was especially critical of national figures in his private journals. For instance in one particularly long entry (most entries run a sentence or less), Rushdoony noted,

Dr. Sandie reported that a friend, formerly [a] security guard for President John F. Kennedy, told him of Kennedy's voracious desire for women on trips away from Washington, demanding a new woman almost nightly. Others in proximity to the Kennedys have given similar reports. The same is reported of a sheriff's officer re. Martin Luther King in L.A. The appetite described in both is not so much sexual as sadistic, a desire to abase, a desire to ‘fuck the whole damn country.’ This is the state of the republic! (R. J. Rushdoony journal entry for August 23, 1970, RJR Library).

It’s this “voracious,” “sadistic” desire that Rushdoony believes is embodied in the “cosmic f—.”

God.”

There can be no sin beyond male-on-male buggery because, “Homosexuality,” he concludes, “is thus the culminating sexual practice of a culminating apostasy and hostility towards God.”

Citing St. Paul, Rushdoony asserts that homosexuality “is the burning out of man” because “homosexuality is a violation of the image of God in man.”

This erasure of God from the being of man leads Rushdoony to note that the Bible uses the noun “dog” to denote the male homosexual. In comparison, the Bible at least includes prostitutes in “mankind” by labeling them “strange women,” while “the homosexual, as a dog… is regarded as outside the race of man.” No longer a human in the proper sense, the homosexual has, like Milton’s Satan, “the hot Hell that in him always burns.”

This animal or Hell-creature has squandered the life force granted by God in an exhaustive and exhausting antinomian project to remake heaven and earth through the transgressive, magical power of antinomian sex. Consequently

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126 Ibid., 1:423.
127 “And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet,” Romans 1:27 KJV; emphasis mine. Rushdoony argues, “The verb “burned” is *ekkiao*, “to burn out”” (Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, 1:423).
128 Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, 1:423; he reiterates this point in Rushdoony, *To be as God*, 75.
131 Ibid., 1:90.
133 Of course, men who engage in homosexual acts can incorrectly believe that their actions are not necessarily transgressions against God and his justice. In the case of dualist conceptualizations of human nature (i.e., those that posit a binary opposition between mind/body or spirit/body), men can commit sexual sins while “stealing” or “barrow” Christian moral foundations, much in the same way non-Christians manage to think rationally by stealing from Christian epistemological foundations: “the implicit dualism of pagan thought made possible a separation of the mind and body, so that the intellect could be isolated from the total life of man. Greek philosophers, like Socrates, could discourse on justice, virtue, and truth while involved in homosexuality. This schizophrenic position was possible because of the isolation of the
homosexuality is “a philosophical expression;” it is not simply an transgression against God’s law, but the final bodily manifestation of man’s original noetic desire to be as God. Thus, in stark contrast from other socially conservative Protestants who work to privatize and depoliticize homosexuality, Rushdoony insisted that homosexuality was fundamentally political because it represents the final resistance of God’s sovereignty. Consequently, death is not only just, but also essential for a crime that so utterly and radically rebels against the divine sovereignty of King Jesus.

Waging War on a Godly Order

In this dizzying and profoundly disturbing effort to dehumanize homosexuals and to provide the necessary theological foundation to legitimize their public execution, we have located the logical end and the constitutive boundaries of Rushdoony’s political and social project. Rushdoony’s declaration of war on the epistemological premises of modern man and their manifestations in the body of the homosexual is predicated on what he believes to be unregenerate man’s declaration of war on a Godly order, which is located in the Christian family. Just as Rushdoony might argue that modern

intellect from man’s material, historical, and moral life” (Rousas John Rushdoony, Salvation and Godly Rule [Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1983], 141). On a more basic level, Rushdoony also observed, “If mind and body are separate substances, then little boys (and big boys and men) can read dirty books without any consequences, because thought and act are only slightly related” (Rushdoony, The Politics of Pornography, 46). In other words, one may actively violate God’s law yet aspire to order and justice without actively seeking the kind of nihilistic anti-Christian behavior Rushdoony associates with active, self-conscience rebellion of such figures as Sade, Nietzsche, or Dostoyevsky.

134 Rushdoony, Institutes of Biblical Law, 1:427.

135 A Reconstructionist would not see this discursive process as “disturbing” because, as anti-humanists who reject the very nature of an anthropocentric world (i.e., “humanistic” world), they believe it is impossible to “dehumanize” homosexuals or any other group. God, as we saw above, labeled homosexuals “dogs;” a creature that is always-already an animal can hardly be dehumanized. For the secular humanist who places mankind’s autonomy over obedience to a specific and supposedly literal reconstruction of God’s law, Rushdoony seems to be the smartest, cruellest, and most the systematically demented of the anti-gay theorists on the Christian Right. The point here is that Rushdoony’s autonomy/theonomy bifurcation is so absolute that many Reconstructionists can hardly fathom why secularists and many Christians find Reconstructionist logic so dangerous.
philosophy—with its anthropocentric presuppositions—must logically culminate with an utter loss of meaning, sodomy, and finally mass murder, one might reasonably point out that Rushdoony’s system similarly culminates with an explicit call for the execution of an entire sexual class of men. But this execution must be understood within the context of Rushdoony’s desire to similarly execute the anthropocentric subject of modern philosophy. In this relationship, the death of the homosexual is synecdoche for the death of the modern subject, while the demolition of the modern subject is holonymy for the eradication of homosexuals. In this sense, Rushdoony’s interpretation of God’s law presupposes homosexuals and constructs them as the very limits of the law. This circular—or in Foucault’s sense, this “spiraling”—aspect of the law functions by 1) asserting that nature itself provides no normative force or mechanism capable of defining human beings; therefore, 2) the transgressive threat of an unreconstructed man—as embodied in the most radically antinomian form of the homosexual male—is the limit against which the law creates the regenerate man. I will deal with each of these points individually.

136 In fairness, Rushdoony and many others in the Christian Reconstruction movement are quick to point out that they believe the invisible hand of God’s grace and not the top-down imposition of authority will guide the process of the regeneration of humankind. In theory, men will, as the task of Reconstruction advances, submit to God’s law voluntarily, leaving a more limited body count than skeptics might like to suggest. Because of their sincere but nonetheless evasive evocation of the regenerative but invisible outworking of grace, it is impossible to assess if the violent potentialities embedded in Rushdoony’s theological logic might lead to mass executions, but there is certainly reason to be uneasy about his rhetorical and theological project.

137 I am here indebted to Foucault’s idea that a limit and its transgression do not have a binary or dichotomous relationship, but instead that the two form a mutually co-constitutive “spiral” (see, Foucault, “A Preface to Transgression.”). Rushdoony would obviously reject this conception God’s law and its limit because he understands the law as itself ontological, but, as the rules and expectations of critical and cultural theory rarely presuppose the reality of God’s law, I am bound by my own disciplinary limits.
1) Nature is not normative!

One of the most important aspects of Rushdoony’s understanding of both human nature and the natural world, emerges from his insistence that traditional appeals to “natural law” are neither Christian nor Biblical. “For the Bible,” Rushdoony insisted, “there is no law in nature, because nature is fallen and cannot be normative. Moreover, the source of law is not nature but God. There is no law in Nature but a law over nature. … [R]eaved law is the need and privilege of Christian society. It is the only means whereby man can fulfill his creation mandate of exercising dominion under God.”

Further, for Rushdoony the very notion of nature as a “self-enclosed system of causality” is dangerous and corrupting. Such a conception of “Nature” is a modern “myth” that is derived from Hellenistic, not Christian, philosophy. “The road to theistic recovery,” he concludes, “is only possible by a systematic attack on the illegitimate concept of ‘Nature,’ which imposes at the very least a screen between God and man…. ‘Nature’ is a bastard concept and must be dropped.”

The significance of Rushdoony’s rejection of the concept of “Nature” is hard to overestimate. First, this places Rushdoony at odds with many on the (Christian) Right who, like Pat Buchanan, believe a “visceral recoil from homosexuality is the natural reaction of a healthy society wishing to preserve itself. A prejudice against males who engage in sodomy with one another presents a normal and natural basis in favor of sound

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140 Ibid., 129.

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morality.\textsuperscript{141} While Rushdoony would have certainly agreed that homosexuals must be prejudged and condemned as a condition of a healthy society, he would have strenuously rejected the notion that revulsion is a “natural” reaction to homosexual. To Rushdoony, \textit{nature is not normative}; it is fallen with man.\textsuperscript{142} As a consequence, Nature can never form a foundation for moral or ethical behavior. Any revulsion one feels in response to sodomy is a manifestation of one’s proximity to a Godly order and its concomitant presupposition of Christian convictions.

Second, Rushdoony’s thought occupies a peculiar philosophical space that emerges at the confluence of social constructivism and theological foundationalism. This position suggests that the natural state of the human body and mind can and do change through time and as a consequence of context, although they are not infinitely malleable. A body, as we have already seen, can be worn out by sin, but before reaching this final, transgressive state of hellish exhaustion a human being can \textit{naturally} engage in any action or behavior that an individual desires and that a community will tolerate. In this sense, Rushdoony was a unique sort of social constructivist and cultural relativist: he clearly believed that human beings can construct a vast array of social organizations and sexual orientations and that none of them could be defended or condemned based on an appeal to nature. But as a \textit{Christian relativist}, he was not an anti-foundationalist: he believed that God’s Word provided an ethical and moral foundation to the mind and body.

\textsuperscript{141} Quoted in Durham, \textit{The Christian Right}, 52.
\textsuperscript{142} In an undated lecture delivered at a Christian college, someone in the audience asked Rushdoony if animals could sin. He responded, “Animals do sin. And I know that our dog you can always spot when he’s going to do something wrong because he puts his ears down and he has guilty air about him as he goes about doing something he’s not told to do.” Laughs follow, but Rushdoony returns to his serious point: “The whole of creation is fallen, including animals. They’re sinners too, they’ve been affected by the Fall.” In short, in nature there is no escape from sin and therefore mankind may make no appeal to the animal or natural world to justify its actions. Only God may justify through His Grace.
of men even if they worked to create other ethical and moral systems that undermined God’s. Thus, God’s grace and His law function as a transcendent force that will reconstruct men, and through their progressive dominion these men will reconstruct the natural order to create the New Jerusalem of Christ.

2) The Threat to a Godly Order

If nature is not normative, then human beings must appeal to another source to justify and sanctify a Godly order. For example, as a Christian relativist who is convinced that one’s presuppositions—what we might refer to as the epistemological initial conditions—determine the outcome of any human law-system, Rushdoony did believe that men are created with an innate, God-given nature, but he argued that that nature could manifest itself in a variety of forms. To illustrate this point, we can return yet again to the homosexual. As I argued above, Rushdoony did not understand homosexuals to be effete, incompetent weaklings. Instead, he presents them as hyper-masculine, aggressive creatures that systematically and self-consciously use the non-normative potentialities of their fallen nature to transgress the laws of God.

It is precisely because nature provides no constraints on their actions that the radical antinomianism of the homosexual male is such a dangerous force against God’s will. Rushdoony believed that the homosexual male pushes the innate, created nature of men to its farthest and most dangerous extreme. In this sense Rushdoony is squarely in the mainstream of socially conservative fundamentalist/evangelical thought in the U.S., which constructs homosexual males first as sexual predators and, finally, the murderers
of men. Further, because of the hyper-masculinity of male homosexuality and its aggressive focus on domination, no form of human sexuality poses a greater threat to the God-given structure of the family. As Lienesch summarizes in his synoptic study of Christian literature on masculinity,

Men are sexual aggressors. … In fact, they are almost uncontrollably sexually aggressive. … Men possess a stronger sex drive than women. They think more about sex, talk more about sex, and, when given the opportunity, engage more in sex, while also enjoying it more than women. In short, men are sexual creatures, for better or worse the product of their reproductive systems—servants, as it were, of their sperm.  

Rushdoony generally shares this sense of men’s aggressive sexuality, and therefore it is not surprising that he saw homosexuals—who, in his view, reject all constraints on man’s nature—as the most violent and dangerous human beings. Thus the consistent theme that emerges in almost all of the literature authored by socially and theologically conservative American Protestants focuses on a systematic and aggressive homosexual “agenda” that seeks not only to recruit boys, but, as Jerry Falwell pointed out, are agents of “Satan’s diabolical attack upon the family.” Thus, we end where we began this section: the family. Antinomianism is, whether we are quoting Rushdoony, Roger Schultz, Jerry Falwell, or any other socially and theological conservative who

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143 For a summary of this discursive construction of homosexuality, especially as it relates to fears over pedophilia, see Durham, The Christian Right, 52-55. Durham also helpfully points out how authors on the Christian Right have recently attempted to Nazify homosexuality by insisting that Nazism was a combination of “black occult forces” and “homosexualism” (Scott Lively, The Pink Swastika: Homosexuality in the Nazi Party, [Keizer, OR: Founders, 1995] quoted in Durham, The Christian Right, 55). Not coincidently, Rushdoony’s praise for Pink Swastika is featured prominently on the book’s cover and website: “Lively and Abrams call attention to what Hitlerism really stood for, abortion, euthanasia, hatred of Jews, and, very emphatically, homosexuality. This many of us knew in the 1930’s; it was common knowledge, but now it is denied…” (“Reviewers Praise The Pink Swastika,” The Pink Swastika, 4th Edition - Final, n.d., http://www.defendthefamily.com/pfrc/books/pinkswastika/html/the_pinkswastika_4th_edition_-_final.htm [accessed September 9, 2010]).

144 Lienesch, Redeeming America, 56-57.

145 Quoted in Durham, The Christian Right, 44.
focuses on homosexuality, nothing more or less than an attack on the family and “the Biblical sexual order.” Rushdoony ideas therefore form within a stratum of texts and discourses that has, since at least the middle of the twentieth century, betrayed a profound ambivalence about the nature of the sexual appetite of men, especially homosexual men. As Michael Lienesch notes, if left uncontrolled, a man’s sexual desire “is anarchic and destructive, with men seemingly wandering about in search of sexual conquest. Controlled, however, it allows for stability and social progress.” The self-government of a Christian man, therefore, is contingent upon the discipline and conduct of that man’s sexual appetites; that is, an a priori theology renders sexuality as inherently biopolitical. And the only response to the lawlessness implicit in aggressive, antinomian sexuality is the establishment and extension of God’s law-word to all peoples and nations of the earth.

III. THEONOMY: BIBLICAL LAW AND A GODLY ORDER

As I demonstrated in chapter 3, Rushdoony believed that Biblical law, as manifested in the laws of Moses and recapitulated by Christ, provides an ethical framework that allows Christians “to take dominion” over the planet and “reconstruct” all of life in Christ’s image. The previous section should have made clear that this process of “taking dominion” is predicated on an effort to annihilate the “subject” of modern anthropocentric philosophy and, in turn, this is directly related to forceful declaration on all forms of sin which emerge from ungodly epistemological presuppositions. In this

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147 Lienesch, *Redeeming America*, 56.
148 I owe this insight and formulation to Philip Armstrong.
section, we turn away from the negative aspects of this struggle to focus on its antithesis: the creation of a Godly order brought into accord with the strictures of Biblical law. To this end I will focus narrowly on Rushdoony’s discussion of Biblical law as it relates to the governance of the family. I have adopted this admittedly artificial constraint for the simply reason that Rushdoony’s discussion of Biblical law is too vast and encyclopedic to cover in any reasonable fashion. (This discussion would be further complicated if I included the legal interpretations of other similarly prolific Reconstructionists such as Gary North and Greg Bahnsen whose work only adds to the complexity and expansive breadth of a discussion of Biblical law). But while artificial, this focus is not arbitrary. First, Rushdoony’s writings on the relationship between the family and Biblical law are some of his most influential (a topic I’ll return in the next chapter). Second, his work on family law provides a concrete illustration of how he envisioned that law would “work” in a reconstructed society. I take this latter point as my primary focus in this section, and will relate it the previous discussions of the familialization of conservatism and the struggle against antinomianism.

The Helpmeet of Man

Up to this point, I have largely discussed Rushdoony’s concept of dominion as if it is the calling of isolated, atomized men, but as I indicated at the beginning of this chapter, dominion is a progressive social project that requires more than a reconstructed man to undertake the project. To understand the social implications of dominion, we must begin with a discussion of how the law “works” on men and women in their calling to dominion; how it functions as a difference engine that codes and recodes all social relations through a complex process of differentiation that ultimately reifies and fixes
specific assumptions about the nature of human beings as permanent and immutable. Once the law fixes these differences, they are in turn mobilized in terms of sexual and gendered difference and emerge as the foundation for dominion itself.

In the Rushdoonian theonomic system, Biblical law operates via the intensification of difference, the exaggeration of discrimination, and the dramatic reordering of the male body in its relations to women, society, and God. The law constrains the ability of an autonomous, rational man to think apart from God by setting clear parameters on how one may interpret the world and therefore on how one may act in the world. “The law,” Rushdoony argues at the outset of the *Institutes*, “cannot favor equality without ceasing to be the law: at all times, the law defines… those who constitute the legitimate and the illegitimate members of society. The fact of law introduces a fundamental and basic inequality in society.” Biblical law therefore defines what is holy by drawing strict distinctions. Thus, “The true holiness of man is man’s separation unto God in faith and in obedience to God’s law. The law is thus the specified way to holiness.” With biblical law established as the mediatory category that codes and recodes all social meaning via a process of discrimination and differentiation, Rushdoony developed Christian Reconstruction (or theonomy or dominion theology) as the system through which regenerated men can fulfill the “dominion mandate” to “subdue all things and all nations to Christ and His law-word.” Rushdoony argues that Biblical law and the sacrifice of Christ provide the means to allow Christians to abrogate the curse of the Fall. Through the law, the reconstructed Christian

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150 Ibid.
151 Ibid.
or “dominion man” might then “take dominion” over the planet and “reconstruct” all of life in Christ’s image.

As we saw in chapter 3, this “dominion man” is the foundation of Rushdoony’s entire social and political project. This “man” is a sexed being that has a natural gendered-order hardwired into its body. He is by nature a creature created in a state of privation that first “had a tested maturity in terms of his work” before God introduced His creation to social relationships in the form of Eve who serves as a both a wife and “helpmeet” in the project of dominion.\textsuperscript{152} With the creation of Eve, Adam—and therefore mankind—entered into marriage and society simultaneously. The origin of society is therefore to be located in the union of male and female in the institutional form of the family. Biblical law, in Rushdoony’s view, clearly establishes the nature of the family by fixing the relationship between male and female into an ethical hierarchy. God’s law-word establishes marriage as a “covenantal instrument,” which mediates the relationships between human beings by coding and recoding the limits and potentialities of male/female interaction.\textsuperscript{153} First, Adam was the primary instrument of dominion, but his individual calling was extended into a social calling with the creation of Eve and the creation of the form of the family when “[i]t is unto ‘them,’ male and female, that God gives the order to exercise dominion.”\textsuperscript{154} Next, this leads Rushdoony to assert that a woman is a secondary or derivative instrument of dominion. Her primary duty in


\textsuperscript{153} Rushdoony, \textit{Institutes of Biblical Law}, 1:341.

\textsuperscript{154} Rushdoony, \textit{Salvation and Godly Rule}, 604.
marriage is *submission* to the *authority* of her husband. Thus, women are partners in dominion but cannot exercise it alone.

To illustrate how Rushdoony’s conception of marriage as “covenantal instrument” is at once similar to the ideas of many contemporary conservative Christians, we should pause and consider, first, how they both view the family, and, second, how Biblical law ensures that women and men occupy very different places with Rushdoony’s understanding family. First, as Michael Lienesch has summarized, there is a general consensus among socially and culturally conservative Protestants that the family is the single most important social institution: “Dear to the heart of Christian conservatism,” he notes, “lies the family. Surrounding the self, connecting it to and protecting it from society, the family is considered by religious conservatives to be the most important of social institutions.”

Further, Lienesch’s study suggests that Christian conservatives often play fast and lose with how they define the family and with the metaphors that they use to discuss it: “Christian conservative thinkers draw on several different definitions of the family—particularly prominent are Puritan, Victorian, and postwar images of the family as ‘church,’ ‘haven,’ and ‘corporation’—combining them into a kind of contemporary collage. Although historically confusing, the result is ideologically consistent, a conception of the family in which men rule, women submit, and children obey.”

Rushdoony’s notion of the family and the woman’s role within it is rooted in the many of the same assumptions outlined in Lienesch’s first quotation, but his ideas are

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155 Lienesch, * Redeeming America*, 52.
156 Ibid., 53-54.
dramatically different from the metaphors indicated in the second. It could be argued that Rushdoony understood the metaphors of church, haven, and corporation in circulation among evangelicals and fundamentalists and specifically formulated his theory of the family in order to undermine these common assumptions. Interestingly, the two evangelical stereotypes of women that Rushdoony works the hardest to undermine are the idea of an ideal “Victorian” woman and that of the dangerous “liberated” 20th century feminist. First, he offers a particularly scathing critique of Enlightenment constructions of gender that produced the “Victorian” women. The Age of Reason, he argued, reduced women to “a useless ornamental person, with almost no rights.”157 Further, the Enlightenment “saw man as reason incarnate, and women as emotion and will, and therefore inferior.”158 For Rushdoony, neither position is Biblical, and both lead corrupt men to unjustly dominate and oppress women through a series of legal mechanisms that diminished women’s role in both the family and other social spheres. The churches were complicit in this project and supported “this legal revolution by a one-sided and twisted reading of scripture.”159 Interestingly, Rushdoony here offers a defense of the women’s rights movement and some aspects of first-wave American feminism noting that both correctly perceived the evils wrought by the Enlightenment. But, rather than working to restore the proper balance between men and women within their calling to dominion, which would restore “women to their rightful place of authority beside man,” feminism eventually gave way to a sinful project to “put women in competition with men” for

157 Rushdoony, Institutes of Biblical Law, 1:349.
158 Ibid.
159 Ibid., 1:350.
society authority.\textsuperscript{160} Thus, Rushdoony’s model for proper womanhood is neither the “pretty doll of the Age of Reason,” nor the “highly competitive, masculinized woman of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.”\textsuperscript{161} Rushdoony’s models are the queens of ancient Christendom, stern “counsels”\textsuperscript{162} who share in all aspects of dominion and the progressive creation the Kingdom of God.\textsuperscript{163}

The women who enter into a covenantal marriage with men find themselves in a relationship that’s primary purpose is to govern a man’s ability to exercise dominion. In this sense, marriage cannot be reduced to the sentiment of love, to the function of procreation, or to economic subsistence. First, love is an insufficient ground for the government of marriage because love only has meaning within the context of Biblical law. For a man, his duty is love, but here love has a specific and unique meaning: “service.”\textsuperscript{164} This service emerges from the man’s submission to Christ and His law.\textsuperscript{165} Within the family, the evidence of the man’s love can be seen in his “wise and loving government of his household.” This leads Rushdoony to conclude, “a man’s life is his work, not his wife,”\textsuperscript{166} and that this work is dominion in the service of the LORD. Second, the purpose of the family is not located in the act of procreation: “the primary purpose of marriage is not simply procreation, but that procreation is an aspect of

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 1:351.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 1:352.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 1:348.
\textsuperscript{163} Rushdoony, \textit{Salvation and Godly Rule}, 603-609.
\textsuperscript{164} Rushdoony, \textit{Institutes of Biblical Law}, 1:338.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., 1:345.
\end{footnotesize}
subduing the earth and exercising dominion over it.”

Woman, as man’s partner in dominion, therefore is much more than a mother: “she manages the farms and business, and is a queen exercising dominion.” Finally, one does not enter into the family form to ensure economic success; the family absorbs the economic sphere into the project of dominion.

The Kingdom of God

This all leads to an important conclusion: the family is the “most powerful institution in society.” Neither the state nor the church nor any other sphere of law may claim precedence over the family and its governance. Further, Biblical law grants the family control of three “key areas of society”: 1) children, 2) property, and 3) inheritance. These three areas of society are granted to the family because, “The law is not oriented to the past… but rather to the future and to progress away from primitivism.” As such, Biblical law establishes the family as the productive institution responsible for ushering in the future Kingdom of God. In contrast, the state, when bound by God’s law, serves only the negative function of enforcing justice, while the church acts a preservative cultural force; neither is creative. When unbound by Biblical law, the state can be especially dangerous because its corporate manifestation of mankind’s fallen nature drives it to “invaded all three areas [of children, property, and

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168 Ibid., 604.
inheritance] in varying degrees, by means of property taxes, inheritance taxes, statist
schools, and laws limiting the jurisdiction of the family.”173 The state and family,
therefore, “represent two rival powers claiming jurisdiction over the same territory and
claiming the same powers of dominion.”174 Any other aspect of society (church, state,
school, etc.) that attempts to claim some aspect of the family’s control over children,
property, or inheritance weakens the family and by extension society as a whole.175

In fact, since the family is the first and most important human social organization,
it is also prone to the most “deformation” by sin. For the Christian, this means that they
must not fall into the various sins that turn the family into an idolatrous cult: ancestor
worship, blood kinship, the absolute authority of the father, etc.176 This point is
particularly critical because a Christian family is not determined by blood ties. Emphasis
on blood, clan, and tribe actually obscures the Christian meaning of the family by
undermining the “theological significance of the family” that is not focused on
“dominion” but instead “the clan and tribe has aimed at power.”177 Christians are to be a
“third race” or “Christian race” that extends well beyond the realm of clan, tribe, or blood
relations not a specific clan or nationality.178 As a consequence, adoption is also a means
of increasing the family and exercising dominion.179

173 Rushdoony, Salvation and Godly Rule, 607.
174 Ibid.
175 He also makes this point at greater length and relates it explicitly to the state in Rushdoony,
Institutes of Biblical Law, 1:191-208.
176 Rushdoony, Salvation and Godly Rule, 606.
177 Ibid.
178 Ibid., 608.
This expansive and seemingly endlessly productive aspect of the family as the source of the “third race” of mankind makes it the primary instrument of Godly dominion. This point is essential to understanding Rushdoony’s Christian social theory: it is based on his post-millennial eschatological assumptions about the ultimate victory of Christ in terms of the future establishment of His Kingdom on this planet by reconstructed men. For Rushdoony, history not only has a teleological arrow, but that arrow is determinative of an ever-increasing cultural complexity and Christianization of all things, not simply human beings but of the cosmos itself.

The family expands in time and space to bring all of creation under God’s authority. In this sense, Rushdoony is emphatic that the family is not some “narrow, ingrown entity.” Instead, “With each marriage, the relationships [are] extended outward” by the cultivation of covenant families under the authority of a reconstructed father. “The family,” says Rushdoony,

with each generation, moves outward by marriage, and the interlocking network of law units is thereby spread further. The family governs itself, and, in so doing, its government covers many spheres of life and its future orientation means that its functions are not present-bound. Over the centuries, families have most tenaciously preserved past and present while working to govern the future.

The vision here is of the inexorable growth of Christendom from one reconstructed family into an imperial kingdom that one day fills the whole earth.

180 Rushdoony, Salvation and Godly Rule, 606.
182 Ibid.
183 Here Rushdoony appears to be nodding to Abraham Kuyper’s suggestion that had sin not entered the world, men would have united the earth under a single, global kingdom organized around a the patriarchal family unit (see his Lectures on Calvinism [Cosimo Classics, 2007], 78-81). Rushdoony sees the grace of Christ and the regenerative power of Biblical law as the mechanisms for the justification and sanctification, respectively, necessary for reestablishing and this unification of mankind into a single world
This vision of the organic, aggressive expansion of the family marks Rushdoony’s uniqueness from many of his contemporaries in the so-called “Religious Right.” He focuses exclusively on the teleological, progressive, and productive force of God’s law as it hurries men and their institutions forward toward the total victory of God in history. Rushdoony neither looked longingly to a lost Eden, nor forward to the rapture of believers from this fallen planet. Further, Rushdoony saw no potential salvation in the electoral capture of the mechanisms of the U.S. government. Instead, Rushdoony exhibited unwavering faith in the coming of God’s Kingdom on earth, in which mankind is justified through the grace of Christ and sanctified by His law. While grace is instant, sanctification is a progressive process that develops slowly over generations as Christian men take dominion over not only their own lives, but also over their families and eventually all other societal institutions until the whole earth and all of its people recognize the ultimate sovereignty of Christ.

The significance of the interrelationship between Biblical law and the family matter lies in Rushdoony conviction that dominion man, through the family, could dismantle Christianity’s greatest contemporary enemy, the secular or humanistic state. From the perspective of a Christian Reconstructionist, the secular state—as embodied in the U.S. federal government—reflects mankind’s sinful desire to reason and live autonomously from the law of God. Rushdoony believed that human beings’ epistemological desire to “to be as gods” leads them to create social institutions that blur
the line between the sacred and the profane, and therefore that undermine and threaten
the family’s ability to further the dominion of God. In his assessment, since the days of
the U.S. Civil War, the U.S. federal government has progressively institutionalized
humanity’s most basic desire to determine right from wrong independent from the mind
of God.

This basic sin, which is sin in its essence, manifests itself… in man’s institutions.
During most of history, the state has been man’s central institution and therefore
the central manifestation in corporate form of man’s original sin. As a result, the
state has repeatedly presented itself as man’s savior and god.

Thus, as a product of collective sin, the non-Christian state combines to govern all
spheres of life in a grotesque parody of this original dominion mandate. Yet, if the
purpose of the family is “subduing the earth agriculturally, scientifically, culturally,
artistically, in every way asserting the crown rights of King Jesus in every realm of
life,” then the state cannot be allowed to claim any status as man’s central institution.
Consequently, the family becomes an incubator for social particularity and cultural
differentiation that operates to resist any attempts to homogenize and constrain human
beings under the limiting parameters of the state.

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184 Rushdoony believed that the New England colonies were Protestant feudal states that resisted any and all attempts to unify governmental authority into a centralized bureaucracy. This feudal order was written into the U.S. Constitution and was designed to protect Americans from the rise of European-style nation-states. By the mid-1850s, a conspiracy of Unitarians and socialists united to unify America into a monolithic government. They realized their goal with the defeat of the Confederacy during the Civil War. Since the time of Lincoln, the forces of an elite urbanized bureaucracy have been slowly rolling back the rural, feudal Christian character that the Constitution was designed to protect. Rushdoony developed this elaborate conspiracy theory in his two volumes of American historical revisionism, *The Nature of the American System* (Fairfax, VA: Thoburn Press, 1978); and *This Independent Republic: Studies in the Nature and Meaning of American History* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2001).


By now, it should be clear that Rushdoony’s theonomic system, if implemented, would wreak havoc on contemporary American society. It would reorder many of the basic aspects of every human being’s life: relationships between husbands and wives, mothers and sons, and brothers and sisters would be rendered irreducibly “Christian;” morality and ethics would become a cosmic battle between the autonomous and theonomous wills of men; the agency of women to act within certain spheres would be drastically extended with a concomitant expansion of maternal responsibility while being simultaneously reduced and constrained in others; the state would be utterly reordered as many of its functions would be subsumed into other social spheres such as the family. Theonomy, then, should be seen as a system that mixes and messes with contemporary society. Even as it erodes the boundaries and foundations for social structures that many Americans—Christian and secularist alike—take for granted, it also conserves and perpetuates elements of the status quo.

The mixing, messing, and conservation instigated in the name of Rushdoony’s theonomic system disturbs secularists precisely because it undermines and threatens to reorder the “modern constitution” that many Americans take for granted. I borrow this concept of the “modern constitution” from Bruno Latour because I believe it is useful for mapping how “modernity” posits a novel chain of linkages between God, nature, and politics that, for illustrative purposes and comparative purposes, can be used to translate Rushdoony’s philosophy into the language of contemporary critical theory. First,

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Latour’s concept of the “modern constitution” does not refer to the contemporary political order, but rather to the structuring of “modernity” itself. Instead, the “modern,” is emerges from the creation of series of epistemological and practical “purifications” that allow for the creation of nature (nonhumans) and culture (humans).¹⁸⁸ That is, modernity constitutes itself—or, rather, we Westerners constitute it in our own lives—through a three-fold process of purification that separates humanity from nature, and then separates humanity and nature from God. These purifications create certain guarantees and “checks” between nature and culture that Latour likens to the “separation of powers” written into modern political constitutions.¹⁸⁹ These purifications allow “moderns”—those citizens authorized by the modern constitution—to engage in the complex “double task of domination and emancipation.”¹⁹⁰

Why are these “processes of purification” relevant to understanding Rushdoony’s theonomic system? Simply, I believe that they underscore that theonomy is modern in

¹⁸⁸ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 10. I hope my reader will forgive here for flattening aspects of Latour’s argument in order to focus on humanism and anti-humanism. I understand that he is actually working to sidestep this issue, but I take up Latour here precisely because of his assertion that “modernity” is often defined in terms of either the birth of the human agent or in terms of the death of the autonomous human agent:

Modernity is often defined in terms of humanism, either as a way of saluting the birth of ‘man’ or a way of announcing his death. But this habit is modern…. It overlooks the simultaneous birth of “non-humanity”—things, or objects, or beasts—and the equally strange beginning of a crossed-out God, relegated to the sidelines. Modernity arises first from the conjoined creation of those three entities [humans, non-humans, and the crossed-out God], and then from the masking of the conjoined birth and the separate treatment of the three communities while, underneath, hybrids continue to multiply as an effect of this separate treatment (13).

As I argued in the previous section, Rushdoony might be thought of anti-humanist who, like Foucault and other anti-humanists, seeks to dispel the mystique and myth of the modern, rational agent. Thus, if the modern is to be defined in terms of a (anti)humanistic stance, then Rushdoony is certainly “modern.” But I believe Latour’s insistence that modernity rest not on (anti)humanism, but on a subtle and complex process epistemology and practical acts of “purification” is useful for illustrating that Rushdoony’s modernism runs deeper than his pronounced anti-humanism.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 13-14.
¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 10.
orientation. That is, Rushdoony’s theonomic systems is both product and producer of the endless effort to police the boundaries of the modern constitution of reality. His epistemology and practice—his *doxa* and *praxis*, to use his own terms\(^{191}\)—is designed to reify the purifications of modernity even if he has declared war on specific modes of modernity. This can be illustrated by mapping the purifications intrinsic to Rushdoony’s system. In preceding sections of this chapter, I have attempted to clarify how Rushdoony’s theonomic system works by tracing how it is mobilized around the division between absolute and ontological separation between antinomian and theonomous modes of being. With this distinction in place, theonomy then operates through the calling of dominion to purify all other aspects of the cosmos.

First and foremost, Rushdoony’s system begins with a rejection of “the death of God” theology and philosophical anthropology so central to modernity. In the previous section, I outlined how his rejections of these theological and philosophical positions grew from his analysis of the embodied implications of humanity’s epistemological desire to “be as God.” His reject of these “modern” trends may tempt some to see Rushdoony’s effort to resuscitate God as some rear-guard maneuver to simply deny the “death of God” theology of Sade, Nietzsche, or Foucault. But, as I argued above, the very notion of “dominion man” can only be formulated in response to and as condition of the antinomian figure of “modern man.” In this sense, the “death of God” and the “birth of man” are the necessary pre-conditions for the death of modern man and the emergence

\(^{191}\) Rushdoony argued that dominion could be reduced to two primary aspects, *praxis* (work) and *doxa* (knowledge), but that they must be executed in terms of God’s law (Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, 1:342)
of dominion man. If modernity “crosses out” God as the condition for the emergence of and death of the modern subject, then theonomy crosses out modern man, adding an extra step of refinement to this act of epistemological and theological purification.

Next, as I argued above, the antinomianism of modern man relies on a normative appeal to the power of the Nature to justify or criticize a particular behavior. This is predicated on modern man’s distinction between nonhumans and humans, which creates an ontological bifurcation that allows moderns to “demolish the ill-founded pretensions of human prejudice.” In this sense Nature becomes the route through which socially-constructed and contextually-situated falsehoods are destroyed, a purification (i.e., the separation of the natural from the social and the judgment of the latter in terms or the former) that enthrones humans as creative agents of their own social reality. If transcendent to Society, Nature provides the immutable laws humanity may not transgress. If immanent to Society, Nature provides humanity with unlimited possibilities for ordering life. Whether it serves as the governing limit to Society or as the source of Society’s endless adaptability, the separation of Nature from the Social is a necessary precondition for conceptualizing of a modern, autonomous human agent. Just as Rushdoony’s theonomic system requires the aufheben of modern theology and philosophy in order to abolish the modern subject, so too does his system require the

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192 Perhaps that it should be noted that Latour’s “crossed-out god” is neither a dead God or a non-existent God. It is in fact the God of specific form of Protestantism that fades off into a kind of deism. This God is infinitely distant from humans and nature, but is also an “all-powerful God” that can “descend into men’s heart of hearts” (Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 33). Thus, Latour’s “modern constitution” is authorized, at least in part, by Protestantism. See Ibid., 32-35.

193 I capitalize “Nature” here to refer to the “purified” and “modernized” proper noun used by Latour. I maintain a similar convention when I capitalize “Social” and “Society” below.

194 Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 35.
retention of Nature as the precondition for the existence of the autonomous agent against which God has declared war. Without the scientific innovations of evolution, astrophysics, and environmentalism, humanity cannot fully conceptualize of its sovereign autonomy from a Godly order. Consequently, Nature is as fundamental to dominion as is “death of god” theology; it is only in positing Nature’s absolute transcendence that humanity may sin so successfully. Theonomy retains the sin of Nature in order to eradicate it and sublate it—there can be no emancipation from sin if there is not first a sinner on which God declares war.

Finally, with the autonomous, rational subject of modern philosophy erased and the “bastard concept” of Nature subsumed under God’s law, Rushdoony is left with one more remaining purification: the Social. The separation of humans from nonhumans constitutes the bifurcation between “Nature” and “Society,” mutually exclusive concepts that provide the foundation for scientific and cultural explanations. In the human or “subject side” of this division, Society or “the Social” is fixed in order to explain some other realm of reality: socio-economics, socio-linguistics, social psychology, culture, the political, etc. As with his subjugation of Nature to the law, Rushdoony is clear that Society cannot be a transcendent force in the life of men. Instead, he specifically posits Abraham Kuyper’s concept of sphere sovereignty as the constitutional “check” necessary to prevent any aspect of society from asserting its transcendence. In theory, sphere sovereignty forbids the transcendence of any component of society by distributing governance of human beings into horizontally arranged spheres that imamate from

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195 Ibid., 80.

discrete, individuated men. That is, sphere sovereignty works by endlessly dividing and sub-dividing Society. Again, we are left with the preservation of the underlying structure of modernity, but we find it reordered and restructured according the initial distinction between autonomy/theonomy. Without the creation of an autonomous, modern Society conjured into existence in opposition to God and Nature, there could be no space from which Rushdoony could carve up the Christian social spheres that deny the transcendence of the state.

Transmodern

At each step in the processes of separation and purification, Rushdoony has not so much rejected the “modern constitution” as he has embraced it and added another level of refinement based on the bifurcations and paradoxes already built into modernity. His theonomic system mobilizes an initial distinction between autonomy/theonomy, which recodes the entire constitution modernity. Much of the constitution remains unchanged even as it is recoded and restructured in Christian terms, a fact that can be seen so clearly in Rushdoony’s retention of such basic “modern” conceptions of progress (post-millennialism), colonialism and imperialism (Christian dominion), and emancipation (Christian libertarianism). This, I believe, helps us understand why Rushdoony is at once so feared by secularists and democrats and why he remains popular among contemporary Christian conservatives. Rushdoony proposes to amend the modern constitution in a way that is at once immediately recognizable and intuitive, but also disturbingly foreign.

Theonomy doesn’t turn modernity on its head. It doesn’t destroy the “modern.” Theonomy calls for a constitutional convention to amend the system in order to Christianize it. In short, Rushdoony would ratify a kind of Fourteenth Amendment to end the Civil War between the two states of mankind: autonomous man and dominion man.¹⁹⁸

In his Preface to the Philosophy of Right, Hegel famously wrote, “It is just as absurd to fancy that philosophy can transcend its contemporary world as it is to fancy that an individual can overleap his own age, jump over Rhodes.”¹⁹⁹ I take this as useful starting point to begin my concluding discussion of Rushdoony’s concept of theonomy: Rushdoony’s theonomic epistemology and political ontology are inescapably modern in much the same way that Hegel’s state was inescapable Prussian. To be clear, I am not arguing that theonomy is a derivative, pallid form of modernity. Quite to the contrary: it is wildly innovative, ingeniously wrought, and potentially very dangerous (especially for those who cling to the unamended modern constitution). I understand that this characterization will leave both Reconstructionists and many of Rushdoony’s critics unconvinced and perhaps angry, but some of the corollaries between Reconstruction and modernity are difficult to ignore. First and foremost, as I have argued throughout this chapter and the previous one, it is impossible to understand Reconstructionism outside of the context of both secularism and the “death of God” theology that dominated mid-twentieth century thought; much like John Kerry, Rushdoony was for the death of God before he was against it. Second, his focus on epistemological questions and his criticism

¹⁹⁸ I hinted at aspects of the argument that follows in Michael J. McVicar, “Rushdoony Among the Academics: The Secular Relevance of the thought of R. J. Rushdoony,” Faith For All of Life (May/June 2007): 20-21, 32.

of naturalistic, scientific knowledge cannot be interpreted as nonmodern, but rather should be understood as a specific moment of the autophagous self-reflexivity of modernity. Third, his conception of society is progressive and characterized by increasing cultural and political complexity, a hallmark of modern thought.

But to simply label Rushdoony “modern” is a misnomer. For instance, his adoption of Van Tillian presuppositionalism might superficially be labeled “post-modern” because it eagerly embraces and acclaims the crisis of modern knowledge as a tragedy that opens up new possibilities for humanity. Further, his appeal to a past age of decentralized feudalism and Puritan-era Republicanism as the primary models of social and political organization suggest that “pre-modern” or “anti-modern” might be useful labels. Indeed, he often appears eager to embrace an anti-modern stance that “firmly believe[s] that the West has rationalized and disenchanted the world…, that it has definitively transformed the premodern cosmos into a mechanical interaction of pure

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200 For lack of better meaning, I would suggest that a “nonmodern” position would reject the distinctions between God, nature, and humanity that Rushdoony works so hard to reinforce. Rushdoony’s Protestant epistemology requires many of the radical breaks (between god and man; man and nature, the Incarnation and everything else) that were constitutive of the modern. Contrast this with Graham Harman’s summary of the nonmodern perspective: “There has never been a radical break with what came before. For we ourselves, just like Neanderthals, sparrows, mushrooms, and dirt, have never done anything else than act amidst the bustle of actants, compressing and resisting them, or giving way beneath their blows” (Harman, Prince of networks, 58). If that is an accurate description of the “nonmodern,” then we can be certain that it does not describe Rushdoony.

201 Latour, We Have Never Been Modern, 123. The similarities between Van Til’s presuppositionalism and systems derisively labeled as “post-modern” have not been lost on Christian authors. As one author argued, “Van Til is unique in that he anticipates Derrida’s critique of western metaphysics with very similar critiques of his own. Like Derrida, Van Til was quick to point out the inherent irrationality of western philosophy. For Van Til, any attempt to ground knowledge in reason, sense experience, a Geist, ‘being,’ or any other abstract principle makes knowledge and meaning impossible. So in this regard, … both Derrida and Van Til reveal surprising similarities in their critiques of the modern project” (Jacob Gabriel Hale, “Derrida, Van Til and the Metaphysics of Postmodernism,” Reformed Perspectives Magazine, July 30, 2004, http://reformedperspectives.org/files/reformedperspectives/hall_of_frame/HOF.Hale.Derrida%20and%20VanTil.6.30.04.html [accessed September 9, 2010]). Of course, even in their similarities, the author is quick to point out that Van Til’s Christianity saves him from the ultimate nihilism of deconstruction.
matter.” Because Rushdoony so easily occupies all of these “modern” positions, without owning any of them, I think it would be more profitable to categorize him as transmodern in orientation. Like Hegel, Rushdoony understands that he could no more overleap the modern moment than he could jump over Rhodes—such a gesture would even be sinful since it would assume human rather than divine transcendence—, but this fact didn’t stop him from trying to cobble together a bridge to span the distance. Rushdoony believed he could use this bridge to produce the future out of a structure that was firmly rooted in a Christian past and modern present. Rushdoony wasn’t satisfied to reflect on the actuality of the rational; he was trying to move beyond it to an alternative actuality based on what he believed to be a uniquely Christian mode of rationality.

Here I am very loosely following American historian of religion Martin E. Marty by freely altering his term transmodern and reformulating so that it might be apply it to Rushdoony.203 “The prefix trans,” Marty writes, “here picks up the dictionary sense of ‘beyond, surpassing, transcending, … on the other side of,’ as in transhuman, transmaterial, or transnational.”204 I adopt the prefix precisely to evoke these four senses, which suggest a generalized attempt “to pass through” modernity and look for “ways beyond” the “modern.”205 Second, Marty’s conceptualization is useful because it suggests neither a wholesale rejection of modernity, nor a derivative and unintentional embrace of random forms of modernity; instead, it points to a double articulation—a complex process of sorting and aggregation—that forms a specific stratum or species of

202 Latour, We Have Never Been Modern, 123.
204 Ibid., 1:251.
205 Ibid.
the “modern.” This stratum of the “modern,” especially as it might be applied to religion, looks to “a fresh religious accent on healing and wholeness” that manifests itself in three forms: 1) an ecumenical desire for the future reunion of all churches; 2) embrace of premodern social and economic order; and, 3) desire to integrate the nation as a whole “in an imperial age.” Theonomic transmodernity exhibits this general trend to “wholeness” in the form of the strategies of disintegrative “holiness” embodied in Biblical law, which, if enacted, would reintegrated Christians into a proper social order that would lead to the progressive reconstruction of the Church and the nation in the form of the “third race,” i.e., Christian agents of God’s progressive dominion and the Kingdom of Christ.

CONCLUSION: TECHNOLOGIES OF THE FAMILY

Rushdoony’s transmodern vision of theonomy sorts, sifts, and separates certain components of modernity. Then, through the mechanisms of certain social institutions, Biblical law consolidates the sorted epistemologies and discourses into what Foucault might call “techniques of the self” that work on “individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to

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207 Ibid., 1:252; 251-316.

attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.”

But theonomy is not an exclusively individualized project; that is, it is not exclusively about the effort of an individualized Christian will to care for its self alone. Rather, theonomy works at the nexus of technologies of the self and technologies of power, which Foucault defines as those technologies that “determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject.” It is in the “contact point” where technologies of power and techniques of the self “interact” that the techniques of the self are integrated into the structures of coercion. Such a relationship between the technologies of self and power make it impossible to distinguish between the domination of the individual by a collective and the self-administration or self-conduct of the individual. In short, it is the “contact between the technologies of domination and those the self” that Foucault called “governmentality.”

Within the context of Rushdoony’s theonomic system, the “contact point” between the self and power does not develop in the enclosures of power that typically concerned Foucault—such as the prison or the asylum—nor does it flow primarily through the state, bureaucracy, or the factory. Instead, Rushdoony begins with “Christian self government” as the primary technology of the self, a system of caring for and

209 Ibid., 18.
210 Ibid.
212 Ibid., 21.
213 Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” 19.
cultivating the self that operates through the differentiating constraints of Biblical law.

The process of Christian Reconstruction is the confluence of the epistemological discipline of theonomy and the concomitant theonomic work of the law on the body and the mind of the Christian male. 215 This epistemological- and self-reconstruction works through techniques of discipline and conduct instantiated primarily in the form of the family. 216 These technologies of the family 217—those forms of power that “determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination” and “objectivize” the subject of Christian Reconstruction—are what I have referred to in the course of this chapter as familialization.

To conclude, I would then follow Foucault, who wondered,

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215 As I did in chapter 3, I follow Foucault’s suggestion that we will find governmentality at the nexus of doctrine, individual forms of behavior, and in “strongly organized groups” (Michel Foucault, Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78, ed. Michel Senellart et al., trans. Graham Burchell, Lectures at the Collège de France (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 204).

216 As we saw above, it also occurs in the spheres of the church, school, and state, but Rushdoony is clear that all Reconstruction begins in the contact of self with the family; Rushdoony, Salvation and Godly Rule, 606.

217 I owe use of this phrase to Lee Wiles-Op, my colleague in Comparative Studies at Ohio State, who has developed Foucault’s ideas to formulate ways for talking about the ways sentiments and disciplines of the family are instantiated in individual family members and extended into a network of familialized relations. As Wiles-Op notes,

Foucault defined a number of “technologies” by which subjectivities and objects are constituted or constitute themselves within fields of culture, power, and materiality. Foucault did not, to my knowledge, write about the “technologies” by which families are formed, prioritized, privileged, felt, and practiced. Nonetheless, the “technologies of the self” concept that he employed to describe the formation of subjectivities lends itself very well to discussions of the discursive contributing factors that structure families in specific ways (LeeWiles-Op, “(Un)Sealing Kinship: Latter-day Saint Genealogy and the Composition of Family Among the Living and the Dead” [paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Region of the American Academy of Religion, Augustana College, Rock Island, IL, 2010], 16n2).

Wiles-Op is primarily interested with intersection between specific Mormon (LDS) discourses related to genealogical research, Temple work, and the way these religious technologies structure “traditional” family units. My focus is, of course, quite different, but Wiles-Op’s highly suggestive and useful discussion pointed me to the intersection between “technologies of the self” and the “technologies of power” evident in the Rushdoony’s theonomic discourse.
whether we may not envisage modernity rather as an attitude than as a period of history. And by ‘attitude,’ I mean a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same times marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task.\textsuperscript{218}

The task here is “indissociable from a desperate eagerness to imagine it, to imagine it otherwise that it is, and to transform it not by destroying it but by grasping it in what it is.”\textsuperscript{219} Modern man, or the transmodern one in my case, “is not the man who goes off to discover himself…; he is the man who tries to invent himself. This modernity does not ‘liberate man in his own being;’ it compels him to face the task of producing himself.”\textsuperscript{220} Rushdoony was concerned with this process of self production. The transmodern self of dominion man is (re)constructed through theonomy, a set of counter-conducts of governmentality instantiated in the family and cultivated via a network of family-oriented organizational structures such as the Chalcedon Foundation, homeschools, seminaries, and alternative civic organizations. In the next chapter I outline how this process of self production played out in specific, concrete instances and introduce some self-described “dominion men.”


\textsuperscript{219} Ibid., 41.

\textsuperscript{220} Ibid., 42.
Chapter 5: “They Would Call Themselves ‘Dominion’ Men”

*The Proliferation and Disintegration of Christian Reconstruction*

“History is a battle ground on which God is presently the Aggressor and Satan the defender. Satan initially struck at God through man, and God intends to crush Satan through the instrument of humanity…. Christ is God’s primary Agent, but in union with Him, the saints are also members of the aggressor army, before which hell’s gates cannot stand….”


“Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?”

– Song of Solomon 6:10 (KJV)

With the publication of the *Institutes of Biblical Law* in 1973, Rushdoony emerged as national figure among theologically and socially conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists. In 1974 *Christianity Today*—the evangelical monthly founded by Rev. Billy Graham—theologian Harold O. J. Brown declared, “Without a doubt, the most impressive theological work of 1973 is Rousas J. Rushdoony’s *Institutes of Biblical Law*, a compendious treatment of a whole gamut of questions in governmental, social, and personal ethics from the perspective of the principle of law and the purpose of restoration of divine order in a fallen world.” This acknowledgement of Rushdoony’s mammoth theological work totaled only two sentences but it pointed to the ever-wider reception his

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work was receiving from outside the rather narrow religious and political circles he had
worked in for much of his life. Indeed, the 1970s marked a turning point in Rushdoony’s
ministry in which he became a national figure within three interconnected spheres of
conservative religious and political activism: education reform, judicial activism, and
political organization. Each of these areas of emerged more or less simultaneously out of
his work at Chalcedon to diagnosis and treat the social turmoil and moral disease of the
1960s. Rushdoony, the *Institutes*, and the Chalcedon Foundation were three densely
interconnected nodes in a vast, amorphous network of imbricated religious figures,
institutions, practices, and ideas that would temporarily coalesce at the end of the 1970s
into that “thing” that we now call, for convenience’s sake, the “New Christian Right” or
the “religious right.”

In this chapter I summarize the history of Christian Reconstruction following the
publication of Rushdoony’s *Institutes*. I begin with a brief discussion of Rushdoony’s
continued effort to build the Chalcedon Foundation into a Christian college and how this
mission developed into a broader agenda to alter the fundamental aspects of the
American public education system. Next, I take readers through a tour of the netherworld
of Reconstructionist theology as embodied in the so-called “Tyler Theology,” a complex
mix of Rushdoony-style Reconstruction, paramilitary survivalism, and aggressive
theological polemics. This second section demonstrates the ways in which personal
disputes conflated with theological disagreements to fracture Reconstructionism into
multiple competing camps. Third and finally, I locate Reconstructionism within the
broader “New Christian Right” that coalesced in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This last
section explores how Rushdoony’s vision of Christian Reconstruction helped inform the
intellectual and organizational leaders of the Christian Right while also highlighting stark differences between the two movements.

I. OF CLASSROOMS AND COURTROOMS

As I indicated in chapters 3 and 4, R. J. Rushdoony’s initial vision for the Chalcedon was to build the foundation into a Christian college dedicated to popularizing and teaching an unapologetically presuppositional approach to human knowledge. In chapter 3, I outlined the epistemological implications of planned institution. This section builds on that discussion to explore how the counter-conducts implicit in this project manifested themselves in Rushdoony’s effort to develop Chalcedon into an institutional foundation for reconstructing the United States into a uniquely Christian confederation of feudal states. I will follow this process through what I have broken into three distinct stages. 1) The ultimate failure to found Chalcedon College; 2) the shift away from forming a college toward something more unique and, in retrospect, quite affective: the creation of a network of loosely affiliated scholars, activists, politicians, lawyers, and family units that all dedicated themselves to reconstructing American culture, but did so in a decentralized, pluralistic manner; and, finally, 3) the splintering of this decentralized, non-institutionalized movement into various competing and cooperating factions that managed to have a subtle yet profound influence on theologically and socially conservative Protestants in the United States.

When Rushdoony formed Chalcedon, Inc. in 1965 he hoped to use the foundation “To establish, conduct and maintain an educational institution, offering courses of
instruction beyond high school.”3 The faculty teaching these courses would “promote orthodox Christian scholarship”4 and instill in the students a basic “understanding of law from a Christian perspective.”5 In 1968 Chalcedon secured tax-exempt status from the IRS and began to draw in regular contributions from supporters. Tax exemption, according to David Watson’s history of the Christian Reconstruction movement, allowed Chalcedon to “more closely adhere to its original objectives. Additional scholars received assistance to write books and to see them to publication. … A tape ministry was begun and seminars were conducted around the country in which Rushdoony and outside experts spoke on topics in the field of education, economics, and creation studies.”6 The foundation grew slowly but steadily with support from a host of right-wing public figures such as Walter Knott and numerous smaller supporters involved in grassroots conservative organizations.

In spite of this success, Rushdoony struggled to raise the funds necessary to buy and develop a campus for the college, ultimately becoming mired in a real estate boondoggle involving a large ranch property in San Luis Obispo County, California. This debacle spoiled Rushdoony’s relationships with some of his earliest supporters and set Chalcedon back years because of the legal related to the failed venture. Eventually, in 1977 Rushdoony raised the necessary capital to allow him to purchase a thirty-acre site in

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4 Draft answers to H. J. Grant of the Internal Revenue Service, n.d. [c. August 1965], RJR Library.

5 Ibid.

northern California near Vallecito, a tiny town in Mother Lode country. Although, Rushdoony returned to his original plan of building a campus for his college, Chalcedon’s focus had shifted in the intervening years to a different set of educational issues.

By the late 1970s, Chalcedon was focusing its attention on advocacy in church/state legal disputes specifically related to matters of homeschooling and private education at the elementary and secondary levels. This change in focus was precipitated by a series of U.S. Supreme Court rulings that allowed both the federal and state governments to regulate education more tightly. Three rulings proved particularly distressing to Rushdoony and many other conservative Christians. First, the combined weight of *Engel v. Vitale* (1962), *Murray v. Curlett*, and *Abington School District v. Schempp* (both delivered in a single, consolidated ruling in 1963) effectively ended the practice of prayer and Bible reading in public schools. Further, in a lower federal court ruling, *Green v. Connally* (1971), a three-judge D.C. district court upheld an IRS decision

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7 Ibid., 23.

8 *Engel v. Vitale* was a landmark ruling in which the court determined that it is unconstitutional for public schools to compose and encourage the recitation of an official school prayer even if the prayer is non-denominational and students are allowed to rescue themselves from its recitation. The prayer in question read, “Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence upon Thee, and we beg Thy blessings upon us, our parents, our teachers and our country. Amen.”

9 *Murray v. Curlett* and *Abington School District v. Schempp* are a consolidated 8-1 ruling that prohibited the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer and the reading of the Bible in public schools. Atheist activist Madelyn Murray brought the former case challenging a Baltimore statue that required, “reading, without comment, of a chapter of the Holy Bible and/or of the Lord's Prayer.” In *Abington* the court similarly ruled against a Pennsylvania statue that required that ten verses from the Holy Bible be read each school day. Further, the ruling opened the possibility of teaching about religion in public schools and was the impetus for the establishment of many religious studies programs in public universities.

10 These rulings, in turn, relied on the court’s logic in *Cantwell v. Connecticut* (1940) and *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947). The former used the fourteenth amendment to incorporate the first amendment into the Bill Rights, thereby applying it not only to the federal governments but also to the states. Following *Cantwell*, the court ruled in *Everson* that the first amendment prohibition against religious establishment applied to the states.
to revoke the tax-exempt status of any organization that engaged in racial discrimination because such an organization could not be a “charitable” organization. *Green* addressed a private segregated school in Mississippi but had implications for churches, clubs, schools, etc. Using this precedent, the IRS set more rigorous tax guidelines and enraged religious conservatives when it applied them to Bob Jones University (BJU) and eventually revoked the University’s tax-exempt status in the late 1970s.

These rulings and the IRS’s pursuit of BJU worried Rushdoony and a host of other conservative Christian leaders, prompting them to create of loose coalition of figures and organizations determined to resist what they perceived as an orchestrated secular humanist attack on religious establishments. The outcry was so vocal and fierce that Randall Balmer has gone so far as to argue that the *Green* ruling was the tipping point that produced the political machinery of the Religious Right. According to Balmer, *Green*

galvanized evangelical leaders who, at the behest of the conservative activist Paul Weyrich, united in defense of Bob Jones University—and in defense, they insisted, of the sanctity of evangelical institutions. Leaders of the Religious Right decided later to add other issues—prayer in schools, pornography, abortion—to their political agenda in preparation for the 1980 presidential campaign.\(^{11}\)

While one might quibble with aspects of Balmer’s thesis,\(^{12}\) it is undisputable that a series of court rulings culminating in *Green* prompted many socially and theologically

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\(^{12}\) Balmer has made this argument to problematize the typical narrative that evangelicals created a political infrastructure to respond to *Roe v. Wade*. His suggestion that *Green* prompted the emergence of the Religious Right suggests that its motivation wasn’t to save babies, but to discriminate against minorities. He bases this assessment on comments regarding the *Green* case made by Paul Weyrich in a meeting of conservatives in the 1990s. This tale is fully recounted in Randall H. Balmer, *Thy Kingdom Come: An Evangelical’s Lament* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 13-14. Balmer’s argument is intriguing and its implications are, as historian Milton Gaither notes, “deliciously scandalous,” but it is not completely
conservative Christians into action. As historian Milton Gaither notes, “For the first time a pan-denominational coalition of Christian conservatives united in vocal opposition to the Federal Government’s attempt to regulate them. Tens of thousands, many of whom had never done so before, wrote letters to congress protesting the IRS initiative.” In short, a series of unpopular court rulings led many evangelicals to think differently about American politics and their relationship to local, state, and federal institutions.

With this in mind, I would suggest that beginning with Engel and accelerating forward to Green, it is certain that some evangelicals saw the combined weight of these rulings as direct threats to their ability to practice their faith, educate their children, and govern their own lives. Beyond these legal decisions, but directly related to their “liberalizing” effects, a series of high profile battles over the public school such as the Kanawha County, West Virginia, textbook controversy illustrated to many evangelicals how political, judicial, and cultural issues were intimately interrelated. While some

convincing (Homeschool: An American History, [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008], 112). Many evangelicals (such as Franky Schaeffer) have pointed out that it took years to mobilize other evangelicals to resist Roe, but this doesn’t necessarily mean that Green is the alternative silver bullet that explains the emergence of the Religious Right’s political machinery. Schaeffer argues that his film, Whatever Happened to the Human Race? actually prompted the turn to politics; see Frank Schaeffer, Crazy for God: How I Grew Up as One of the Elect, Helped Found the Religious Right, and Lived to Take All (or Almost All) of It Back (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2008), 260-293. Schaeffer’s account of the rise of the Religious Right, when read in conjunction with William C. Martin, With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America, (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 194-195; 239-240, is as reasonable as Balmer’s. Further, as I’ll argue below, some evangelicals such as Rushdoony did enter politics in the 1970s in response to court decisions, but not necessarily as a specific response to Green. Green was, at best, the motivation of some evangelicals to enter politics; the larger legal context can’t be reduced to Green no matter what Weyrich may have boasted.

For the relationship between the Green ruling and other important rulings and how they prompted varied Christian legal responses, see Martin, With God on Our Side, 168-173; R. Jonathan Moore, Suing for America’s Soul: John Whitehead, the Rutherford Institute, and Conservative Christians in the Courts, Emory University Studies in Law and Religion (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 24-33.

Gaither, Homeschool, 111. Gaither also partially refutes Balmer’s charges in a round about way by showing that very few private Christian schools were actually affected by the IRS tax changes, and that by the 1980s the IRS had generally stopped pursuing such cases (112).
evangelicals opted to fight for the political control of local school boards, these controversies, according to William Martin, also “spurred… the growth of private Christian day schools and an increase in home schooling.”

It is in this broad-based and national struggle to define the limits of the “Christian” classroom and its relationship to the “secular” courtroom that Chalcedon found it’s new calling in the 1970s.

The (Familialized) Classroom

Since the publication of Intellectual Schizophrenia in 1961, Rushdoony had been at the forefront of movement to encourage theologically and culturally conservative Christian parents to remove their children from publicly financed, secular schools. The book jumpstarted his career as a public defender of homeschooling and made him a major celebrity in the small but growing subculture of homeschooling Christians. Intellectual Schizophrenia homed in on the secularization of American public education, and like many theologically conservative critics of public education, argued that the dechristianization of education would lead to moral degeneration and cultural collapse.

Unlike many homeschooling proponents, however, Rushdoony’s criticism of public education did not begin with an assessment of its failed pedagogy. Instead, Rushdoony’s attack on public education remains largely unique in theologically conservative circles because of his focus on the epistemological foundation of what he labels variously “secular” “humanistic” or “statist” education and his development of the

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15 Martin, With God on Our Side, 139.

oppositional category “Christian scholarship.” Rushdoony’s critique of education is a radical one that attempts to dig straight to the roots of public education and expose the political consequences of its epistemological foundation. Specifically, Rushdoony traces public education to its ultimate source—sovereignty.

The Christians Rushdoony spoke and wrote to in the 1960s and 1970s were sought to reverse a century-long trend of ceding family control of life to other institutions. In his conclusion to a study of the history of the family in North America during the seventeenth century, historian John Demos, summarizes this trend: “broadly speaking, the history of the family in America has been a history of contraction and withdrawal; its central theme is the gradual surrender to other institutions of functions that once lay very much within the realm of family responsibility.” Rushdoony identified this historical tendency as a disease and sought to diagnose it as a specific symptom of man’s rebellion against the sovereign power of God’s law. His prognosis was that humans could beat this illness through the steady re-familization of life. Thus, as I argued in the chapter three, this problem of sovereignty is directly related to antinomian men’s rebellious attempt to find salvation in the power of the secular state to structure and govern the lives of Christians. Public education was, in Rushdoony’s eyes, the first step in the process of the de-familiaization—and therefore of de-Christianization—of U.S. culture. For Christian parents to “surrender children to the state is to turn them over to the enemy.” Such an action invites God’s collective

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judgment on a generation of parents and their children who have rejected the absolute sovereignty of the Lord.

The solution to this rebellion, according to Rushdoony, is to reestablish the family as humanity’s educational womb. In this sense, to return to my argument from chapter four, the family is God’s primary instrument for reconstructing the forces of antinomianism and reasserting God’s sovereignty over the lives of men. The family’s role in educating the next generation transcends all other institutions or social spheres and, as such, it is the only legally legitimate space for educating children: “… the best and truest educators are parents under God. … The moral training of the child, the discipline of good habits, is an inheritance from the parent to the child which surpasses all other. The family is the first and basic school of man.”19 The consequence of this logic is that Christians not only have an obligation to educate their children, but that they also must free the children from public, state-funded education of any sort.

Rushdoony’s analysis of education—most consistently expanded in Intellectual Schizophrenia and its in companion volumes The Messianic Nature of American Education20 and The Philosophy of the Christian Curriculum21—has since become the foundation of a vast movement of Christian educators, some of whom know of his “pioneering”22 work, and some of whom do not. This work put Rushdoony at the forefront of a movement that, as Milton Gaither indicates in his masterful history of

19 Ibid.
22 Gaither, Homeschool, 134-140.
American homeschooling, is steadily reversing the trend of de-familization that Demos indicated in the quotation I cited above:

> in our own time we are seeing a reversal of this longstanding pattern [identified by Demos]. Homeschooling is only the most obvious example here. … Some of the fuss over homeschooling may be due to the fact that it has been on the cutting edge of a larger renegotiation of the accepted boundaries between public and private, personal and institutional.\textsuperscript{23}

In short, Rushdoony’s effort to re-familize education is part of a much larger process underway in American culture. Seen from within this large perspective, Rushdoony might rightly be called a “pioneer” as I indicated above, but the reality is far more complex: he is a node or a knot in large, shifting assemblage of practices, texts, ideas, and cultural patterns that organize certain material, affective, and cultural flows into a more or less familiar domestic and familial structure (centered around a mother, a father, and their offspring) that most Americans would recognize as a nuclear family unit.

Rushdoony is unique, however, in that he and his life’s work manifest as a particularly intense concentration of these flows. Further, through his work, he enrolled numerous allies into his project of Christian reconstruction, thereby extending the reach of his ideas, texts, and familial sentiments well beyond the limits of his own family.

A clear example of his success at enrolling allies in his familial struggle can be found in the widespread acceptance of his idea in the Christian homeschooling movement. For example, beyond the frequent citation and use of Rushdoony’s philosophical studies of American education that I cited above, two of his public lectures series have become fixtures in Christian homeschooling curriculums: *A Christian Survey*...
of World History and American History to 1865. These works circulate freely in certain circles of homeschoolers that may not be fully aware of Rushdoony’s larger project of Christian reconstruction. As a result of the wide use of these texts, Rushdoony’s impact on the pedagogical and epistemological presuppositions of homeschooling parents is inestimable:

… in the homeschooling movement Rushdoony’s influence has been direct and powerful. His writings have bequeathed to the conservative wing of the homeschooling movement both a strong sense of opposition between God’s law and human laws and a tendency to think of itself as a divinely guided instrument in restoring a Christian American. Many homeschooling families and organizations are every bit as serious about integrating the Bible into public and private life as was Rushdoony, and they see the homeschooling of their children as the first step in the process…

But to limit Rushdoony to his effect on the re-familialized classroom is far too simplistic. Even as he was writing and lecturing to parents who wanted to teach their children to become self-conscious Christians, he began lobbying for and building the legal and institutional mechanisms necessary to protect the rights of these parents and their children. It is in this sense that Rushdoony used the public space of America’s


25 Fritz Detwiler has persuasively argued that Rushdoony’s work (along with that of Francis A. Schaeffer, IV) has also influenced many reform efforts within the public schools; see his Standing on the Promises of God: The Christian Right’s Fight to Redefine America’s Public Schools (New York: New York University Press, 1999). Interestingly, Rushdoony would have never supported such efforts. As he wrote to Bill Moyers, “I am against the coercive attempts by the state schools to control all independent schools. Why should I attempt to use coercion against the public schools?” He didn’t want compulsory public education to be Christianized; he wanted Christians to be free of the public schools (R. J. Rushdoony to William Moyers, January 5, 1988, RJR Library.

26 Gaither, Homeschool, 137.
courtrooms to carve out the private, domestic spaces necessary for the familializing process of Christian Reconstruction to thrive.

*The Courtroom*

By the 1970s, American conservatives—religious or otherwise—had reached the general consensus that jurisprudence in the U.S. had swung too far to the left. During this period, conservatives began their aggressive rhetorical condemnation of “activist judges” who “legislate from the bench” because these same liberals couldn’t win at the ballot box. Of course, the reality is much more complicated than this rhetorical trope indicates. As Steven M. Teles has argued, throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, the legal profession in the U.S. underwent a seismic shift as a network of public interest law firms began to seek reforms through legal rather than political mechanisms.27 Through the effort of a painstakingly built and well-funded network of advocacy groups, “liberals” were able to secure a series of major judicial victories regarding civil rights, women’s right, environmental protection, church/state separation, and so on, that eventually became controversial cornerstones of contemporary American culture.

Conservatives, who regarded many of these rulings with suspicion and even hostility, found themselves generally unprepared and unable to resist these judicial shifts. The result, according to Teles, was a slow process of trail and error, failure and mixed success whereby conservatives built a counter-network of public interest law firms. These firms were staffed by “authentic members of a conservative ‘new class’” who were “products of a new constellation of conservative institutions committed to a set of

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ideological principles rather than corporate interests.” Rushdoony’s own Chalcedon Foundation was itself part and parcel of this “new constellation of conservative institutions” that helped create and was the creation of this movement of men and ideas dedicated to enacting the abstract ideological commitments of the right. It should not be surprising then, that Rushdoony was one of the first activists and thinkers among theologically and socially conservative Protestants to realize the importance of public interest law for not only defending what remained of America’s “Christian” heritage, but also for creating new social, political, and cultural potentialities for conservative Christians.

As Rushdoony lectured on the Christian education circuit to promote his interpretation of a Christ-centered elementary and secondary school curriculum, he became increasingly aware of a distressing trend: parents and church leaders who had sought refuge from public education by establishing homeschools and church schools were being prosecuted for running afoul of state and federal regulations. In many cases, the parents found themselves being prosecuted by local authorities for refusing to meet this or that standard of the state-established curriculum or for failing to fully disclose some aspect of their bureaucratic operations. As Rushdoony encountered parents and attorneys involved in these cases he began putting them in contact with one another. As a result, he managed to slowly stitch together an ad hoc network of Christians united by their hitherto unknown common goal of abandoning public schools.

By the middle of the 1970s Rushdoony was spending more and more time weaving this net together. Phone calls came daily from parents and pastors engaged in

28 Ibid., 221.
these cases and Rushdoony began counseling them on how to handle the cases.\footnote{By the early 1980s, these calls for counsel and information came daily, and in some cases almost hourly. In the next section, I cite a letter (R. J. Rushdoony to James B. Jordan, March 12, 1981, RJR Library), at length that highlights how important Rushdoony had become as the networker-in-chief of the Christian homeschooling movement.} “One of growing, time-consuming, but necessary activities,” he wrote to someone seeking Chalcedon literature on independent schooling, “is answering telephone calls from groups facing state and federal pressures to give them counsel.”\footnote{R. J. Rushdoony to George Pearson, n.d., RJR Library.} Rushdoony blamed this necessary work on the failure of a previous generation of evangelicals to stand up and resist a half-century’s worth of court rulings: “It has been the dereliction and withdraw from social relevancy of conservative Christianity which has led to our present plight. It is a happy irony of history that they are now being compelled to make the key resistance.”\footnote{Ibid.}

Pressing the work forward, Rushdoony distributed literature and served as counsel to homeschooling parents. But he didn’t stop there; he also began putting Christians into contact with sympathetic lawyers, seeking out large-money donors, and, when all else failed, earmarking some of Chalcedon’s limited funds to help in the cases. For example, in the mid-1970s, after Rushdoony travelled to Cleveland, Ohio, and meet David Gibbs, an attorney defending Christian clients against the Ohio Department of Education. Rushdoony believed the state was “requiring all Christian schools to teach humanism,”\footnote{R. J. Rushdoony to Nelson Bunker Hunt, April 15, 1976, RJR Library.} but he thought his “

\textit{Messianic Character of American Education} has sparked resistance in Ohio to the state educational code’s requirement that \textit{all} schools teach humanism.

Parents this fall will be charged and their children taken from them for having their
children in Christian schools.”\textsuperscript{33} If the Christian schools refused to teach humanism, Rushdoony believed that the state they would be shut down and the parents prosecuted.

In an attempt to help Gibbs in his case against Ohio, Rushdoony put him in contact with Lawrence D. Pratt, a Rushdoony confidant and important player in the American conservative movement who would later serve as president of Gun Owners of America. Pratt was setting up a legal organization called the Foundation for Law and Society. Rushdoony hoped to convince Texas oilman and then-billionaire Nelson Bunker Hunt to support Gibbs and Pratt, writing, “Their work will be of central importance in the legal defense of Christian Liberty for Christian schools, for business enterprise, etc. … Any assistance you can give them will help us establish a very important agency in the defense of our Christian freedom.”\textsuperscript{34} As a result of all of this networking, by the late 1970s Rushdoony established a small but impressive rolodex of Christians who knew the ins and outs of the U.S. legal system, and he wanted to put them to use.

Further, in a significant departure from his early activities, Rushdoony spent a considerable amount of time convincing able young Christian men to attend law schools instead of seminary. Of the many bright and most determined young lawyers that Rushdoony encourage to litigate in the interest of Christian liberty, John W. Whitehead was certainly the most significant. At twenty-eight, Whitehead graduated from law school at the University of Arkansas and converted to evangelical Christianity after reading a copy of Hal Lindsey’s \textit{The Late Great Planet Earth},\textsuperscript{35} which he had purchased

\textsuperscript{33} Emphasis in the original. R. J. Rushdoony journal entry for April 7, 1976, RJR Library.

\textsuperscript{34} R. J. Rushdoony to Nelson Bunker Hunt, April 15, 1976, RJR Library.

\textsuperscript{35} Hal Lindsey, \textit{The Late Great Planet Earth} (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970).
from a J. C. Penney department store. Shortly after his conversion, Rushdoony recruited Whitehead to write a book on the legal issues surrounding the separation of church of state. During the late spring of 1976, Whitehead researched the book in Rushdoony’s massive library in Vallecito, and the following year, Whitehead published *The Separation Illusion: A Lawyer Examines the First Amendment*, to which Rushdoony provided the forward. As Whitehead toured to promote the book, Christians who had never heard of Rushdoony approached the young lawyer to ask about the author of the forward and Whitehead in turn put them into contact with Chalcedon. Through these contacts, Rushdoony widened his network of lawyers and Christians interested in pursuing legal cases against state and federal governments.

Through word of mouth and his lecturing tours, Rushdoony’s notoriety also spread in Christian homeschooling and day schooling circles. By the early 1980s, he had become a much sought after expert witness in court trials related to independent Christian education. As a highly polished public speaker used to debating and equipped with a seemingly encyclopedic knowledge of U.S. history, educational policy, and Christian theology, his testimony won the affection of Christians and baffled prosecutors. Between 1980 and 1988, Rushdoony testified no less than twenty-three times in court cases all over the United States. These cases related to Christian schooling, the establishment of

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36 Moore, *Suing for America’s Soul*, 37.

37 Rushdoony alluded to this research arrangement in a April 28, 1977, letter to Otto Scott: “An attorney was here briefly last summer, using some of my books for research on church and state relations in the U.S.; his book will be published later this year.” Further, he made several references to Whitehead’s visits in his personal journals.


39 This count is based on entries in Rushdoony’s journals.
religion by the state, the independence of Christian churches, and the right of preachers to engage in confrontational evangelistic tactics in public venues.

In many of these trials, Rushdoony’s insisted that the prosecution of Christian parents was not only wrong, but also sinful. During a trial of homeschooling parents in Macon, Georgia, Rushdoony testified that the trial was “evil because such trials have America’s finest on trial, while hoodlums are free in the streets”\(^{40}\) In another trail in Nebraska, as Rushdoony approached the witness stand, one women associated with the Christian defendant leaned to another and whispered, “Whose side is he on? Our side or theirs?”\(^{41}\) During the course of his testimony, the woman audibly concluded, “He’s not on our side. He’s on the Lord’s side.”\(^{42}\) Rushdoony’s intelligence and ferocity on the stand apparently prompted prosecutors to take him seriously as a threat to their cases. They made efforts in some cases to suppress his testimonies and, in a federal case in Maine, the government attorney produced carefully annotated copies of Chalcedon publications and used them during Rushdoony’s cross examination.\(^{43}\)

Rushdoony’s interest in these cases intensified to the point that it dominated the other activities of Chalcedon. In a letter to James B. Jordan, Rushdoony explained that he was using all of his lecture appearances as opportunities to drum up emotional and financial support for John Whitehead’s legal cases: “Chalcedon donates my time, travel expenses, and services; among other things, we help subsidize John Whitehead’s work in the courts. This is a financial drain, as well as a personal drain; it also limits my ability to

\(^{40}\) R. J. Rushdoony journal entry for April 12, 1983, RJR Library.
\(^{41}\) R. J. Rushdoony journal entry for February 4, 1983, RJR Library.
\(^{42}\) Ibid.
\(^{43}\) R. J. Rushdoony journal entry for February 22, 1983, RJR Library.
Indeed, Rushdoony’s support for Whitehead eventually led the two men to establish a Christian public interest law firm dedicated to defending homeschoolers or any other issue they deemed a threat to the free practice of the Christian faith. “I have asked John Whitehead,” Rushdoony wrote to a potential financial supporter of the project, “to draw up papers for a group, titled Christian Rights Foundation, to fight such cases wherever they are.”  The cases Rushdoony wanted the foundation to participate in were those that most conservative evangelical Christians felt didn’t concern them: “Christians refuse to unite on these matters in existing groups; i.e., different kinds of Baptists will not work together; Arminians and Calvinists will not work together; neither will work with Catholics, nor charismatics and there is a division among charismatics.” Specifically, he hope Whitehead would organize a foundation that would accept cases involving “heretical and non-Christian” organizations such as Church of Scientology because Rushdoony believed that if such cases were lost, then it “can destroy all churches and erode the First Amendment.”

Whitehead drew up plans for an ambitious new foundation aimed at nothing less than reconstructing America’s legal heritage in terms of a Christian heritage that Whitehead believed modern Americans had abandoned. The initial proposal for the foundation indicated that the “central purpose of the Christian Rights Foundation shall be

45 R. J. Rushdoony to Howard Ahmanson, September 8, 1980, RJR Library.
46 Ibid.
47 R. J. Rushdoony to Howard Ahmanson, September 8, 1980, RJR Library.
48 Ibid.
to promote, assure and enhance the freedom of Christians in the exercise of their faith in accordance with the guarantees of the United States Constitution.”

Organizationally, the foundation would have “branch offices across the United States that will effectively fight the legal battles necessary for reinstating a constitutional form of government.”

Epistemologically, Whitehead’s proposal relied heavily on Rushdoonian themes of return to constitutional values, moral reconstruction, and public education. The foundation would take as its primary duty to “reconstruct and revitalize America’s legal heritage” by training “lawyers and interested laymen” how to participate in “legal and political processes.” This process of education and reconstruction would “guide the American public to an understanding of and desire for a true legal and constitutional system based upon the philosophy of those who drafted the American founding documents.”

This vision seamlessly combined the broad goals of Christian reconstruction with the narrow vision of re-Christianizing one sphere of American culture. Rushdoony and Whitehead’s cooperation provides an illustration of how Christian reconstruction works: it is a decentralized process whereby certain intellectual and religious commitments are manifest in an institution, which in turn intensifies and broadcasts those commitments into other social spheres.

Chalcedon provided the initial capital needed to finance the formation of the foundation and, with the support of millionaire savings and loan heir Howard

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50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.
Ahmanson, Rushdoony located the necessary funds to support Whitehead’s vision. The Christian Rights Foundation changed its name, and eventually took shape as the Rutherford Institute. Named for Samuel Rutherford, the Scottish churchman and author of *Lex, Rex; or, the Law and the Prince* (1644). Rutherford’s quickly banned book challenged the divine right of kings (i.e., of Rex lex; that the king is the law), arguing that the king was subject to a greater law, a covenant established by God between the ruler and the ruled. Whitehead had previously highlighted Rutherford’s argument, using it as the theoretical heart to his own book, *The Second American Revolution*, which he published shortly before founding the Rutherford Institute. Whitehead argued that Rutherford’s ideas provided the moral foundation for the Colonies’ first revolution against the English crown and that contemporary Christians must similarly adopt Rutherford’s ideas as the moral foundation for their second revolution against the state’s encroachment on religious freedom.

In 1982, with all of the necessary elements assembled, Whitehead and Rushdoony incorporated the Rutherford Institute. Whitehead became the institute’s president. The board of directors consisted of three other Christian lawyers, and a cohort of non-lawyers including Rushdoony, Howard Ahmanson, and Franky Schaeffer, V. This trinity of non-lawyers on the board assembled three of the most significant evangelical personas of the early 1980s. Rushdoony, of course, was already well known among evangelical academics, activists, and seminarians as an intellectual dynamo. Ahmanson and

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53 In a letter requesting $75,000 from Ahmanson to “get the foundation going” Rushdoony noted, “we are financing all the preliminary work, because we feel the survival of all of us depends on it” (R. J. Rushdoony to Howard Ahmanson, September 8, 1980, RJR Library). Later, Rushdoony asked Ahmanson to contribute $100,000 per year to keep the foundation operating (R. J. Rushdoony to Howard Ahmanson, March 23, 1982, RJR Library).
Schaeffer rounded out the board as the reclusive moneyman and the flamboyant evangelical rockstar, respectively.

Ahmanson, then barely over thirty, was the heir to a savings and loan fortune estimated at $2.5 billion. Modest, humble, and reluctant to speak in public because of the awkward gestures and verbal outbursts associated with Tourette’s syndrome, Ahmanson was also a brilliant organizer who had determined to use his vast wealth to further Christian causes. In the course of his religious education, Ahmanson encountered Rushdoony’s writings. As one reporter who spent a considerable amount of time and had nearly unlimited access to Ahmanson noted, “For years, the books of the Rev. R. J. Rushdoony provided a cornerstone to his religious education.”

The two men had met in the late 1970s and, as was his wont, Rushdoony took the young man under his wing and cultivated Ahmanson’s talent according to Rushdoony’s unique interpretation of scripture. Rushdoony encouraged Ahmanson to practice dominion through Christian work, the very project Rushdoony had been engaged in most of his adult life. When Ahmanson came to Rushdoony asking advice about professional counseling, Rushdoony dismissed the suggestion: “You have both intelligence of a high order, and money. You need now to put both to work. There is no better solution to problems and tensions than productive work. … The knowledge of Scripture and our application of it heals and strengthens us. … Get to Christ’s work.” Work in terms of dominion was the best treatment for Ahmanson’s problems, and his resources assured that he could “get to Christ’s work” in ways Rushdoony could only dream of. In part

54 Peter Larsen, “Part 1: Burden of Wealth,” The Orange County Register, August 8, 2004, sec. A.
because of Rushdoony’s direct counsel, Ahmanson became a frequent contributor to the Chalcedon Foundation and Whitehead’s Rutherford Institute. In fact, after Whitehead secured tax-exempt status for Rutherford, Ahmanson agreed to contribute $25,000 and continued his generous support for nearly a decade.  

Unlike Ahmanson, Franky Schaeffer was brash and combative. He relished a confrontation and was famous in evangelical circles for his films, books, and public debates. Franky was the son of Francis A. Schaeffer, IV (1912-1984), a Reformed theologian who had studied under Cornelius Van Til at Westminster Theological Seminary. There he learned an apologetic framework that he then popularized in a series of books and films advancing uniquely Christian critiques of Western culture that paralleled Rushdoony’s work on law, politics, and social reform. The senior Schaeffer had started L’Abri, a sort of communal seminary and educational retreat for Christians interested in studying cultural and philosophical issues, in the Swiss Alps in the 1950s. The “Shelter” drew a constant flow of curiosity seekers, exhausted hippies, and Christian dropouts to Europe where they could argue with Fran, as Schaeffer was known to his friends, and whet their apologetic and philosophical skills. While running l’Abri with his wife, Edith, the elder Schaeffer authored a series of bestselling books on the subject of secular humanism and its place in Western culture.


Working as a director and producer, Franky wrote his father’s ideas in lightening with film versions of the books *How should We then Live?*\(^{58}\) and *What Ever Happened to the Human Race?*\(^{59}\) The latter was particularly significant and is frequently cited by evangelicals and scholars alike as a primary impetus behind Protestant resistance to the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in *Roe v. Wade*.\(^{60}\) Beyond his films, Franky Schaeffer also authored several polemical works that urged evangelical activism on political and social issues. Most notably, his *A Time for Anger* freely cited Rushdoony’s work and recommended Chalcedon to his readers.\(^{61}\) Although Franky Schaeffer later claimed that his influential father had thought that Rushdoony as “clinically insane” and Franky personally dismissed Rushdoony as “our version of the Taliban,”\(^{62}\) during the early 1980s

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\(^{60}\) Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 239.

\(^{61}\) See for instance, Franky Schaeffer, *A Time for Anger: The Myth of Neutrality* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1982), 205. Watson claims that in some of his other works, “Schaeffer did not give the credit to the theonomists which was due them” (Watson, “Theonomy,” 36).

\(^{62}\) Schaeffer, *Crazy for God*, 333. Franky Schaeffer’s charge that his father believed Rushdoony was “clinically insane” may be true, but it probably reflects a retrospective assessment of Rushdoony’s ideas rather than any statement made openly by his father. First, as I note in section three below, Francis Schaeffer relied on Rushdoony’s ideas and they shared citations and sources during the late 1970s and early ‘80s. Furthermore, Schaeffer regularly used Rushdoony’s books in his study groups at l’Abri (William Edgar, “The Passing of R. J. Rushdoony,” *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*, August/September, 2001). I think it is fair to suggest that it is unlikely Schaeffer would have sought guidance from and paid such intellectual respect to a madman. Second, Schaeffer and Rushdoony did correspond occasionally. In one telling letter from the late 1970s, Schaeffer told Rushdoony of his latest round of cancer tests and warmly thanked him and Gary North for their support (Francis A. Schaeffer to R. J. Rushdoony, November 20, 1978, RJR Library). For his part Rushdoony thought highly of Schaeffer and wrote of him, “We were friends, we differed at points but never argued about them.” Further, attesting to their intimate association, Rushdoony also knew some of the last words Schaeffer ever spoke: “Please, Father, take me home. I’m very tired” (R. J. Rushdoony to John Kistler, March 3, 1990, RJR Library). This latter point strongly implies that Rushdoony was present at Schaeffer’s bedside near the end of his life or that Schaeffer’s family was close enough with Rushdoony to relay such a story to him. Either way, it suggests that Schaeffer’s feelings for Rushdoony were far more complex than Franky Schaeffer implies.
Schaeffer openly cooperated with Rushdoony, Whitehead, and other prominent figures on the Christian right. Franky’s high profile as an author and filmmaker made him an essential component of the Rutherford Institute’s fundraising efforts and public relation campaigns.

Slowly but surely Whitehead used the notoriety of his board of directors to build a public interest law firm that eventually became highly significant within American religious and political history. Historian R. Jonathan Moore has argued that the Rutherford Institute “represents a particularly important organization” because its genesis “helps to explain the rise of conservative Christian legal advocacy groups in late twentieth century America.”\(^6^3\) Further, Whitehead blazed a path and developed legal and political tactics that many of “its younger peers imitated.”\(^6^4\) Eventually, Ahmanson and Rushdoony left the board of directors as Rutherford, under Whitehead’s leadership, away farther from its origins in Christian Reconstructionism and began to look more like a generically “conservative” public interest firm. Whitehead would later go on to use Rutherford’s resources to serve as co-counsel to Paula Jones in the landmark Supreme Court ruling *Jones v. Clinton* in which the Court concluded that a sitting president has no immunity against civil law suits.

But before Whitehead struck out on his own legal path, he and the Rutherford Institute were part of the process of Christian reconstruction. This isn’t to say either that Whitehead was a Christian Reconstructionist or that he was a disciple of Rushdoony. Any attempt to explain reconstruction in terms of direct, linear causality or limit it to

\(^{63}\) Moore, *Suing for America’s Soul*, 5.

\(^{64}\) Ibid.
Rushdoony’s direct intellectual influence on an individual entirely misses the point of Rushdoony’s wider project. Whitehead will likely spend the rest of his life denying that he was ever a Reconstructionist, but such denials hardly free him from the burden of the project that he clearly agreed with in the early 1980s. Further, to Rushdoony’s postmillennialist eyes, even those who publicly renounce and reject the project of Christian reconstruction may ultimately contribute to the long-term re-Christianization of the U.S. Dominion is neither realized in a single generation, nor is it a top-down process dependent upon the conscious actions of men like Whitehead. The social and political spaces created by Whitehead and other Christian lawyers during the 1980s and ‘90s created environments in which Rushdoony’s explicitly Christian from of familialized education could survive and in some contexts flourish. The long-term consequences of the combined legal and judicial strategy at least theoretically implies subsequent generations can use these precedents to further dominion and eventually reconstruct the entirety of U.S. culture under Christ’s law.

II. “MY DREAM WOULD BE THE STATE’S NIGHTMARE”

Even as Rushdoony greatly increased the potential for Christian reconstruction through his work in education and America’s courtrooms, another vision of Christian reconstruction was emerging from the work a second generation of scholars and activists

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65 Moore notes that since the 1990s Whitehead’s and the Rutherford Institute’s “ideology and practice had shifted just enough to make religious conservatives uncomfortable with the prospect of aligning themselves with Whitehead’s operation.” By this point in his career, Whitehead offered frequent and vigorous denials of that he ever fully accepted Rushdoony’s ideas or that Rutherford’s goal was to Christianize America. See ibid., 190-191.

66 Again, as Moore points out, “Whether or not [Whitehead] ‘evolved’ away from Reconstructionist particularism later in his career, during the seventies and early eighties Whitehead clearly found Reconstructionism useful as a framework in which to locate his specific church-state analysis” (ibid., 57-58.).
Rushdoony had supported religiously, financially, and emotionally during the 1960s and 1970s. This new generation of reconstructionists agreed with the broad outlines of Rushdoony’s project but they took issue with his insistence on the centrality of the family in the project of Christian reconstruction. In fact, soon after the publication of the *Institutes of Biblical Law* in 1973, these younger advocates of reconstruction began to argue that other institutions were as central, if not more so, than the family. Two of the most significant figures to join in the project of reconstruction during the 1970s began to argue that Rushdoony—in spite of his good work to protect the place of the family and the rights of Christians to educate their children as they saw fit—had ignore the place of the church in the project of reconstruction. Two key proponents of this position were Greg Bahnsen and Rushdoony’s son-in-law, Gary North.

As a child, Greg Bahnsen was raised in the highly conservative Orthodox Presbyterian Church and was consequently open to the more conservative aspects of Reformed theology. He converted to Rushdoony’s theonomic position after he heard the latter lecture on the subject of Biblical law at Westmont College in Santa Barbara. While at Westmont in the late 1960s, Bahnsen began to write for Rushdoony’s *Chalcedon Report* and eventually earned divinity and theology degrees from Westminster Theological Seminary and a Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Southern California. With this impressive academic pedigree, Bahnsen landed a teaching job at Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS) in Jackson, Mississippi, and began teaching on the

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subject of theonomy. Even within a conservative institution such as RTS, theonomy was a highly controversial subject.

Before being fired from RTS in 1978 Bahnsen had taught a group of students who would later become associated with a small Presbyterian church in Tyler, Texas. His students, including James B. Jordan and David Chilton, all agreed with the basic contours of Rushdoony’s project of Christian reconstruction, but they also became convinced that they needed to focus their attention on reconstructing the church on the foundation of Biblical law. When Gary North joined Bahnsen’s former students in Tyler, they created a rival form of Christian Reconstructionism that drastically changed the movement. The Tyler Reconstructionists developed a theology that was different than what Rushdoony envisioned as the foundation for legitimate Christian political and social activism.

“Scary” Gary

In chapter 4, I outlined how Gary North first came into contact with Rushdoony in 1962, and the two began a long and incredibly complex relationship. This section specifically explores how this relationship was strained by the intense, combative personalities of the two men. It also documents how familial tensions between North and Rushdoony paralleled a theological and organizational schism within the reconstruction movement and led to the creation of two distinct and antagonistic camps, one located in California and centered on Rushdoony in Vallecito, and another concentrated in Tyler, Texas.

In the 1960s, it seems that Rushdoony immediately recognized North’s potential from their first exchange of letters. Rushdoony worked to help North gain a foothold

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inside the intuitions of post-War libertarianism and conservatism—especially the Volker Fund and the Center for American Studies—and pushed him to his ill-fated tenure at Westminster Theological Seminary, one of the most prestigious educational institutions in conservative theological circles. Further, Rushdoony also helped North pursue the study of “Christian” economics within the context of the secular academy.

After departing Westminster, North initially enrolled at University of California, Los Angeles, in the fall of 1964, dropped out, and then transferred to the University of California, Riverside, in the spring of 1965. At UC Riverside, North completed his dissertation, “The Concept of Property in Puritan New England, 1630-1720.” He initially supported the project with research and teaching fellowships until 1969. This support included the prestigious—at least within the context of the American conservative movement—Weaver Fellowship (named in honor of Richard M. Weaver, author of *Ideas Have Consequences*) from the Intercollegiate Studies Institute and an Earhart Fellowship, both awarded in the late ‘60s. Not insignificantly, both fellowships came from organizations firmly established within the mainstream of American Fusionist conservatism.

North also applied for and received scholarship assistance from Rushdoony’s Chalcedon Foundation. North’s application for Chalcedon is particularly interesting for the recommenders he assembled to attest to his scholarly acumen. Robert A. Nisbet, a highly influential conservative intellectual and sociologist whose work stands on par with Russell Kirk’s and Richard Weaver’s, recommended North highly: “He is an outstanding

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mind in all respects and has a personality and bearing to match. I regard him as a natural teacher and scholar, and it is inconceivable that he will not in time become an influential member of the academic profession.”71 Edwin S. Gaustad, now a prominent historian of American religion, declared North “[w]idely read and highly motivated,” and offered unqualified support for this “exceedingly diligent, [and] capable student.”72 Finally, Warren I. Cohen, a respected historian of U.S. foreign policy, estimated “that North was the brightest student at the University that year [1963] and he is undoubtedly the most stimulating student with whom I have ever worked.”73 But Cohen’s recommendation was bluntly honest about North’s political views: “Mr. North’s views are by no means acceptable to me—in fact I find them most distasteful—but rarely have I heard so-called ‘conservative’ positions argued more persuasively or with such marvelous wit.”74 This caveat aside, Cohen’s recommendation was ultimately as positive, if not more so, than those of Nisbet and Gaustad. In each case, these scholars—one well-respected and securely established faculty member and two junior faculty who would become major figures in their respective fields—gave North the highest marks and glowing assessments of his potential for future work in academia. Rushdoony, accordingly, gave him the scholarship.

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73 Warren I. Cohen to the Chairman of Chalcedon, Inc., February 27, 1967, RJR Library.
74 Ibid.
As his scholarship support from ISI, Earhart, and Chalcedon wound down, North became a frequent contributor to FEE’s *The Freeman*, and eventually became a part-time employee of Rushdoony’s Chalcedon Foundation in 1970 and 1971 to fund the final stretch of his graduate work. In 1972, North went to work for FEE but eventually left to work for Rushdoony at Chalcedon in 1973. Thus, by the time North came to work for Rushdoony as a full-time employee of Chalcedon, he was a *bona fide* veteran of the American conservative and libertarian establishment. He had worked for two of its most important think tanks, benefited from the financial support of two other prominent organizations, and maintained friendly relationships with important movement insiders such as Leonard Read, Ed Opitz, and Murray Rothbard among many, many others.

North further strengthened his ties with Rushdoony and the Chalcedon Foundation when he married Sharron, Rushdoony’s daughter. The two wedded on February 23, 1972, with a small ceremony and reception dinner. Gary’s courtship of Sharron reveals how his personal feelings for his soon-to-be wife mingled with his broader political concerns about the threats of socialism and the necessity for a female helpmeet in the fight for dominion.

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In a letter declaring his interest in Sharron, North explained the situation to Rushdoony: “I settled on her, in principle, years ago,” but S. Rushdoony initially rejected him. In 1971 something suddenly changed her mind and she approached North about a relationship. “I think it was prayer” that changed her mind, North explained to Rushdoony. In response to Sharron’s sudden interest, North arranged for Sharron to travel from California to upstate New York where he was working for the Foundation for Economic Education. In order to “watch out very carefully for our reputations,” a local preacher agreed to oversee the courtship and ensure that Sharron was never “unescorted.” Rushdoony agreed to the courtship arrangement and sent Sharron to visit North, drily noting in his journal, “marriage to Gary contemplated.”

Interestingly, North indicated that their courtship and possible marriage would be rocky not because of personal issues, but because of the threat of socialism and North’s need for a helpmeet in his work as a Christian writer and political dissident. He promised that he would protect Rushdoony’s daughter as best as he could “from the mess that’s in the works.” Although not specific about this “mess,” it seems to have been related to the threat of socialism. “It’s my brains,” he wrote to Rushdoony, “against the insanity of socialist controls.” North’s mature clarity regarding the threats working against their union didn’t end with his awareness that he must protect his soon-to-be wife from socialists. It also extended to his awareness that their relationship couldn’t be based on

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76 Gary North to R. J. Rushdoony, October 28, 1971, RJR Library.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 R. J. Rushdoony journal entry for October 25, 1971, RJR Library.
81 Ibid.
something so trivial as romantic love: “I’m going into this with my eyes open.

Romanticism isn’t a part of my make-up. I aked [to court] her years ago, not because I was in love with her, but because I respected her. I still respect her, and I’m growing to love her.” 82 Ultimately, North concluded that his respect grew from Sharron’s best qualities: “She is everything I could ask for from a wife of my youth. She is quite, theologically aware, not a red-hot, steady, and careful with her money. That is what I need, if I need anyone. … I think we can get more accomplished together than individually.” 83 Rushdoony apparently agreed that Sharron and North could succeed as a couple and blessed the union.

As his son-in-law, North proved to be a prolific and able popularizer of Rushdoony’s complex theological ideas and a capable political organizer as well. Rushdoony specifically brought North to Chalcedon to research the relationship between Biblical law and laissez faire economics. North rewarded Rushdoony’s confidence with the publication of An Introduction to Christian Economics (1973), an economic companion volume to Rushdoony’s Institutes. Further, during his time at Chalcedon, North began to engage in political projects that were different from the sort favored by Rushdoony but that Rushdoony did not discourage. Where Rushdoony tended to lean toward avoiding the immediate gains of electoral politics by favoring the patient building of institutions focused on education and behind-the-scenes activism, North favored more direct, confrontational action. He was comfortable with reaching out across sectarian and political boundaries in order to engage allies who were not quite as Christian as

82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
Rushdoony might have preferred. This meant that North brought Rushdoony-style reconstruction out of the family, the classroom, and the courtroom and injected it into political environments that proved oddly receptive to Rushdoony’s ideas.

In his political endeavors, North initially flirted with national politics before turning exclusively to grassroots organizing. In 1976 he worked in Washington, D.C., as a staffer for Texas Representative Ron Paul. Paul won a special election in the spring to fill a vacant seat and then lost in the regular election in November, making him, in North’s words, “America’s only Bicentennial Congressman: elected and defeated in 1976.”

John W. Robbins, Paul’s legislative assistant, hired North as his research assistant in the summer of 1976. “We were truly the odd couple,” North wrote of his time working with Robbins on Paul’s staff.

Robbins, as a defender of [theologian] Gordon Clark, was completely hostile to Clark’s chief rival, Cornelius Van Til. I am a disciple of Van Til’s apologetic method…. Dr. Paul had no knowledge about the rival positions that Robbins and I represented. I am not sure that he understood fully the extent of our Calvinism. He surely did not know about our rival views of epistemology.

Despite their rivalry and Paul’s ignorance of the religious basis for their political activity, North and Robbins cooperated well enough, although North appears to have had very little influence on either Robbins or Paul’s activities on the Hill:

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86 Dr. Paul was apparently a subscriber to North’s Remnant Review before he hired North, but it is unclear what he knew about North and his political and religious commitments beyond his libertarian economic views. For Paul’s subscription, see Gary North, “It All Began With Fred Schwarz,” LewRockwell.com, December 16, 2002, http://www.lewrockwell.com/north/north145.html (accessed August 12, 2010).
I stuck to my knitting; Robbins stuck to his. I did research on various economic issues; Robbins did research on specific pieces of legislation that were being considered by Congress. … I never got involved with the specifics of most of the legislation, unless it had something to do specifically with banking.  

North wrote statements here and there on the dangers of the International Monetary Fund and the significance of other economic issues, but, because of Paul’s midterm defeat, wasn’t in Washington long enough to have had any appreciable effect on policy or legislation.

After Paul left office in January 1977, North wrote a testy screed warning Christians that Washington was a cesspool that could not be changed overnight. In the highly entertaining piece, North claimed that Dr. Paul was “as amateurish a politician as I have ever seen,” noting that he foolishly “believed in principle and voted that way.” Of the conservative aides serving on congressional staffs, North asserted, “Seldom in the history of man have so many incompetents, cronies, idiots, goof-offs, hangers-on, and nincompoops been assembled in one geographical area.” It is unclear if North considered Robbins and himself to be among the “goof-offs,” but it is clear that his experience in Washington convinced him that national politics could do nothing to address American problems: “I am a believer in local politics. My experience in Washington did not change my belief. Those who believe in political salvation at the national level are certain to be disappointed.”

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87 North, “John W. Robbins, RIP.”
88 North, “Confessions of a Washington Reject.”
89 Ibid., 76.
90 Ibid., 78.
91 Ibid., 85.
of activists: “Things are going to get a lot worse before they get worse.”92 This sort of unrelenting pessimism, his prolific literary output following his departure from Washington, and his hardboiled rhetoric eventually earned him the nickname “Scary” Gary.93

North’s time on Paul’s staff and his pessimistic turn away from national politics is particularly significant for Christian Reconstruction because after leaving Washington North began developing practical strategies and tactics for Christians to deploy at the grassroots political level.94 While Rushdoony had always been engaged at the local political level, his writings and lectures on the subject were hardly practical in a way that activists might use them. It is one thing to assert that politics and epistemology are intrinsically linked; it is another thing entirely to demonstrate how one might translate this assertion into a set of carefully formulated political tactics framed within the

92 Ibid., 86.

93 North also earned the label “Scary” for some of his seemingly unscrupulous actions, such as sending fraudulent book donations to public and private libraries of institutions of higher education. During the late 1980s and early ‘90s, North’s Institute for Christian Economics sent boxes of books to libraries with mailing slips that incorrectly indicated, “These books were paid for by an alumni [sic] who wishes to remain anonymous.” This tactic was revealed in Earl Lee and Scott Forschler, “Bearing Gifts: How Librarians Deal with Gift Books and Gift Givers-A Detective Story,” Journal of Information Ethics (1992): 52-59. The authors, after some investigation, found no such anonymous donors existed, a fact that might have prompted some of the libraries to return the unsolicited books. This revelation opened North up to national ridicule in Christian circles, prompting the likes of Randall Balmer to attack ICE’s “inventive trickery”: “Gary North… had a problem. Not enough people were reading his books. Day after day he’d flail away at his computer churning out books on something he calls Christian Reconstructionism, but no one listened” (Randall H. Balmer, “Commentary: I Wish I’d Though of That!” The Christian News, February 8, 1992). Other publications followed with comments on the scheme (for example, see, “Christian Reconstructionists Hope to Stack Library Stacks, Duo Argues,” Church & State, January 1992, 14). North perhaps honestly, but nonetheless lamely responded that it was all the result of a “computer blunder” and grudgingly took responsibility for the library stacking scheme. Oddly enough, he ambivalently conceded, “my explanation—‘Yes, I made some mistakes, but I am not a crook’—sounds suspiciously like Richard Nixon’s explanation of Watergate” (Gary North, “A Mistake but No Crook,” The Christian News, February 8, 1993, 15). Regardless of the exact cause and motivation behind the plot, such schemes gave North a aura of duplicity and sneakiness that helped earn him the nickname “Scary.”

overarching strategies of Van Tilian epistemology and Christian reconstruction. North worked to develop the latter approach through his careful study of the economic theory that he believed he had uncovered in the Old and New Testament. This new social and economic theory would ultimately lead to a theological rift between Rushdoony and North that would eventually destroy their personal relationship.

**The Tyler Group**

As North drifted in a new theological direction, North and Rushdoony were also beginning to develop an antagonistic personal relationship that was partially related to their respective theologies, and also to their combative personalities. Heated and very personal exchanges became the norm for Rushdoony and his son-in-law as the 1970s drew to a close. The tensions between the two men ebbed and flowed over issues of money, theology, parental authority, and their relative influence within the larger Christian reconstruction movement.

While it is difficult to pinpoint the origin of this personal rift between the two men, there were clear signs that a conflict was coming. Perhaps most significantly, shortly before North joined Ron Paul’s congressional staff, Rushdoony angered North by giving him a significant pay cut as the editor of Chalcedon’s *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*. Rushdoony implied that many of Chalcedon’s supporters thought

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95 R. J. Rushdoony to Gary North, January 21, 1976, RJR Library. North served as the first editor of *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction* from 1974 until 1981 when Rushdoony fired him. North envisioned the journal as a serious publication that “bridges the gap between the newsletter-magazine and the scholarly academic journal.” Its intended audience was “intelligent laymen, working pastors, and others who are interested in the reconstruction of all spheres of human existence in terms of the standards of the Old and New Testaments.” These quotations appear at the beginning of each issue of the journal. See, for instance, the statement in the first issue, Gary North, ed., *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* 1, no. 1 [Electronic Edition] (Summer 1974). Further, North used his editorship at the journal as an opportunity to attack his enemies and denounce his critics. As David K. Watson notes, “From the very first issue… North used it as a forum for issuing denunciations of men he opposed…. With North at the helm of
North was not working hard enough, and Rushdoony removed him from Chalcedon’s lecture schedule. North, clearly anger
ed by the suggestion that he was giving his all for Chalcedon, responded by implying that he and Sharron would have to delay having a second child because of Rushdoony’s proposed pay cut, but ultimately he stayed on as editor of the *Journal* until 1981.

After Ron Paul’s ouster in 1977, Gary North roamed in search of a new employer and a new home. Perhaps as a result of his demotion and pay cut at Chalcedon in 1976, North did not try to return to California and work directly under Rushdoony’s oversight at Chalcedon. Instead, he worked as a writer for Howard Ruff’s *Ruff Times* until 1979

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the *Journal*, the level of inflammatory rhetoric from the Chalcedon camp rose to new heights” (Watson, “Theonomy,” 20).

96 According to Rushdoony, “… a number of people, all of whom have a high regard for you and Greg [Bahnsen], feel I have been too indulgent and allowed too little to be done by you two, and done too much work myself” (R. J. Rushdoony to Gary North, January 21, 1976, RJR Library).

97 North made these points in two separate notes addressed to R. J. and Dorothy Rushdoony, both dated January 24, 1976, RJR Library.

98 North claims that he briefly flirted with becoming a member of Dan Quayle’s Congressional staff, but was eventually denied the job. See North, “It All Began With Fred Schwarz.”

99 During the economic downturn and oil crisis of the 1970s Howard Ruff became a semi-famous prophet of hard-money economics. Ruff is notable, in part, because of his connections to right-wing activists closely associated with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Ruff, like many others on the right, believed that America’s departure from the gold standard in 1971 had led to the hyperinflation of the late 1970s. His *How to Prosper During the Coming Bad Years* (New York: Times Books, 1979) became a New York Times bestseller and *Ruff Times* claimed 80,000 subscribers in 1979 (“Business: Profit of Doom,” *Time*, March 23, 1979, http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,920273,00.html?iid=chix-sphere [accessed August 12, 2010]). Ruff is also famous as a forerunner of the survivalist movement for his *Famine and Survival in America* (n.p.: Ruff, 1974). Through Ruff, North came into contact with other right-wig Mormon activists and during the 1980s North organized conferences with Ruff and members of the Skousen family, including the economist Mark Skousen, his brother Joel, a prominent survivalist author, and Mark’s wife JoAnn (Gary North, “Gary North Presents: Racing to the Year 2000-Planning for Personal Stability in the Midst of Change,” Conference Program (Fort Worth, TX, n.d.), Institute for First Amendment Studies, records, 1980-1999 (MS074), Digital Collections and Archives, Tufts University, Medford, Ma.). Mark and Joel are nephews of the important Mormon conservative author, activist, and educator Cleon Skousen (1913-2006), a Brigham Young University professor, JBS member, and author of the now-classic conservative texts *The Naked Communist*, 11th ed. (Salt Lake City: Ensign, 1962) and *The 5000 Year Leap: The 28 Great Ideas That Changed the World* (n.p.: National Center for Constitutional Studies, 2007). Interest in the Skousens (especially Cleon and Mark) has increased during the late 2000s because Glenn Beck, a Mormon convert and popular conservative radio
and then served briefly on the economics faculty of Campbell University in North Carolina, a Baptist-affiliated school. In December 1979, North and his family finally settled in Texas for a simple reason: “no state income tax.” After settling in Tyler, North began to develop his own non-profit “think tank” called the Institute for Christian Economics, or ICE. North modeled ICE on the Chalcedon Foundation but also took FEE and the ISI as examples. The result was an organization dedicated equally to the concepts of Biblical law and its application to economic issues.

When North settled in Tyler he joined the Westminster Presbyterian Church under the pastorship of Ray R. Sutton, a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary. Although Sutton had graduated from one of the leading premillennialist seminaries in the evangelical movement and had no direct organizational connection to Rushdoony’s Chalcedon Foundation, he apparently converted to theonomy based on his own reading of scripture and through conversations with Reconstructionists. He had established Westminster in the late 1970s as a mission church to Tyler and slowly built the congregation into a central node in the Reconstructionist network, eventually attracting North and other men associated with Rushdoony’s Chalcedon Foundation. Under Sutton’s guidance, members of Westminster began a series of innovations that focused on the place of the church in the lives of dominion men. Instead of continuing Rushdoony’s perspective that the family was the primary instrument of God’s dominion, the men at Tyler sought downplay the family and emphasize the role of the church.

talk show host, has promoted their work. North’s work with Ruff and the brothers Skousen is yet another indication of his willingness to work outside of the exclusive boundaries of Christian Reconstruction.

100 North, “It All Began With Fred Schwarz.”
101 Ibid.
At Tyler, the church became the central organizing factor in the lives of the congregation. The vision of Sutton, North, and other leaders was of powerful ecclesiastical structure with the ability to discipline its members and also structure their lives according to the strictures Biblical law. This contrasted sharply with Rushdoony’s familial structure, and it was a difference that members of Westminster Presbyterian Church took great pains to highlight. Through Geneva Divinity School, the “teaching ministry”103 of the church, and North’s ICE, the Tyler church produced a seemingly endless proliferation of books, pamphlets, newsletters, and audiotapes designed to popularize their vision of a church-centered Christian reconstruction of the United States of America.

This church-centered perspective emerges clearly from the writings of a host of Tyler-based authors. For instance, David Chilton stated this focus on the church in his numerous works. “The center of Christian reconstruction, is the church,” he wrote.

The River of life does not flow out from the doors of the chambers of Congresses and Parliaments. It flows from the restored Temple of the Holy Spirit, the church of Jesus Christ. Our goal is world domination under Christ’s Lordship, a “world takeover” if you will: but our strategy begins with reformation, reconstruction of the church. From that will flow social and political reconstruction, indeed a flowering of Christian civilization.104

Similarly, James B. Jordan developed this point quite rigorously, likening the church to a military unit. According to Jordan, the church instructs men in the offices of dominion through the threefold pedagogies of fear, drill, and education. In terms of fear, Jordan argued that the Bible sets “court-enforced boundary. God threatened to kill anyone who

103 Ibid., 25.
got too far out of line. He established authorities in Church and in state with real power to enforce this. Fear is a very real factor in Christianizing a people, for fear shapes the minds and attitudes of people.” 105 Second, church liturgy is a form of structured “drill:” “The performance of ritual actions by our whole persons restructures our lives. Such ritual creates a context for understanding truth when we hear it.” 106 Finally, education or instruction must be conducted in terms of the presuppositional constraints developed by Van Til and popularized by Rushdoony as Christian education. Thus, just as the “military shapes men by means of fear (threat of real punishment), drill (ceremonial acts, such as marching), and instruction,” so too will the “reestablishment of true government in the Church” lead to the recovery of these pedagogies in “society at large.” 107 Jordan concludes with a clear contrast to Rushdoony’s position that the family is the womb of the Kingdom: “The Church is the nursery of the Kingdom, and there can be no reformation in state, school, or family, until there is reformation in the Church.” 108

North promoted this theology and ecclesiology as a unique innovation within the reconstructionist movement. He referred to it as the “Tyler Theology” and its proponents as the “Tyler Group.” The Tyler Theology was distinguished from other versions of Reconstructionism by “its heavy accent on the church, with weekly Communion.” 109 The Tyler Group situated itself in opposition to Chalcedon’s work in California, noting in

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106 Ibid.
107 Ibid., xii.
108 Ibid.
publication after publication that Rushdoonian reconstruction “tended to stress the social issues before the ecclesiastical one.”¹¹⁰ Further, Tyler’s newsletters also attempted to draw focus away from Rushdoony’s work, noting, “the Christian Reconstruction movement has been appreciably altered by the work of scholars here at Geneva [Divinity School]. It is our conviction that at this point in history, the focus of our efforts must be directed at the Church.”¹¹¹

**Decentralization of the Church and Positive Feedback**

As with all aspects of Reconstructionist theology, the Tyler Group’s focus on the church has real-world consequences. Unlike Rushdoony who focused most of his attention on ideas, North and the men at Tyler explicitly worked to develop a sociological theory organized around the institution of the church. Within the context of the Tyler Theology, however, the “church” is not conceptualized as a monolithic, centralized hierarchy of ecclesiastical units working in unison across varied geographic regions. Instead, for North and the Tyler Group¹¹² decentralization and fragmentation among church groups is one of the primary political assets of Christianity, not a weakness.

“Christianity is decentralized,” North insists,

indeed, “fragmented” better describes our condition. If the Christians can assemble themselves into, loosely organized but well-trained special-interest

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¹¹¹ Quoted in ibid.

¹¹² In the discussion that follows, I focus my attention on Gary North’s exposition of the political and social implications of the Tyler Theology. North is arguably the “political theorist” of dominion theology who has spent years teasing out the political, economic, and organizational implications of the more esoteric and obscure aspects of theonomic dominionism. Writers such as Jordan, Chilton, and George Grant offer similar insights, but not in the same sustained and easily readable manner as North. To see how North’s ideas intersect with others in the Tyler Group and beyond, see essays complied in the complimentary volumes of Gary North, ed., *Theology of Christian Resistance* [Electronic Edition] Christianity & Civilization 2 (Tyler, TX: Geneva Divinity School Press, 1983); North, *Tactics of Christian Resistance*. 
blocs, while today’s centralized humanist culture is disintegrating, the result could be the creation of a new cultural synthesis, one based on biblical law rather than some version of humanistic natural law...  

Wise churches (located in the home) would then further decentralize their structures by delegating their ministries to their individual family units and, ultimately, to the individual members of the churches.

This decentralization would lead to, in North’s words, a systemic “positive feedback loop” in which the gains made in one sphere would “feedback” into the other spheres generating positive, ever-increasing levels of faith, obedience, and monetary prosperity. The positive feedback of dominion assumes, to borrow another term from mathematics, that the decentralized system of God’s emergent Kingdom is “self-similar” across all spheres of society. That is, the form of the Kingdom is similar to (or identical to) the form of its constituent components—the individual, the family, and the state. The implication of this self-similarity is that once one sphere of life comes into accord with

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115 This is North’s phrase; see, Gary North, Liberating Planet Earth: An Introduction to Biblical Blueprints [Electronic Edition] Biblical Blueprint Series 1 (Fort Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1991), 136-138, 146-148. This introduces an interesting counter-intuitive tension between the non-linearity of dominion, and the teleological linear progression of history. “Positive feedback” presumes a non-linear, exponential relationship between the input and outputs of a system; small inputs generate large outputs that are greater than the sum of the system’s individual, constituent elements. Thus, North’s concept of dominion assumes an ever-advancing non-linear relationship between the initial inputs in the system (i.e., the self-governing Christian man) and its subsequent output (the Kingdom of God). Yet history, according to God’s plan, is advancing toward unimpeded development and complexification of mankind and the earth itself in the form of the future Kingdom. This, if thought about in cosmological terms, equates to nothing less than a denial of the second law of thermodynamics.
God’s law, this change will cascade through all other spheres of governance leading to the cultural, political, and social regeneration sought by reconstructionists.\textsuperscript{116}

For North, the Godly positive feedback loop of dominion means that Godly men will multiply exponentially and that their presence will make the state sphere more unruly over time. God, in His infinite wisdom, understood that sinful men would try to consolidate and regulate this expansion through Babel-like centralization and, accordingly, built a solution into His law-word:

As societies become larger and more complex, the civil government must remain decentralized in order to achieve its goal of creating social peace. … The more complex a society becomes, the less able the State’s officials are to direct the society. … It is only by means of self-government under God’s law that a complex and developing society can regulate itself.\textsuperscript{117}

In short, not only is a monolithic, centralized, top-down system sinful,\textsuperscript{118} but it also is not dynamic enough to bring about the Kingdom; therefore, God’s law requires the decentralization of humanity to ensure that they increase and fill the earth. Thus, “The international kingdom of God must be decentralized. No new tower of Babel will do Christians any good. … But person by person, church by church, occupation by

\textsuperscript{116} This metaphor of the “self-similarity” of the Kingdom is useful, I believe, for conceptualizing the rift between the Tyler Group and Rushdoony. If the Kingdom of God is indeed self-similar as North implies with his (perhaps unintentionally sloppy) mathematical metaphor, then in theory it can be brought about through any of the spheres. But the question becomes: Which of the spheres (the individual, the family, the church, or the state) is the most expedient and efficacious for Kingdom building? Both Rushdoony and the Tyler Group agreed that individuals, working in isolation, could not build the Kingdom. Similarly, both agreed that the state could only usurp the Kingdom, never build. This left the family and the church. Rushdoony was emphatic that the family, through painstaking education and fecundity, would slowly build the Kingdom by sanctifying individuals and reclaiming the state. The Tyler Group, believes that the state was in a crisis and will soon fail. This means that individuals and families would not have the social or material resources necessary to survive the coming collapse. Only the local church, with its resources and unity would remain to protect the individual and the family and, therefore, rebuild the state.

\textsuperscript{117} Emphasis in the original. North, \textit{Unconditional Surrender}, 258.

\textsuperscript{118} Centralization is a component of “Satan’s social order.” Satan “requires political centralization” because he, like a human being, “is a limited creature” who substitutes bureaucratic centralization for “God’s omniscience and omnipotence” (North, \textit{Liberating Planet Earth}, 155.).
occupation, nation by nation, the world is to be brought under the dominion of God.”

The positive feedback that leads to the expansion of dominion also creates the conditions that make centralized bureaucracy impossible because churches can engage in “brush fire wars” that “show the bureaucrats that they cannot stop the spread of the Christian fire by putting out one blaze. They have to put out hundreds of blazes.”

Evoking the rhetoric of Martin Luther King, Jr., North longingly admitted that he “dreamed” of these brush fires. “My dream,” he noted wistfully, “would be the state’s nightmare.”

The brush fires of the emergent, decentralized church are made possible by an important Godly historical mechanism: the free market. Capitalism is a primary element of God’s plan precisely because it undermines the Babel-like unity of all social and cultural structures. This notion led North to conclude that capitalism will lead to the conditions necessary for allowing men to conceive of themselves as discrete, individuated units (a precondition of the self-government of dominion man); fractured the family from tribal and ethnic components into “nuclear” family units (similarly a requirement for the emergence of Christians as the third race of men); and created the need for decentralized federal or republican government (the final judgment on Satanic bureaucratic bureaucracies).

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119 North, Unconditional Surrender, 348.

120 Christians could make these brush fires even more effective if they would essentially “hide” their home churches from federal oversight: “One way of staying out of the limelight of the Federal bureaucracy,” North likes to tell his readers, “…is to avoid applying for IRS approved church status.” Instead, he hopes that small home churches would seek dominion on a local level and avoid federal interaction as much as possible. See, North, Backward Christian Soldiers, 199.


122 Emphasis in the original. North, Backward Christian Soldiers, 188.
centralization). Soon, North predicted, the internal logic of capitalism will also decentralize American cities and, with them, the last vestiges of urban liberal Christianity.

North’s focus on the importance of the decentralized nature of the church, family, and state led him to make a number of increasingly bold predications about the economic and political future of the United States and the global economic system. North and many of his fellow churchmen at Tyler believed that the process of Christian reconstruction could be accelerated during periods of intense social unrest and economic collapse. First, they foresaw the possibility that the Kingdom of God might be brought about by sudden shifts in the global economic and social system. Specifically, North has made a series of predications regarding the sudden systematic collapse of such transient institutions as the U.S. federal government, the global banking system, and the market economy. Second, in the event of any of these catastrophic collapses, decentralized churches operating independently from the federal government and will step into the void left by the imploding state and provide societal stability. When American society finally collapses under the combined weight of massive foreign debt, military overstretch, and internal decadence, North and his followers hope to have a network of churches ready to step forward and fill the gap. To prepare Christians for this future event, he has

123 This summary is drawn from Gary North, “Market Decentralization and Covenantal Organization,” Christian Reconstruction 13, no. 6 (December 1989).


written book after book aimed at educating Christians on how to live debt free, avoid electronic surveillance, and develop the skills necessary for surviving economic collapse.¹²⁶

**Survivalism**

The Tyler Group’s ecclesiastical mission, militaristic metaphors, and heated rhetoric was closely paralleled by a survivalist-inspired, hard-money social agenda that they believed would allow the church to survive and thrive in the wake of cataclysmic economic or military disaster. While serving as editor for the *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, North published a manifesto for Christian survivalism. Entitled “A Biblical Basis for Survival Preparations,” Micheal R. Gilstrap forcefully argued, “A Christian, of all people, should be a survivalist. … We must see from biblical history and biblical law that survival preparation is not an option. It is not a new fad of the rich. It is not simply the practice of the doom-and-gloomer. It is a matter of faith.”¹²⁷ Gilstrap declares that Biblical patriarchs such as Noah, Joesph, and Moses were prototypical survivalists who heard a warning from God, listened to His instructions, and then acted

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¹²⁶ For instance, see Gary North, *Government by Emergency* (Fort Worth, TX: American Bureau of Economic Research, 1983). In this book North predicts that a major national emergency will allow the federal government to expand its power through unconstitutional means. Other books in this genre include Arthur Robinson and Gary North, *Fighting Chance: Ten Feet to Survival* (Cave Junction, OR: Oregon Institute of Science and Medicine, 1986) and Gary North, *The Sinai Strategy: Economics and the Ten Commandments* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1986). The former explains the importance of bomb shelters and other precautions to the Christian, while the latter lays out how a Christian can use the principles of the ten commandants to “get rich slowly” without utilizing debt and other non-Christian modern economic mechanisms. The Bush administration’s response to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the recent subprime implosion and subsequent recession have all provided North with several “see, I told you so” moments that he sees as confirming the ideas outlined in these and other texts.

on faith to prepare for the future. As with these ancient figures, God, he claims, is again giving clear signs that the U.S. is now under judgment and Christians “have a reason to survive.” Why? Because Christians will regenerate the world following God’s judgment.

Of all people, we are obligated to survive. This is God’s world’s, not the devil’s. We are not just another speck of dust in this vast universe, but part of the body of Christ—the new humanity. ... Before there can ever be regeneration, there must be death. The judgment to come is that death. The Dark Angel of the Lord will bring death to western civilization. But if Christians do not survive, then someone or something else will gain temporary dominion in this world, and we will have to begin all over again. Just as Noah’s sons went on to help shape the future history of the world, we must survive so that our children can help shape the future for God. No one else will do it. It is not only our privilege to survive if God wills, but in a sense it is our duty to survive so that our children will survive. We must survive—for the Lord.  

The implications of this line of logic are profound. First, just as orthodox evangelical theology insists that an individual must die in her self in order to be reborn in the body of Christ, Gilstrap’s essay suggests that a civilization must destroyed in its entirety before it can be regenerated as a Christian civilization. Second, the “body of Christ”—the Church—must be prepared for this judgment or it too will parish. Third, just as God destroyed humanity but saved the remnant of Noah to regenerate the world, Christian reconstructionists must heed the warnings and prepare to rule in the wake of the coming destruction of humanity. Unfortunately, Reconstructionists are not focused on the coming crisis. Rather, they are concerned with “the postcrash world.” Gilstrap warns that reconstructionists must get their priorities right: “[O]ur foresightedness must extend not only to the crisis, but to the world on the other side of the crisis. Hopefully, in our case, to a world under God’s Law.”

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129 Emphasis in the original. Ibid., 203.
This notion of the preparing for the “postcrash world” was a primary concern for some within the Tyler Group. Some in the circle had begun to collect firearms—either for security or as a monetary investment, or both—and the leaders of the church engaged in aggressive and dismissive attacks on the enemies. With their focus on strict church discipline and respect for ecclesiastical authority, the Tyler Group had a habit of alienating and even excommunicating dissident members. Some of those who left Westminster Presbyterian Church did so as a response to the survivalist rhetoric. As one former church member wrote to Rushdoony,

The things of greatest emphasis at Westminster, are money, personal power and influence, infiltration of other church, government, social associations, paramilitary equipment and training, an elite inner core group and other cultic trappings. They talk constantly of the Law, humanism, the coming collapse of all economies, governments, etc., but never of love of God for a sinful people. The fruits of the Spirit are not evident in them, nor has a single soul been won to the Lord by their ministry. What happened is that some, coming out of other error or bad experience are banding together in semi-secret hatred of all established orders. They would call themselves “Dominion Men” but are far more accurately characterized as Dostoyevsky’s “Underground men.”

Another dissident who left the church similarly cited the stockpiling of guns as something he didn’t “understand” about the Tyler Group’s theology and that his disagreement with

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130 After Rushdoony fired North as editor of the Journal, Douglas F. Kelly, the new editor, published an essay rebuking survivalism among reconstructionists: “One disturbing development in the reconstruction movement is the rise of survivalism. Armed self-sufficiency is touted as the key to passing through upcoming crises unscathed. … These reconstructionists are implicitly waiting for the collapse, so that they can ‘move right on in.’ Their faith in present reconstructionism can be measured by the height of their stockpiles of dehydrated food” (Martin G. Selbrede, “You Can’t Split Rotten Wood,” The Journal of Christian Reconstruction 9, no. 1 (Winter 1982-1983): 207-208.). While those involved in the Vallecito form of Reconstructionism didn’t necessarily shy away from owning guns, gold, and dehydrated food, they were not in accord with Tyler’s emphasis on survivalism.

131 James Jordan argued that machine guns “like rare stamps, art, and other similar things, are skyrocketing in value” and prudent Christians would invest in them, not stockpile them for a coming battle (James B. Jordan to R. J. Rushdoony, March 16, 1981, RJR Library).

the practice helped prompt his exit from the church.\textsuperscript{133} By the mid 1980s, the Tyler Group’s survivalist literature on decentralization, gold, and guns had begun to influence church groups all over the country.\textsuperscript{134}

As the Tyler Group’s reputation for hardnosed brawling, harsh theological rhetoric, and survivalist paranoia spread throughout evangelical circles, Rushdoony was going through a one of his darkest personal periods as the president of the Chalcedon Foundation. His endless writing, researching, and lecture tours were beginning to wear him down. In a particularly telling letter, Rushdoony registered his exhaustion in blunt terms:

Yesterday noon, I ate (as often) a cold meal, alone, because, when I sat down to eat, the phone range. A pastor I have never met, with a weeping woman before him, called for counsel; he had called a year before in another case. For the same reason, I ate alone at night. In between, I spent a couple hours again on the phone in like matters. This goes on daily. Yet not even one in ten will contribute to Chalcedon.

I will continue, only because the battle is the LORD’s. But I will not go where people will not fight with the precious pocketbooks. They have guns and food to defend themselves, but the battle in the courts goes begging.

In five and a half years, I have not been home all of any month. I am canceling all trips in April… staying home for my birthday and Dorothy’s… and that is it.\textsuperscript{135}

I quote this at length because it plainly illustrates the sacrifices Rushdoony had made for Christian reconstruction. Rushdoony, now in his mid sixties, was, in his own words, “a

\textsuperscript{133} John A. Nelson to Ray R. Sutton and Bob Dwelle, April 4, 1981, RJR Library.

\textsuperscript{134} For a report directly linking survivalist activity to the Tyler church, see Douglas E. Chismar and David A. Rausch, “The New Puritans and Their Theonomic Paradise,” The Christian Century, August 1983, 712-715. It is important to note that Chismar later retracted key passages of this article in an embarrassing public apology, but he did not retract any of his comments about the activities of survivalists he discusses in the story; see Douglas E. Chismar, “A Correction,” The Christian Century, November 9, 1983.

\textsuperscript{135} R. J. Rushdoony to James B. Jordan, March 12, 1981, RJR Library.
very fallible man.” He was a human being capable, as we’ll see more clearly in the material that follows, of pettiness and pride. But he was also a man who was rarely home and missed his beloved wife. He cared so deeply for his work that he missed meals and volunteered his time generously for people who volunteered nothing in return. His love of Jesus Christ was so profound that he willingly sacrificed his own health, happiness, and mental well-being—and that of his loved ones—for the “battle.” Further, I quote this letter at length because it illustrates Rushdoony’s mindset in the early 1980s when he, through a complex series of events, separated himself from the Tyler Group. The young men at Tyler, to whom Rushdoony had given so generously, were about to turn on him, and he was no in the emotional or spiritual state to handle the attack.

“Let the Lord Judge Between Us”

Many tears and much ink has been spilled over the rift between Rushdoony’s Chalcedon Foundation and the men associated with the Tyler church. In particular, Gary North has long suggested that he split with Rushdoony because they disagreed over the place of the family and the church in project of Christian Reconstruction, but the truth of the matter is far more complicated. The actual cause of the split was probably three-


137 In 1987, Christianity Today summarized the cause of the split as follows: “the rupture came in 1981 with a disagreement over an article North wanted to publish in The Journal of Christian Reconstruction. North approved the article’s argument that the Passover blood on the doorpost bore symbolic overtones of virginity; Rushdoony said such thinking reeked of fertility cult” (Rodney Clapp, “Democracy as Heresy,” Christianity Today, February 20, 1987, 18. North responded by asserting, “If this story were true, then the reader could safely conclude that the Reconstructionist leadership borders on the egomaniacal, and should not be taken seriously” (Gary North, “Appendix B: Honest Reporting as Heresy,” in Westminster’s Confession: The Abandonment of Van Til’s Legacy [Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991], 334). Instead, he insisted that the real cause of the split was

Tyler’s disagreement with Mr. Rushdoony about the requirement of local church attendance and taking the Lord’s Supper. We think all Christians need to do both. The Tyler church practices weekly communion. In contrast, Mr. Rushdoony has refused to take Holy Communion for well
First, the disagreement over the role of the church and family was real, but it was insufficient to cause the rift. Second, by 1981 Rushdoony believed his former students were using him because they no longer respected him and supported Chalcedon financially and emotionally. Finally, and of utmost importance was the simple matter that North was publically and privately attacking Rushdoony and telling his audiences that his father-in-law was “crazy,” while also insisting that he was ill and unable to lead Chalcedon.

Rushdoony felt that James B. Jordan, Gary North, and Greg Bahnsen were using his reputation to embellish their own. Further, he was clearly exhausted. The movement that he had labored to build was in many ways thriving: Chalcedon was supporting John Whitehead’s work in the courts to defend Christian homeschoolers; Rushdoony was lecturing far and wide and appearing before influential conservative groups such as the Heritage Foundation and even instructing U.S. Army officers on religious matters;¹³⁸ his name freely circulated in evangelical circles as a man of God of significant influence, but members of these same circles rarely mentioned him in public because of his controversial writings.¹³⁹ Yet for all of these successes, Chalcedon was still a one-man operation that was exhausting its seemingly unexhaustable founder. “I am not a resource; I am person,” Rushdoony angrily wrote to Gary North. “And Chalcedon is not here

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¹³⁸ R. J. Rushdoony to Gary North, March 17, 1981, RJR Library.

simply to be used by groups which want to build themselves up, not a cause.”

Because of its close association with Chalcedon, the Tyler Group bore the brunt of Rushdoony’s wrath. Their self-confident writings downplayed Rushdoony’s work. Some were even implying that Greg Bahnsen, a theologian cultivated and supported by the Chalcedon Foundation, had developed the idea of theonomy before Rushdoony. In response to some of these insinuations, Rushdoony wrote to North, “I am simply fed up with parasites who feel they are my ‘champions’ and ‘friends’ simply because they read my books, speak favorably of me, and say, ‘Peace be with you, the Lord prosper your work.’”

Making matters worse, in private discussions North was actively attacking Rushdoony and suggesting that his father-in-law was clinically insane. This accusation hurt Rushdoony deeply. When James Jordan inquired about Rushdoony’s anger with the Tyler Group, Rushdoony responded that he had no issue with Tyler per se, but that particularly resented North’s assault on his sanity:

… I do have a bias against Tyler… for a reason unrelated to the church or the seminary, but to Gary. Since moving there, Gary talks widely about his apparently religious and economic wisdom in locating in Tyler, and he may be right, but he very frequently adds, ‘anyone who lives in California is crazy.’ Some have hinted that he adds more. The implication: I live in California, and Gary thinks I am crazy (and also maybe over the hill since writing the Institutes). Some ‘friends,’… not only report Gary’s statement to me but want to know what he meant by it about me…? I have always said, “He means nothing at all.” I am tempted now to answer the next person thus: “Gary who has nothing but good from me, is a brilliant and remarkable man whom I am normally proud to have as a son-in-law, but, sometimes… he is an insensitive clod.”

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140 R. J. Rushdoony to Gary North, March 17, 1981, RJR Library.

141 To this, Rushdoony responded, “Let people think of Bahnsen as the senior thinker. I am fighting for a cause, not trying to promote myself” (ibid.).

North’s attacks on Rushdoony’s sanity for remaining in California was directly linked to Tyler’s survivalist mentality. Rushdoony saw the link, and it infuriated him. “I am sure Tyler is loaded with stored foods, guns, and perhaps bomb shelters,” he wrote to Jordan. But, Rushdoony insisted, the battle would not be waged in some post-apocalyptic future Rushdoony insisted. “The battle is now, and people should not fear Moscow or hungry mobs, but the LORD. There is no bomb shelter to hide them from the wrath of God, or guns to hold him at bay.”

Given the level of extreme personal animosity exhibited in these written exchanges, it is hard to imagine that the dispute between Rushdoony and his supporters at Tyler can be reduced to theology alone.

This isn’t to say that theology was unimportant in the conflict. In fact, the whole dispute exploded over an article North wrote for The Journal of Christian Reconstruction. After reading a draft of the piece, Rushdoony wrote, “I am returning your Economic Commentary on ‘Walls and Wealth.’ I am baffled that you could write a piece so bad. It smacks of fertility cults, not Scripture.”

North, following an interpretation developed by James B. Jordan, argued that the lamb’s blood splashed on the top and sides of the doorframe by the Hebrews during Passover represented the

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144 Emphasis in the original. R. J. Rushdoony to James B. Jordan, March 12, 1981, RJR Library. In a March 16, 1981 letter to Rushdoony, Jordan responded that Tyler was not stockpiling guns although “most people own one or two.” Also, “no one here has a bomb shelter, and no one except Gary talked about putting one in.”


hymeneal blood of a deflowered virgin on her wedding night. Rushdoony declared the argument “weird” and commanded North, “destroy this.”

Never one to back down from a fight, North not only refused to concede Rushdoony’s point, but took Rushdoony’s letter as an opportunity to assert that the movement Rushdoony had started was now ready to surpass him:

To be quite frank, some of the younger men in the movement are ready to make some fundamental innovations in the existing theonomy framework. No movement stays in the same mold forever. Chilton, Bahnsen, Jordan, and I are going to make our own independent innovations, and I will (God willing) finance us in this endeavor. We have 50 years of production ahead of us, we hope, we’re all likely to come up with ideas that we don’t even suspect today. And out younger disciples will no doubt go beyond us. That’s what progress in theology is all about. Young men innovate.

North’s not so subtle message? Rushdoony was old, washed up, near death; make room for the Young Turks.

When this exchange is seen within the perspective of Rushdoony’s exhausted letters to James Jordan regarding his anger with North and his sense of being used by the Tyler Group to embellish their own standing in theological circles, one can surmise that North used his response to intentionally antagonize his father-in-law. It is impossible to believe that North was not already aware of Rushdoony’s feelings about Tyler, and it is clear that Rushdoony’s earlier appraisal that North believed he was senile was basically correct. For his part, Rushdoony returned sarcasm with sarcasm. “Your letter,” he responded, “is written with your usual grace and courtesy. You are ‘innovative,’ and I am, as you make clear to many, over the hill, so the future of theonomy with some

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‘fundamental innovations’ (that word again) is in the hands of ‘Chilton, Bahnsen, and I.’" 149

The sarcastic letters set off a rapid exchange of correspondence that shuttled back and forth between Rushdoony, North, Jordan, and Ray Sutton. With each new note, the temperature of the rhetoric increased until Rushdoony eventually charged all three Tyler men with “blasphemy”150 and demanded they “recant”151 their positions. Rushdoony’s charge of blasphemy and his demand that the Tyler group recant their argument put him in an awkward position that Gary North eagerly homed in on:

The previous letters seemed to imply, ‘recant, or else.’ Or else what? What, precisely, are you telling me? What are my options? If I don’t recant—and I wish to say clearly that I am not now recanting—what then. You see, it’s a question of authority and sanctions. If you have authority, you can impose sanctions. If you have no sanctions, you have no authority.152

Not only was Rushdoony “over the hill,” he was impotent; powerless to wield any authority over the men he had mentored and helped grow into the acrid-witted and rock-ribbed theological adversaries he now faced. And North was never above taking a cheap shot when an opportunity presented itself. In this case, North not only happily challenged Rushdoony’s authority, he also attacked Rushdoony’s very claim to be the founder of Chalcedon. “Of course,” he sneered,

there never would have been a Chalcedon if I hadn’t recommended you so highly to Grace Flannigan, at the Betsy Ross Book Store, back in the fall of 1964. She invited you down to speak at my recommendation, when the Volker Fund fired you. Who knows what would have happened to you if it hadn’t been for me?

151 Gary North to R. J. Rushdoony, August 9, 1981, RJR Library.
152 Ibid.
But, then again, where would I be today with your help in launching my career? So it’s been fruitful for all.153

In truth, North was more or less correct: Rushdoony had no real authority over him or the Tyler group. Rushdoony’s only recourse was to fire North as editor to The Journal of Christian Reconstruction and terminate his relationship to Chalcedon, a move that North both anticipated and for which he seemed to hope. He warned that if Rushdoony fired him, the Tyler group would simply start a rival publication.154 “Let me know the next step. Soon,” North taunted.155 Rushdoony took his son-in-law’s advice and immediately fired North and Jordan, who also contributed to the journal. Not to be outdone, North sent letters to all of the journal’s previous authors and subscribers to inform them of the “sad situation” at Chalcedon and tell them know that a rival journal was to begin publication in Tyler.156

For his part, Jordan sincerely believed in his interpretation of Passover, and, unlike North, tried not to antagonize Rushdoony. But he also felt deeply wronged by the whole matter, believing that Rushdoony had overstepped his authority in demanding that both he and North disavow the article and destroy it.157 Ultimately, he asked for an apology from Rushdoony: “I am forced to resist your Saturnine tendency to devour your

153 Gary North to R. J. Rushdoony, August 8, 1981, RJR Library.
154 The rival publication was Christianity & Civilization, published by the Geneva Divinity School at Tyler.
155 Gary North to R. J. Rushdoony, August 9, 1981, RJR Library.
156 Letter from Gary North to all former Journal of Christian Reconstruction authors, August 21, 1981, RJR Library.
157 Jordan respected Rushdoony’s position, but was not ready to budge from his interpretation of Passover: “I ought to say, for the record, that this is simply a question of authority as far as I am concerned. … You are not… within your rights to demand that I change my views on any matter at all. If I be a heretic, that is a matter for the Church to reckon; thus far my immediate elders… are in agreement that I am not a heretic” (James B. Jordan to R. J. Rushdoony, September 16, 1981, RJR Library). Jordan would neither recant nor apologize.
offspring. A simple apology for the temper of your correspondence, and a declaration of willingness to deal lawfully with me in the future, is all that is required to repair this breach.”158 No such apology was forthcoming.

Rushdoony ended the matter forever with one final note to Sutton. In it, he reluctantly admitted that Jordan and North apparently believed in their interpretation of Passover (although he implied North’s belief might have been, at best, shallow). For Sutton, however, he reserved particularly harsh words: “You have made clear in telephone conversations twice that you do not like it [Jordan and North’s interpretation], but you want unity, not truth apparently.” This was a particularly harsh charge because, in theory, Sutton was the primary ecclesiastical and theological authority at Westminster Presbyterian Church. His failure to discipline North and Jordan was, for Rushdoony, a gross dereliction of Sutton’s duty. “The gospel,” Rushdoony continued, “is not pragmatism.”159 In haste, Rushdoony concluded the note, “Let the Lord judge between us. I commit judgment into His hands. Let me be.”160 Rushdoony never spoke to North, Jordan, or Sutton again.

III. “RUSHDOONY IS DAMNED GOOD TO STEAL FROM”

The schism between Chalcedon and the Tyler Group had positive and negative connotations for Christian Reconstruction. On one hand, North and the other young men at Tyler tired to bury Rushdoony’s and Chalcedon’s corpses with paper. As Howard Ahmanson told Rushdoony, “Gary acts as though you are already deceased—or should

be.” This meant a veritable explosion of publication as North, Jordan, Chilton, Sutton, and many others produced book after book, newsletter after newsletter, and audiotape after audiotape in the hopes of convincing the world that they, and not the stodgy has-beens at Chalcedon, were the true dominion men of the Christian Reconstruction movement. Further, while Rushdoony specifically avoided responding to the output of the Tyler Group, he and his staff at Chalcedon continued their own prodigious literary output and lecture itineraries. The result was that the two branches of Reconstruction engaged in agonistic but ultimately mutually beneficial publishing campaigns that saw the younger generation of Reconstructionists reaching new audiences while sustaining interest in Rushdoony’s writings.

On the other hand, the schism put a considerable amount of emotional stress on the individuals involved and on their organizational infrastructure. It strained Rushdoony’s relationship with his daughter, Sharron, and his grandchildren. It also ended the strong bounds with men whom Rushdoony had cultivated as his spiritual and intellectual heirs. North, Bahnsen, Chilton, and Jordan had all spent a portion of the formative years under Rushdoony’s tutelage, and, especially in the case of North, Rushdoony’s family had become their own. Beyond the sudden severing of their personal ties, the schism also caused discomfort among organizations and individuals active in the Reconstruction movement. Many complained that they felt they were being required to choose between Tyler and Chalcedon, and they resented it. Some went so far as to try to intervene and heal the rift, but to no avail.

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161 Journal entry for April 25, 1989, RJR Library.

Beyond the schism between Tyler and Chalcedon, broader cultural and political changes in U.S. culture were also influencing Christian Reconstructionism. First, the rise of the variously labeled “New Christian Right,” “Christian Right,” “Religious Right” or “New Right” as an amorphous but potent political force had recently helped elect two presidents in 1976 and 1980. Second, dramatic cultural shifts accelerated as changing attitudes toward abortion, sexuality, and individual liberty partially resonated with the concomitant rise of the Christian Right. Third, the resonance between the stated political and cultural aspirations of the Christian Right and the emergence of popular conservative sentiment during the early 1980s created a context in which the ideas of Rushdoony and other Reconstructionists circulated far beyond Reformed circles and gained a certain amount of cultural traction. Consequently, just as the organizational, institutional, and personal relationships among Reconstructionists began to disintegrate, Christian Reconstructionism simultaneously emerged as a small but important component of the conservative realignment of political and religious culture in the U.S. during the 1980s.

For evangelicals and fundamentalists, social and political action has long proved a significant theological and practical problem. Indeed, much of this dissertation has documented the micro-history of this struggle by focusing on how some theologically conservative Christians have struggled to reconcile their religious commitments to evangelism, the doctrine of individual salvation, and the imminent return of Christ with an aggressive political and social activism. The emergence of Christian Right in the 1970s and ‘80s indicated that on some level, many of these questions had been answered or were being answered in practice: Christians had an obligation to evangelize to individuals, but this obligation could be furthered and mediated through mechanisms
beyond the church and family; salvation is a gift from God, but certain environments are more conducive to winning souls than others; yes, Christ will return soon, but that doesn’t mean that a Christian may stand by idly as sin dominates the culture around.

For his part, Rushdoony believed that he was partially responsible for this shift in evangelical and fundamentalist attitudes toward culture and politics. Specifically, he believed that his focus on Christian Reconstruction was the condition for the establishment of Christ’s post-millennial kingdom on earth had prompted many evangelicals and fundamentalists to rethink their withdrawal from participation in the broader culture. In fact, he had gone so far as to indicate that he felt many in the emerging Christian right were using his ideas without giving him the proper credit. To James B. Jordan, Rushdoony once mused, “I was also told a couple of years that one ‘scholar’ said, ‘Rushdoony is damned good to steal from’ (re. ideas).”  

His anxiety about whether activists on the right were stealing from him would only increase over the course of the 1980s, not simply because of a petty desire for recognition, but because he feared they may compromise too much on important issues.

While it would be impossible to suggest that Rushdoony’s ideas and writings alone motivated or prompted widespread evangelical reentry into politics and social activism, it is indisputable that he did indeed have a profound impact on a small number of figures who helped prompt the shift. In this section, I briefly outline some of the ways that Rushdoony’s ideas intersected with these broader trends on the right and indicate how Rushdoony was both pleased with and worried about the consequences of political

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success and the implications of Christian compromising with a broader conservative social and political agenda.

_Council for National Policy_

Few organizations on the right are more controversial and shrouded with the secretive vestments of conspiratorial intrigue than the Council for National Policy (CNP).\(^{164}\) Founded in 1981\(^{165}\) by Tim LaHaye, an evangelical author and then-head of the Moral Majority, the CNP reflected the new evangelical consensus that conservative Protestants must engage in direct political action and seek to influence public policy.\(^{166}\) Gary North was present at the first organizational meeting of the CNP in Dallas, Texas. “That first meeting was a mess,” North reported on his blog decades later. “Nobody had a clue as to what was going on, who was in charge, what the CNP was supposed to become.”\(^{167}\) After some wrangling, those present agreed that the organization should

\(^{164}\) The popular press largely ignored the CNP during the 1980s. A handful of investigative journalist did take note of the organization and documented its meetings, members, and activities as they related to domestic and foreign policy. Most notably, Russ Bellant set the standard for later reporting on the CNP with his chapter on the organization in his _The Coors Connection: How Coors Family Philanthropy Undermines Democratic Pluralism_ (Boston: South End Press, 1991). Bellant argued that the origins of the organization “are not found in mainstream conservatism or the traditional Republican Party but in the nativist and reactionary circles of the Radical Right, including the John Birch Society” (43) and that it threatened to undermine democratic pluralism in the U.S. and abroad. He documented its relationship to Christian Reconstructionism and how it influenced foreign policy in the Middle East and Latin America. Bellant’s book influenced other like-minded researchers including Frederick Clarkson, Sara Diamond, and Skipp Porteous who would situate the CNP as an important secretive organization at the heart of the rise of the New Right in the 1980s. By the late 1990s and early 2000s journalists in publications such as the _New York Times_ and _The Nation_ took notice of the CNP and its relationship to the Republican Party and the wider conservative movement. Because of the organization’s secret membership lists and private meetings, most of the coverage focuses on the secretive mysteriousness of the organization.


\(^{166}\) Bellant, _The Coors Connection_, 36-37.

serve as a conservative counter-weight to the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) and could maintain a similarly elite roster by charging new members $5,000 to join.\(^{168}\) Upon realizing that few in the room could put up such a fee, the founding members quickly exempted themselves for the rule.\(^{169}\) The expense of joining the organization assured that many of the members would come from the business community and from well-funded non-profits with cash to burn. The CNP would then function as a networking organization that would put businessmen, religious leaders, and intellectuals into contact with conservative policy makers and politicians.

Rushdoony was not invited to the initial planning sessions of the CNP. This fact angered Rushdoony: “A ‘secret’ meeting of top Christian leaders, most of whom are to some degree indebted to me, left me out; none present including Gary [North], opened their mouth \textit{at the meeting} to say: Rush should have been invited.”\(^{170}\) Although North did not mention Rushdoony at the meeting, he did nominate his father-in-law for future membership. James B. Jordan reported to Rushdoony that the first meeting did not necessarily reflect the best and brightest Christian intellectuals: “Gary [North] said that you \textit{must} be included. Gary feels that the Christian element in the meeting is small-minded and immature. It was apparently organized by Tim LaHaye. Gary thinks these guys are just playing games, trying to become another ‘Christian’ CFR.”\(^{171}\)

\(^{168}\) Ibid. North cites the $5,000 membership fee, but Bellant indicates that individuals paid $2,000 for a year membership; $5,000 bought one membership on the CNP’s Board of Governors. Bellant, \textit{The Coors Connection}, 36.

\(^{169}\) North, “Writing Conspiracy History.”


domination of business interests and Christian leaders in the mold of Tim LaHaye eventually led Rushdoony to reject the organization, but in the early 1980s, the CNP accepted Rushdoony’s nomination and he became a regular presence at its organizational meetings during much of the 1980s.

During the CNP’s regular meetings, Rushdoony associated closely with Howard Phillips, founder of the Conservative Caucus and occasionally served on panels addressing problems related to public education. 172 Through Phillips and the panels, Rushdoony networked with other CNP members, most of whom he dismissed as “true believers in politics.” 173 In spite of the general political orientation—and, therefore, secular persuasion of many at the meetings—Rushdoony did find the meetings beneficial as he hobnobbed with the principle religious leaders and moneymen of the right. Specifically useful were the connections he made with like-minded Protestant ministers who flew just below the horizon of national politics and widespread notoriety but who were fighting battles similar to the ones waged by Chalcedon. Thus, after one meeting he noted, “Made some excellent contacts, especially with Pastor Hodges of Baton Rouge, La., concerned with Christian Schools for blacks.” 174 The meetings could also be excellent for fund raising as Rushdoony discovered during a Dallas meeting in which he elicited $60,000 from supporters of Chalcedon’s legal work. 175

For all of their usefulness, however, Rushdoony generally disliked the meetings and stopped attending them in the late 1980s. Part of his dislike was rooted in the fact

174 Ibid.
175 R. J. Rushdoony journal entry for August 17, 1984, RJR Library.
that Rushdoony believed that the CNP and many of its members were stealing his ideas and using them without proper credit. For instance, during a meeting in Phoenix in 1984, the participants watched a taped speech from the televangelist Pat Robertson and heard floor speeches from U.S. Representative Newt Gingrich and Herbert Titus, a law professor, future administrator at Robertson’s CBN (now Regent) University, and occasional Christian Reconstructionist. All three men, Rushdoony noted, “called for the reconstruction of America, religious renewal, etc., a program ‘close’ to Chalcedon’s but without regeneration and God’s law mentioned, nor Chalcedon. More than a few [of those attending the meeting] saw the parallel to our work.”

Rushdoony knew both Robertson and Titus well and both were highly sympathetic to Rushdoony’s project of Christian Reconstruction. During the 1970s and early 1980s, Rushdoony had been a regular guest on Robertson’s television program, The 700 Club where he discussed subjects ranging from psychology to philosophy to Biblical law. Robertson hired Titus as an administrator at CBN University and was aware that he had contributed to the appendixes to The Institutes of Biblical Law. Further, Titus was associated with many of the Chalcedon’s legal activities during the 1970s. General awareness these connections led one participant at the CNP meeting to observe, “Everyone steals from Rushdoony.”

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179 Marley, in his biography of Robertson, suggests that Titus’s ties to Reconstructionism may have initially led Robertson to see him as “a mover and shaker” and later to see him as a problem (Marley, *Pat Robertson*, 256). Robertson hired Titus in 1986 to get CBN University’s School of Law accredited by
Rushdoony clearly was bitter that neither Robertson nor Titus publicly cited his influence, but his anger went far beyond some petty personal slight. He was concerned that men such as Robertson and Titus had downplayed his influence as a symptom of a broader evangelical desire to compromise on matters of doctrine in order to cooperate with secular and non-evangelical conservatives. “Month in and month out,” Rushdoony insisted, “I find my materials, illustrations, and footnotes used, sometimes verbatim, with no credit, because I am ‘controversial.’ So is the Lord.” In short, he interpreted a failure to directly cite his influence as a manifestation of evangelical cowardice and cultural retreat in order to avoid controversy.

If Rushdoony’s thought reflected a certain harsh strain of Reformed theology that many on the Christian Right were reading, quoting from, and distributing to others, then a failure to acknowledge Rushdoony exposed a wider willingness to set aside controversial matters in the interest of democratic pluralism, inter-religious cooperation, and, worst of all, doctrinal compromise. As David John Marley points out in his biography of Pat Robertson, Rushdoony was essentially correct on this point:

While he might occasionally say things that resonated with fans of Rushdoony, Robertson’s Baptist roots showed when he praised religious pluralism…. Robertson’s hopes that Christians will hold sway over the government are based on the democratic idea of majority rule. If religious conservatives are the largest single group of Americans, their ideas should naturally find expression in the nation’s laws. Dominionists [such as Rushdoony] do not view democracy as God ordained, especially if it keeps his laws from being enacted.182

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the American Bar Association (58, 256). Robertson later fired Titus in part because of the latter’s relationship to Christian Reconstructionism; he believed that Reconstruction made Titus “very narrow minded and had a very narrow definition of what a Christian is” (58).


182 Marley, Pat Robertson, 58-59.
Rushdoony feared that participants in the CNP meetings were politicians and activists first and Christians second. Their concern was moral and ethical in a generic sense, not in an explicitly Christian sense. While Robertson and others would have certainly disputed this point, Rushdoony’s narrow definition of orthodox Christianity made it nearly impossible for many evangelical Christians to live up to Rushdoony’s standards. Further, Rushdoony’s unique anti-pluralism and anti-democratic sentiments assured that he interpreted any language similar to his own as essentially identical to his own. Thus, from Rushdoony’s perspective, Robertson was simultaneously stealing Rushdoony’s ideas while denying their inherent truth.

Cobelligerents

Rushdoony’s tendency to see his influence in the works of other Christian writers and activists is particularly apparent in his relationship with Francis A. Schaeffer, IV. Rushdoony and Schaeffer had been reading one another for years and shared many basic theological ideas. As I noted above, Schaeffer studied under Van Til at Westminster Theological Seminary. Further, both Schaeffer and Rushdoony shared a profound fondness for the Reformed theologies of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd. Finally, as we saw earlier in this chapter, Rushdoony worked with Schaeffer’s son,

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183 Duriez, Francis Schaeffer, 40.
184 Irving Hexham, “The Evangelical Response to the New Age,” in Perspectives on the New Age, ed. James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 322n.16. Hexham has rightly argued that critics of Rushdoony and Schaeffer are too eager to conflate their ideas in order to turn Schaeffer into a derivative Reconstructionist. The two men did have similar ideas, but they disagreed on significant issues (such as the place of Biblical law in modern society, the problem of homosexuality, and numerous other problems). Further, Schaeffer dismissed key aspects of Rushdoony’s ideas—such as the latter’s emphasis on conspiracy theories and theocracy—in A Christian Manifesto, rev. ed. (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1982). See ibid, 56 and 120-121, respectively.
Franky Schaeffer, on legal issues related to Whitehead’s Rutherford Institute, and, in turn, the younger Schaeffer freely drew on Rushdoony’s ideas in his books and films.

Rushdoony was most clearly influential on one of Schaeffer’s last works, *A Christian Manifesto*. The *Manifesto* has long been considered a touchstone in the history of contemporary Protestantism in the U.S. for its impassioned plea that evangelicals and fundamentalists must understand that their faith in Christ “not only has personal results, but also governmental and legal results.”185 In his history of the rise of the Religious Right, William Martin points out that the *Manifesto* influenced a generation of evangelicals to engage in civil disobedience campaigns to protest U.S. abortion laws.186 Similarly, one of Schaeffer’s biographers argued that the book “substantially helped create a new Evangelical Right in America” by fusing Schaeffer’s pro-life activism with political conservatives to create a coalition, “which was able to exercise considerable political clout during the Reagan era.”187 The book sold nearly 300,000 in its first year188 and continues to influence Evangelical activists into the 2000s.

Not surprisingly, this fusion of activism, theology, and politics relied on the ideas and actions of Rushdoony and the Chalcedon Foundation. After reading the *Manifesto*, Rushdoony privately confided in his journal, “Read Francis Schaeffer: *A Christian Manifesto*, another book using some of my material, with phone calls for citations, with no mention of me: for most writers, I am useful but unmentionable! Not faith but

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185 Ibid., 20.

186 Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 321. This point was also developed earlier in Sara Diamond, *Roads to Dominion: Right-Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995), 246-247.


188 Diamond, *Roads to Dominion*, 246.
timidity is the mark of too many Christians today, including able men like Francis.”

Beyond a few unacknowledged sources, Rushdoony’s influence is also detectable in the
in the very origin of the book: the inspiration for the Manifesto emerged from a meeting
of the Christian Legal Society, which Schaeffer attended in April 1981. Not only had
Rushdoony supported the Society in the 1970s and tried to secure it funding, but many
attending the 1981 were Reconstructionist-inspired lawyer/activists. Most notably, John
Whitehead and Herbert W. Titus, long-time associates of Chalcedon attended the
conference, and Schaeffer warmly cited them in the text as critical legal influences on his
reasoning. In fact, Schaeffer specifically noted that Whitehead helped shape the text,
while Whitehead later indicated that he served as Schaeffer’s research assistant on the
project. In short, Schaeffer’s text pulsed with the force of Christian Reconstruction
even though it is impossible to firmly pin the book down as a “Reconstructionist” text.

At its heart, however, the Manifesto is more deeply Kuyperian and Van Tilian
than it is Rushdoonian. The text is structured around the notion of the “antithesis”
between Christian and secular worldviews. At the outset of the text, Schaeffer makes
clear that American culture has shifted “away from a world view that was at least vaguely
Christian… toward something completely different—toward a world view based upon

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R. J. Rushdoony journal entry for December 1, 1981, RJR Library. Far less concerned with
polite opinion was Gary North who recognized some of Rushdoony’s citations in the text and essentially
charged Schaeffer with plagiarizing Rushdoony’s ideas for more than twenty years. See, Gary North and
& Civilization 3 (Tyler, TX: Geneva Divinity School Press, 1983), 124-126. Further, Schaeffer did cite
some Reconstructionist authors in his text, most notably using articles from The Journal of Christian
Reconstruction; see, Schaeffer, A Christian Manifesto, 141n2; 141-142n7.

Ibid., 10-11.

John W. Whitehead, “Crazy for God: An Interview with Frank Schaeffer,” oldSpeak: An
oldspeak-frankschaeffer.html (accessed September 10, 2010).
the idea that the final reality is impersonal matter or energy shaped into its present form by impersonal chance” in which man—and not God—becomes the measure of all things.\textsuperscript{192} These two perspectives “stand as totals in complete antithesis to each other”\textsuperscript{193} and, consequently, anyone who embraces the humanistic view that impersonal chance dominates the universe cannot ultimately cooperate with Christians to create a better world.\textsuperscript{194}

Pagans, however, are not totally useless within the totalitarian binary structure of the antithesis. As sales of the \textit{Manifesto} soared and many of his other books topped bestseller lists, Schaeffer used his status as an evangelical \textit{agent provocateur} to push Jerry Falwell and other Christian right leaders to “use pagans to do your work.”\textsuperscript{195} His reasoning in the \textit{Manifesto} and other interviews and writings from this time helped prompt the formation of the Moral Majority, a pan-religious and pan-denominational organization, and similar organizations. Schaeffer proposed that socially and theologically conservatives Christians had ceded too much to the humanists because of a misguided and naïve commitment to purity. Instead of this suicidal pursuit of purity he suggested that an evangelical might work with a “cobelligerent” who “is a person who may not have any sufficient basis for taking the right position but takes the right position

\begin{footnotes}
\item[192] Emphasis in the original. Schaeffer, \textit{A Christian Manifesto}, 18.
\item[193] Ibid.
\item[194] Schaeffer is explicit that secular conservatives are just as bad as secular liberals: “As Christians we must stand absolutely and totally opposed to the whole humanist system, \textit{whether it is controlled by conservative or liberal elements}” (emphasis in the original; ibid., 77-78.).
\item[195] Martin, \textit{With God on Our Side}, 197.
\end{footnotes}
on a single issue. And I can join with him without any danger as long as I realize that he is not an ally and all were talking about is a single issue.”

Although Rushdoony did not himself adopt Scheaffer’s rhetoric of cobelligerancy, he was already practicing a form of it with his legal activities in the 1970s. In fact, it is reasonable to suggest that it was his combined activism with Franky Schaeffer, John Whitehead, and a network of homeschooling and legal activists that helped provide the working theological model underlying both the Manifesto and the concept of cobelligerancy. Indeed, Rushdoony’s cooperation with Roman Catholic faculty in the Notre Dame Law School and his broad willingness to provide legal support in the trials of groups ranging from the Amish to the Church of Scientology point to his general acceptance of and advocacy for the concept of cobelligerancy long before Schaeffer publically formulated the idea.

Thus, while Schaeffer is remembered in history books for his concise Manifesto and its pivotal role in formulating and formalizing the mechanisms and the theological logic behind the emergence of the Christian Right and the wider “New” Right, Rushdoony remains an obscure footnote. Yet, Rushdoony remains a singularly important footnote. First, he helped organize public interest law firms and encouraged a generation of parents to withdraw their children from public schools nearly two decades in advance of the cultural and political milieu that the Manifesto embodies. Second, it is important to note that the Manifesto emerged from a conference that Rushdoony’s acolytes were partially responsible for organizing. In short, if Schaeffer wrote the script for evangelical involvement in politics, he did so with the help and inspiration of a Christian grassroots

196 Quoted in Duriez, Francis Schaeffer, 192. See also Martin, With God on Our Side, 197-204.
and intellectual foundation that Rushdoony organized in the U.S. If Rushdoony was concerned by his lack of acknowledgement in the *Manifesto*, his discomfort stemmed not simply from a desire for recognition, but rather out of fear that the *Manifesto* was too timid and would not do enough to harness the political and cultural opportunities opened up by the emergence of the Christian Right.

**Conclusion: The Ends of Reconstruction**

By the end of the 1980s, Rushdoony’s health began to fail. During a visit to his doctor in 1986 he learned that an ear infection was likely to leave him mostly deaf.\(^{197}\) Further treatment revealed that his life-long inability to sleep for “2½ - 4 hours only” a night was likely related to chronic ear infections and other ear disorders he had experienced since he was three years old.\(^ {198}\) He continued to testify in court cases after the diagnosis, but his appearances became more rare until they ceased in 1988.\(^ {199}\) This was likely due to the fact that his health problems began to move far beyond his chronic ear infections: tests run in 1990 indicated that Rushdoony was suffering from high cholesterol and had developed type 2 diabetes.\(^ {200}\) This effectively ended the seventy-four year old’s public speaking and expert witness career. He continued to write and run the day-to-day operations of Chalcedon, but the intense vigor of his early career was, not surprisingly, no longer evident.

\(^ {197}\) R. J. Rushdoony journal entry for May 23, 1986, RJR Library.
\(^ {198}\) R. J. Rushdoony journal entry for June 20, 1986, RJR Library.
\(^ {199}\) Rushdoony’s last stint as an expert witness seems to have been a trial involving pastor Royal Blue of the Redding Baptist Church in Sacramento, California, on April 11, 1988.
\(^ {200}\) R. J. Rushdoony journal entry for March 28, 1990, RJR Library.
Aside from Rushdoony’s failing health, a series of other setbacks related to the Chalcedon/Tyler split further weakened the overall progress of Christian Reconstruction during the 1990s. First, two of the movement’s most promising theologians, Greg Bahnsen and David Chilton, died suddenly in 1995 and 1997, respectively. Bahnsen in particular had been an important rising star in the movement. He was a forceful public debater, polemicist, and classroom teacher and his absence seriously hurt the Christian Reconstruction because it came precisely when a dynamic and vigorous leader was needed to fill Rushdoony’s role in the movement. Second, Gary North did little to try to reconcile the two camps and instead spent much of the 1990s authoring direct attacks on his father-in-law’s legacy. He variously accused Rushdoony of supporting Unitarianism, aired dirty laundry about Rushdoony’s first marriage and the subsequent divorce, and charged that Rushdoony “was not really in charge” of the Chalcedon Report: “In recent years, as [Rushdoony] has grown older… and increasingly deaf, he has tended to hand over much of Chalcedon’s operations to inexperienced people without any theological training.” While North’s charges were exaggerated, they didn’t help convince new donors to offer money to the Chalcedon foundation.

The result was that Christian Reconstructionism was falling apart at the moment of its greatest gains. The institutional health of Chalcedon was in question as Rushdoony’s health failed. Gary North was sliding into self-parody with his attacks on a man too old, tired, and uninterested to defend himself. Yet, the larger idea of Christian


Reconstruction, especially the wider concept of dominion theology, was more popular and reaching a wider audience than it ever had before. Parents were taking Rushdoony’s writings on education evermore seriously. The emergence of the Christian Right saw millions of evangelicals and fundamentalists adopting variations on Rushdoony-inspired dominion theologies popularized by the likes of Francis A. Schaeffer and his son, Pat Robertson, and other televangelists such as D. James Kennedy. In short, the disintegration of the organizational structures of Christian Reconstructionism seemed to have little impact on its influence in an assemblage of interlocking religious and political issues.
Chapter 6: American Heretic

Evangelicalism, Democracy, and the Limits of Religion

“The tendency of institutions—church, state, and school—and of all callings, is to absolutize themselves and to play god in the lives of men. The answer of men to this problem has come to be ‘democracy.’ Democracy, however, only aggravates the centralization of power into institutional hands, because democracy has no solution to the problem of human depravity and often fails even to admit the problem.”

– R. J. Rushdoony, The Institutes of Biblical Law

“And the LORD said…, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.

– I Samuel 8:7 (KJV)

Historian Thomas A. Tweed identifies four common “themes” or “motifs” historians have commonly used to organize their narratives: “the organic, the frontier, the contest, and identity/difference.” The organic theme, according to Tweed’s assessment, is heavily indebted to evolutionary theories of culture developed in the nineteenth century and relies on biological metaphors of planting, growth, and cultivation. Narratives organized by and around a frontier theme bare the traces of Frederick Jackson Turner’s

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2 Thomas A. Tweed, “Introduction: Narrating U.S. Religious History,” in Retelling U.S. Religious History, ed. Thomas A. Tweed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 13-14. Tweed notes these broad thematic categories, but indicates that many others have been used such as “declension and secularization” and “irony and democracy” (14). Other common themes might include consensus, unity, denominationalism/sectarianism, etc. I offer Tweed’s streamlined list here for its basic utility for the purposes of my argument.
seminal essay, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” which prompted historians to generate narratives that “recounted not just the gaining and losing of land and resources but also the attitudes and behaviors associated with that environment, including the influence of individualist and democratic impulses on the fate of the American denominations.”

Next, Contest developed as a common theme with the end of the first World War as historians turned their “attention to international conflict and struggle.” “The basic image in this motif can be understood in political terms using the analogy of an election or a war, or it might be understood in economic terms using the language of class struggle and market economy.”

Finally, Tweed suggests that identity/difference theme came to dominate many histories beginning the in the 1970s. “This theme,” Tweed points out, “concerns… the unity or diversity of American religion. Convinced that earlier narratives overemphasized unity, narrators have tried to make a place for diversity while acknowledging that there has been some commonality too.”

Tweed moves on to suggest that this theme is often conceptualized in terms of “abstract spatial images” such as center/periphery, Venn diagrams, insider/outsider, mainstream/currents, and so on. These spatially organized narratives of identity/difference, Tweed argues, tend “to foreground white mainline Protestants and to shape plots that trace the rise and decline of Protestant cultural influence.” In short, the identity/difference theme presumes a mainline Protestant center around which “peripheral

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5 Ibid., 15.

6 Ibid.
groups situate themselves or as mainstream from which the other bodies of water diverge.”

My interest in recounting Tweed’s categorization of themes is two-fold. First, this dissertation relies to some degree on all four themes. I touched on the frontier in chapter 1 and chapter 2 focused on the failure of some conservatives to build consensus in the post-War era. Further, for better or worse, this is project dominated by Tweed’s final theme, identity/difference. It is inseparable from the growing awareness on the part of historians, religious studies scholars, and social scientists of the problems of social and cultural pluralism of the U.S. and the concomitant concern for how groups create and maintain the social boundaries. Given Rushdoony’s indisputable status as a white, elite, heterosexual pastor in the Presbyterian tradition, my narrative can do little to escape the tendency of the identity/difference theme to reify the essential white maleness of mainline Protestantism.

Yet for all of historiographic orthodoxy and shortsightedness of my project, in this chapter (as I did in chapter 2) I am struggling to work against the grain of the identity/difference theme discussed by Tweed. As Tweed explicitly notes, the identity/difference theme and its corresponding spatial metaphors are used by scholars to structure their narratives in such a way that scholars become the final arbitrators for determining where their subjects stand in relationship to the center and its periphery. Thus, implicitly, Tweed includes the scholar as an important agent in the creation and maintenance of the very processes of identification and differentiation. My intention, especially in this chapter, is therefore rooted in the thematic processes Tweed identifies,

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7 Ibid., 16.
but approaches them from a different direction. First, my point here is follow the complex ways in which the processes of identification and differentiation emerged from contact between Rushdoony and those he either pre-supposed as enemies or who, through interaction, emerged as his enemies or allies over time. Next, I map how Rushdoony and his interlocutors formed relationships that mobilized and were mobilized by the construction of social boundaries, many of which concretized into institutional structures that in turn reinforced and perpetuated these social distinctions.

Within the context of the study of U.S. religious history, the perspective I adopt in this chapter is heavily indebted to the a general trend pioneered by the likes of Tweed and also by (among many others) figures such as Robert Orsi and R. Laurence Moore who have labored to move away from the focus on “mainline” Protestant denominations, and more importantly, have attempted to avoid defining other American traditions in terms of their relationship to the Protestant mainline. However, since this project is also part and parcel of much broader debate about Protestantism and its mainline, Fundamentalist, and evangelical manifestations, it nonetheless remains prisoner to many of the historiographic and sociological assumptions that Tweed, et al. seek to undermine. In an attempt to work around and outside of this problem, I have been heavily influenced by complimentary approaches taken in the work of Jon R. Stone and Sean McCloud.

First, Stone’s *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism* is in many ways the inspiration for the chapter that follows. In attempting to make sense of the place of

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8 Tweed has continued and refined his theoretical approach in his helpful and highly suggestive, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

Rushdoony’s Christian Reconstructionism within the wider structure of American Protestantism it is difficult to simply focus on its theological uniqueness as the causal mechanism for why observers—whether friend or foe—normally situated it on the “fringes,” “margin,” or “extremes” of religious practice in the U.S. Stone, in a useful and provocative study of the emergence of neo-evangelicalism during the twentieth century points out that scholars “tend to focus on the theological differences between rival Protestant groups,” and as an alternative suggests that we turn our attention to the “boundaries themselves.” That is, he continues, scholars need to also take into account “the way evangelicals have sought to delimit the evangelical community and the social structural dynamics this definitional process entails.”

In a similar vein, McCloud’s *Making the American Religious Fringe* explores how various boundaries between “mainstream” and “fringe” traditions emerged in the popular journalistic accounts of “cults.” Like Stone, McCloud writes of the social and structural dynamics at work in the process of creating distinctions between various religious groups. He argues, “the American religious fringe functioned for journalists as a ‘negative reference group’ in process of identity construction. … As a negative reference group, the cultic margins helped to define what writers and editors desired or perceived themselves, their readers, and American culture as a whole to be.” Both Stone and McCloud seek to understand the way certain identity positions are constructed

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11 Ibid., 3.


13 Ibid., 7-8.
through various media sources. Further, both are acutely aware of the processes of identification and differentiation mobilized as these boundaries take shape, coalesce, shift, and collapse. In this sense Stone, McCloud, and myself are operating within the limits of the identity/difference paradigm identified by Tweed. But rather than seeking to classify in order to structure our historical narrative, in following Stone and McCloud, my narrative attempts to trace how my subjects created their own classificatory systems within a milieu of social and cultural processes that mediated their construction of boundaries and gave them substance, form, and articulated them into other social fields.

As I did in chapter 2, this chapter attempts to map the controversies\(^\text{14}\) that led to creation of Christian Reconstruction as both an intellectual and political project embraced by Rushdoony and his followers, but also as it was created and recreated by those who came in contact with the movement. Specifically, I focus on how Reconstructionism interacted with larger social and cultural movement such neo-evangelicalism and where it stands in relationship to such broader movements. This chapter begins with a chronological rewind of sorts and moves back to the 1960s to follow Rushdoony as he worked to create a relationship with the editors of *Christianity Today* and one of its chief fiscal patrons, the Sun Oil mogul J. Howard Pew. During this period, most evangelicals worried about the tone of Rushdoony’s theology: was he a peacemaker, or an instigator determined to embrace theological purity at the expense of unity? This discussion sets the stage to consider Rushdoony’s reception by evangelicals during the 1970s and eighties when many theologically and socially conservative Protestants were coming to

terms with their newfound political power. In this second section, I explore how evangelical authors moved to erect a strong partition between the sort of political activism engaged in by evangelicals and what they regarded as the dangerous and unchristian activity of Rushdoony and other Reconstructionists. I argue that evangelicals in the 1980s moved to conflate their theological disputes with political concerns about the proper role religion should (or should not) play in governing others. Finally, the third section considers how the antidemocratic aspects of Reconstructionism identified by critical evangelicals also became the target of journalists and pundits who feared the emergence of Christian theocracy following the 2001 terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania, and the electoral success of George W. Bush.

I. Rushdoony and the Neo-Evangelical Coalition

Rushdoony’s place within American Protestantism is contested and likely will remain so for years to come. As I have attempted to document in the previous chapters, Rushdoony and his ideas circulated through various organizations and political discourses only to emerge as a circumscribe outsiders: a controversial figure within his own denomination whose combative stand on theological issues eventually made his life as an active pastor all but impossible; expelled from the Volker Fund and Center for American Studies for his controversial ideas on race and religion; a marginalized yet influential figure in southern California’s emerging conservative movement who was as likely to cultivate relationships with the John Birch Society as he was to encourage his supporters to avoid the organization. In short, by carving out the strategic site of Christian

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Reconstruction, Rushdoony sacrificed access to and inclusion in wider social, cultural, and religious milieus. In this section I focus specifically on his contact and conflict with “the flagship publication of mainstream evangelicalism,”\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Christianity Today}. I document how Rushdoony walked a precarious line between national notoriety in the rarified circles of Presbyterianism and neo-evangelical publishing, while courting obscurity in his grassroots efforts to reconstruct American culture via Chalcedon. By closely analyzing Rushdoony’s conflicts with \textit{Christianity Today} and its editors, we can better understand how Rushdoony both positioned himself as an outsider and, simultaneously, how others constructed him as a marginalized figure embodying religious, theological, and political “extremism.” Also, by focusing on his contact and conflicts with neo-evangelicalism I hope document some of the ways that Rushdoony deftly cultivated his ideas and succeeded in presenting them to a broad audience in spite of his marginalized status and his own habit of forsaking allies and popularity for his idiosyncratic notion of theological purity.

\textit{Combining the Best in Liberalism with the best in Fundamentalism}

Perhaps no single national Christian publication was more prominent in the mid-twentieth century struggle to create a coalition\textsuperscript{17} of theologically conservative, socially aware Protestants than \textit{Christianity Today}. Billy Graham and a group of financial


\textsuperscript{17} Here I follow Stone’s suggestion that the twentieth century evangelical movement should be seen as a shifting “collection of changing constituencies;” a coalition of allies drawn together in the impermanent flux of theological positions, institutional organizations, emotional sentiments, and individual constituents. Stone, \textit{On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism}, 7.
supporters\textsuperscript{18} founded the magazine in 1956 to “plant the evangelical flag in the middle of the road, taking a conservative theological position but a definite liberal approach to social problems. It would combine the best in liberalism and the best in fundamentalism without compromising theologically.”\textsuperscript{19} Graham hoped the magazine would be “nothing less than the finest journal in the Western world, comparable to what \textit{Time} is in current events.”\textsuperscript{20} He wanted the publication to have intellectual authority so he recruited Harold John Ockenga (a graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary, the first president of the National Association of Evangelicals, and a co-founder of Fuller Seminary) to set on its board and tapped Fuller professor Carl F. H. Henry to edit the new publication. Together, Ockenga and Henry were intellectual architects of “neo-evangelicalism” or “new evangelism.”\textsuperscript{21} This theologically conservative movement sought to develop a socially relevant brand of fundamentalism and has since been described as the “third


\textsuperscript{20} Quoted in Board, “Moving the World with Magazines,” 130.

\textsuperscript{21} These two phrases are normally used interchangeably and appear to have been coined by Harold John Ockenga during an address in the late 1940s. See George M. Marsden, \textit{Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism} (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1987), 146; Gary J. Dorrien, \textit{The Remaking of Evangelical Theology} (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 56. Neo-evangelicalism could be distinguished from fundamentalism, according to Ockenga, because, although it reaffirmed “the theological view of fundamentalism,” it is a “ringing call of repudiation” of fundamentalist separatism “and [a] summons to social involvement” (Quoted in Dorrien, \textit{The Remaking of Evangelical Theology}, 56).
force” of American Protestantism, occupying a sort of organizational and theological middle path between fundamentalism and liberalism.22

As Graham emerged as the public face of the new evangelicalism, Christianity Today developed into its intellectual and journalistic voice. During the publication’s first decade, Henry attempted to produce a magazine that “spoke for evangelicals;” a sophisticated journal that was “published across the street from the White House”23 and reached a broad audience of laymen, clergy, policy makers, and business leaders. He wanted a magazine and staff that, according to Stephen Board, “valued journalistic reporting, scholarly credentials, and, most of all, serious debate.” 24 With this focus on journalism and scholarly debate, Henry hoped the publication would combine “an irenic spirit with theological integrity”25 so that evangelicals might move beyond factional theological concerns to address social issues.

As the magazine project came together, Henry and his editors sought out theological conservatives and invited articles on any number of issues. They were particularly interested in critiques of theological modernism who could communicate complex theological issues to a generalist audience. In 1957 associate editor Dr. J. Marcellus Kik sent R. J. Rushdoony, then known primarily as a promising young critic of modernism and secular education, a letter announcing the launch of the new venture. Kik

22 Ibid., 55.
23 Board, “Moving the World with Magazines,” 131. Board notes that many critics believe that after Henry’s departure as editor—depending on who you believe, he was either fired by Ockenga or resigned—the magazine ceased speaking for evangelicals in Washington, and instead began to simply “speak to” evangelicals when it began publishing across the street from headquarters for the National Association of Evangelicals. Board disputes this interpretation of the magazine’s history, but he indicates that some critics of the magazine believe it.
24 Ibid., 130.
invited Rushdoony to write an article for an early issue of the magazine and closed with
this solicitation: “I would like to have you suggest articles which you might like to
contribute to our new magazine. … It is my hope that you will accede to our requests.” Rushdoony did accede.

It appears that Rushdoony accepted Kik’s invitation because, like many
theologically conservative clergy of his day, Rushdoony perceived Christianity Today as
a response to the creeping liberalism embodied in other national Christian publications
such as Christian Century. Thus, although he made it clear that the magazine was not
“as Calvinist as I would like it,” Rushdoony nonetheless supported the publication with
short articles, book reviews, and freelance editorial work. In the first volume of
Christi
anity Today he published one of his first articles authored for a wide, non-Calvinist Protestant audience, and with it he began a long, restive relationship with the
neo-evangelical publication. Further, the editors ran favorable reviews of some of
Rushdoony’s early books, including By What Standard and Van Til. This inclusion of

27 Graham, Henry, and others clearly hoped that the magazine would appeal to readers exactly like Rushdoony; see Shipps, “Christianity Today, 1956-,” 171; Henry, Confessions of a Theologian, 144.
29 It’s not clear whether any of these reviews ran under Rushdoony’s name, but his correspondence indicates that he was writing reviews for Kik (J. Marcellus Kik to R. J. Rushdoony, May 20 1957, RJR Library).
30 Rousas John Rushdoony, “Ecumenism and the Lord’s Table,” Christianity Today, September 30, 1957. As the title implies, the article is a critique of various ecumenical liturgical experiments that Rushdoony believed “obscures the essential meaning of the sacrament” by placing too much emphasis on the supposed unity of humanity as a pre-condition for the power of the ritual (13).
32 Robert D. Knudsen, “Current Mood of Our Century: Alienation,” Christianity Today 6, no. 1 (1961), 48-54. This is a lengthy review of a series entitled Modern Thinkers Series published by Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company in 1960. Knudsen is generally positive about the whole series. Rushdoony’s Van Til was one in a series of eight short texts that also included introductions to
Rushdoony’s material in the first few years of the publication’s existence suggests that Kik and Henry saw Rushdoony as a potential ally within the evangelical coalition that they were hoping to create.\(^{33}\)

Rushdoony’s relationship with *Christianity Today* deepened when the editors realized that he had a particular strength for simplifying and clarifying complex theological ideas for his readers. As a capable popularizer of the difficult ideas of Cornelius Van Til, *Christianity Today*’s editors specifically sought out Rushdoony to help edit and clarify the Westminster theologian’s submissions. In one note soliciting Rushdoony’s aid, Kik explained, “Both Carl Henry and myself have struggled with [Van Til’s manuscript] in order to clarify it. Since you have clarified the writing of Van Til previously, I thought the best thing we could do is to send it to you to work over. Please remember 95% of our readers have no knowledge what *geschichte* is. Anything you can do to clarify will be helpful.”\(^{34}\) Rushdoony fulfilled this request and apparently operated as a cooperative and respected freelancer for the magazine.

But even as he worked to further the general mission of *Christianity Today*, Rushdoony also began criticizing the editors with more regularity. His criticisms seem to fall into two broad categories. First, there are his *warnings* to the editors. Second, there

\(^{33}\) This point is underscored by Henry’s stated rationale for inviting contributions for men such as Rushdoony. “We solicited articles from evangelicals in mainline denominations, not because we were precommitted to ecumenism but because writers in the independent churches might give the magazine an anti-ecumenical cast that would hinder our outreach” (*Confessions of a Theologian*, 167). In short, Rushdoony’s position within a mainline church (he was then associated with the Presbyterian Church in United States of America) ensured that he was not too controversial for the magazine’s editors and its intended readership.

\(^{34}\) J. Marcellus Kik to R. J. Rushdoony, January 30, 1959, RJR Library.
are his more aggressive theologically-based denunciations against the what he saw as a “liberal” drift among the magazine’s editorial standards. Rushdoony’s warnings normally took the form of strongly worded letters urging the editors to pay more attention the underlying theological implications of the material accepted. In terms of warnings, for instance, in one such letter Rushdoony forcefully criticized Henry and Kik’s decision to publish a favorable review of the writings of the Southern novelist William Faulkner. After citing a vivid inventory of the vulgar evils in Faulkner’s work, Rushdoony concluded, “I maintain that the defense of or liking for Faulkner is a sign of moral and spiritual degeneracy… and that Christianity Today has no moral right to protest filth on the newsstands and then give such prominence to Faulkner. I realize that the editors have probably not themselves read Faulkner or they would not have accepted the article.”

If Rushdoony meant this final sentence as a rebuke of the intellectual vapidity of Christianity Today’s editors, they hardly noticed. Instead, Kik admitted that he and others at the magazine had never read Faulkner. “If the editors had read William Faulkner’s works,” Kik began, “and they are as you described them, you may be assured this article never would have appeared in our magazine.” If Kik’s statement is to be taken at face value, then it only underscores failure of the editors of the “flagship” journalistic and intellectual endeavor of neo-evangelicalism to effectively overcome the lingering residue of fundamentalist separatism. Rushdoony had made his own reputation, in part, on his desire to overcome this cultural isolation and familiarize himself with the

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35 R. J. Rushdoony to J. Marcellus Kik, February 25, 1959, RJR Library.
36 J. Marcellus Kik to R J. Rushdoony, March 12, 1959, RJR Library.
cultural products of secular culture. This led figures such as Kik to take Rushdoony’s warnings seriously even if he didn’t immediately act on them.

After this exchange over the vulgarity of Faulkner, Rushdoony’s outspoken criticism of the magazine intensified into outright *denunciation* of the editorial standards of the publication. Perhaps emboldened by his more-or-less comfortable relationship with Kik and other editors at the publication, Rushdoony began to aggressively challenge the editors to maintain the rigorously orthodox theological standards of *Christianity Today*. In letter to Dr. L. Nelson Bell, the executive editor and Billy Graham’s father-in-law, Rushdoony went to the heart of the matter: “I am writing to you, as executive editor, to express my concern over certain very pronounced tendencies in *Christianity Today*. I have reference to the very marked hostility being displayed towards the orthodox view of Genesis.” Rushdoony was particularly concerned with a handful of book reviews which he believed did not line up with an orthodox fundamentalist interpretation of the historical factuality of the events recorded in Genesis 1-11. Rushdoony concluded the essay by suggesting that he was part of larger community of clergy concerned “over this tendency” at the magazine. “It does indicate,” he asserted, “a definite strain of heresy as the official stance of what professes to be an orthodox publication. And, unless radical changes are made, we can only assume that the publication intends to go further along these lines.” Setting aside Rushdoony’s odd appeal to an unidentified collective “we,” his invocation of “heresy” was no doubt meant to be a pointed accusation designed to make Bell pause and take note of the letter.

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38 Ibid.

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These two exchanges point to Rushdoony’s precarious place within the developing neo-evangelical coalition that would play such a prominent role in U.S. culture during the 1960s and 1970s. First, his warnings about Faulkner would have hardly been unusual coming from a socially and theologically conservative clergy member, but the heavy-handedness with which he addressed them to Kik, a learned and highly respected clergyman, indicated that Rushdoony was more than willing to bruise a budding friendship and professional relationship in order to play the role of informed Christian culture warrior. Second, Rushdoony’s aggressive note to Bell suggests that Rushdoony was either unaware or unconcerned with the fact Henry and Graham had intended the publication to include a spectrum of opinions popular among fundamentalist and neo-evangelical thinkers. While it is true that Christianity Today was generally fundamentalist in its stance on the creation narrative contained in Genesis, it is also true that even among fundamentalists there was some nuance and sophistication in interpreting the literal historicity of Genesis. That Rushdoony so aggressively moved to foreclose this range of opinion suggests that any cooperation with the “irenic” big-tent mission of the Henry/Graham neo-evangelical coalition was highly unlikely.

Or, perhaps more correctly, Rushdoony’s was making it clear that he did not want in their big tent. By the middle of the 1960s, Rushdoony’s criticisms of Christianity Today had circulated far and wide within certain Reformed circles. Besides his aggressive letters to Christianity Today’s editors, Rushdoony had also begun share his criticisms of the publication in his private correspondence with academic theologians whom he warned to avoid the publication. In one such strongly worded letter to Dr. C.

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39 Henry, Confessions of a Theologian, 147.
Gregg Singer, a professor at Catawaba College in North Carolina, Rushdoony spelled out his concerns about *Christianity Today*’s breed of neo-evangelicalism. “*Christianity Today,*” he explained,

rejected the position the Reformers stood for. It holds to the position known as ‘neo-evangelicalism,’ or the ‘new evangelicalism.’ This position… plays down [Kuyper’s concept] of the antithesis, holds that doctrines which divide ‘Christians,’ such as infallibility, the atonement, etc., should not be sharply stated but only generally so, and that ‘love’ must be emphasized *ad nauseam.* … But, most of all, there is a determined hostility to Calvinistic thinking, because it represents an uncompromising stand on the Biblical faith. *Christianity Today* wants to further ‘dialogue’ with the opposition. And ‘dialogue’ today is really a technical word in the vocabulary of the left, and it means surrender in order to have common ground.40

This sort of rhetoric would have hardly endeared Rushdoony with Henry and others at *Christianity Today,* and also it made clear his now unequivocal hostility to a magazine he had initially approached with such high hopes. More importantly, however, Rushdoony’s statement to Singer highlights the fact that Rushdoony believed that neo-evangelicalism was a more less a closed coalition that was “capturing old Fundamentalism, and old orthodoxy.”41 That Rushdoony feared a movement which shared most his core theological values, but did so in an insufficiently rigorous manner suggests a form of theological purism that had drastic sociological implications: he was rapidly moving toward a theological stand that precluded any ability to cooperate with anyone who disagreed with his interpretation of Scripture no matter how minor or insignificant the distinction. And he was moving to this position just as J. Howard Pew offered him the

40 R. J. Rushdoony to C. Gregg Singer, September 28, 1965, folder 24, C. Gregg Singer Papers, Manuscript Collection #32, The Historical Center of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) (hereafter cited as the CGS Papers).

41 Ibid.
chance to replace Kik and become a regular contributor to Christianity Today, a position that could possible entail considerable influence in the neo-evangelical coalition.

J. Howard Pew

J. Howard Pew, perhaps most famous today as one of the co-founders of the Pew Charitable Trusts, was the chairman of the Sun Oil Company, a prominent Presbyterian layman, and major financial backer of Christianity Today. He had long been an outspoken critic of theological modernism and socially “liberal” movements such as the Social Gospel. As a noted and wealthy layman, Pew believed it was his duty to, as the historian E. V. Toy notes, “counteract the misconceptions that many ministers had about businessmen.”

Like many mid-century figures influenced by Protestant fundamentalism, Pew feared that theological liberalism went hand-in-hand with social liberalism in a way that undermined the possibility for the individual redemption of human beings in favor of a collectivist form of social redemption that he believed to be utopian and unbiblical. Further, he was part of generation of socially conservative businessmen who used their economic influence to counteract what he interpreted as liberalism among American clergymen.

As I noted in chapter 1, Pew was a supporter of such right-wing, religiously inflected organizations as Spiritual Mobilization, the Foundation for Economic Education, and the Christian Freedom Foundation. It was through this activism that Pew became familiar with Rushdoony and eventually reached

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out to him as a potential ally in the fight against the supposed liberalization of American Protestantism.

Before discussing Pew’s relationship with Rushdoony, it is worth pausing a moment to consider Pew’s wider relationship to American Protestantism. It is particularly useful for understanding why Pew was both emotionally and financially invested in Christianity Today and why he believed that Rushdoony could prove to be a useful ally in his struggle against a “liberal” Protestant establishment. Their budding relationship was directly linked to Pew’s wider fight against theological and social liberalism. Specifically, Rushdoony admired Pew’s doggish struggle in the late 1940s and early 1950s as chairman of the National Lay Committee of the National Council of the Churches of Christ.44 During his tenure at the head of the Lay Committee, Pew used his position to combat what he saw as a pronounced socialistic drift in American clergy. According to one biographer, Pew fortified his Lay Committee as a bulwark against clerical liberalism—both political and theological.45 From 1950 until 1955, Pew used

44 The National Council of the Churches of Christ (NCC) is an interdenominational federation formed by a collection of U.S. Protestant churches. The organization formed in 1950 out of an earlier manifestation known as the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ. It was during this transition period that the NCC hoped to further cooperation between the clergy and laity with the formation of a Lay Committee to advise the NCC’s General Board. The members of the NCC believed that its “initial progress would depend upon generating a sense of involvement among lay people able to donate generously” (Henry J. Pratt, The Liberalization of American Protestantism: A Case Study in Complex Organizations [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1972], 87).

45 J. Howard Pew, Faith and Freedom: The Journal of a Great American, J. Howard Pew, ed. Mary Homan Sennholz (Grove City, PA: Grove City College, 1975). The NCC’s previous manifestation, the Federal Council of Churches, had issued statements that “approved the essential thrust of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal… implying a need for enlarging the sphere of government action” (Pratt, Liberalization of American Protestantism, 17.). This had poisoned the organization’s relationship with businessmen such as Pew and many other archconservative laymen. The FCC also “had been labeled Communist and socialist in several widely read books” (86). Among these were influential works such as Carl McIntire, Modern Tower of Babel (Collingswood, NJ: Christian Beacon Press, 1949). Pew and many other laymen (especially his fellow right-wing crusaders Herbert C. Cornuelle and Jasper E. Crane, characters who have already figured into chapter 1 of this dissertation) wanted to create a mechanism whereby they might stop—or at least stall—the NCC’s ability to issue objectionable economic and political material on behalf of all member churches.
his chairmanship to defend “the principle that the Christian churches should not become involved in economic and political controversy.” Indeed, as his defiant final report to the Council insisted, “Our [the Lay Committee’s] premise was that, instead of appealing to government, the church should devote its energies to the work of promoting the attributes of Christianity—truth, honesty, fairness, generosity, justice and charity—in the hearts and minds of men. We attempted to emphasize that Christ stressed not the expanded state but the dignity and responsibility of the individual.”

Pew’s intention to prevent the NCC from issuing official statements on economic and political issues, however, was far from straightforward, and, in fact, clearly represented a intermingling of Christian theology, politics, and economics. The committee’s proposed “Lay Affirmation”—a document that the NCC’s Board believed could prove controversial enough to endanger the stability of the entire council—insisted that the NCC must not issue statements about “economics, politics, and social relationships,” then moved on to unironically insist that

a Christian society is a voluntary society, where the rights and dignity of the individual are respected, where economic decisions are arrived at in a free market place, political decisions are made by a representative government operating within the framework of moral law, and all are free to worship God as God reveals His Holy Will to them.

While one would be hard-pressed to find a more overt and explicit statement on matters political and economic emanating from a church-supported committee, Pew and his 219-

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48 Pratt, Liberalization of American Protestantism, 103.
49 Pew, The Chairman’s Final Report, 186.
50 Ibid., 187.
member\textsuperscript{51} Lay Committee saw no such contradiction. Many of the members of the NCC’s General Board did see the contradiction: “The deathblow to the Lay Committee,” notes Henry J. Pratt, “was struck by a group of men… who might be described as nonideological or perhaps as moderately conservative.”\textsuperscript{52} They eventually rejected Pew’s “Lay Affirmation” and abolished his Lay Committee in 1955 because they worried further conflict could lead to “debilitating factional strife” that might be “endangering to the internal stability of the NCC.”\textsuperscript{53}

Although the NCC managed to part ways with Pew’s Lay Committee, he was a stiff-necked man who could hardly be dissuaded from his cause by the success of socialists on single front in the war. Pew continued his quest to resist theological and social liberalism in the church via a host of other initiatives such as Spiritual Mobilization and the Christian Freedom Foundation that eventually brought him into contact with R. J. Rushdoony. Their cooperation in these organizations was not accidental—they shared many sympathies: staunch support of a Reformed worldview; distrust of the NCC and other socialistic parachurch organization; support for the John Birch Society;\textsuperscript{54} and respect for Westminster Theological Seminary. Further, both men harbored deep misgivings about the ultimate nature of the neo-evangelical message of Christianity Today.

\textsuperscript{51} At its height, the Lay Committee numbered 219 members. Ibid., 295.
\textsuperscript{52} Pratt, *Liberalization of American Protestantism*, 103.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
The two men crossed paths because of Pew’s support for *Christianity Today* and another important mid-century right-wing magazine, *Christian Economics*. Rushdoony had been a long-time reader and contributor to the latter when its editor, Howard E. Kershner, recommended that Pew might want to enlist Rushdoony as an ally in their fight against liberal Protestantism. Following this suggestion, Pew began to pursue Rushdoony as a possible contributor to *Christianity Today*, and to replace his deceased friend, Dr. J. Marcellus Kik.

For the first decade of the magazine’s history, Pew maintained a close personal relationship with associate editor Dr. Kik, a conservative Presbyterian. Pew offered financial backing to Kik’s scholarly pursuits while Kik served as Pew’s loyal theological ally and friend. When Kik died in the fall of 1965, Pew went looking for another scholar and minister of similar stature and ability. He quickly settled on R. J. Rushdoony. “Knowing how interested you have been in the history and development of our Church down through the ages,” Pew wrote to Rushdoony shortly after Kik’s death, “I was wondering if you would like to continue Dr. Kik’s work.” Rushdoony eagerly responded, “I am honored that you are considering me to continue Dr. Kik’s work, and am greatly interested.”


56 Shortly before his death, Kik demonstrated his dedication to Pew’s cause when he moved to Philadelphia in an effort to help Pew resist changes to the Westminster Confession (Undated letter from Charles Hays Craig to R. J. Rushdoony, RJR Library).


While Pew vetted Rushdoony as Kik’s potential successor, he also moved to give Rushdoony a prominent national platform in the pages of *Christianity Today*. On Monday, February 12, 1966, Rushdoony flew from Los Angeles to Phoenix for a private audience with Pew. Although the exact substance of the conversation is unclear, the two discussed Rushdoony’s desire to start a Christian college under the auspices of the Chalcedon Foundation and Pew proposed his hope that Rushdoony might replace Kik. During the meeting, Pew also solicited a series of four articles on the topic of “The Mediator: Christ or the Church?” The articles would, in Pew’s words, address “the need of the church to keep out of economic, social and political affairs.” Through this offer, and Rushdoony’s agreement, the two men became allies in Pew’s long-running fight against organizations such as the NCC. Further, they were also moving toward a collision with Henry and the other editors at *Christianity Today* who, though largely in agreement with Pew and Rushdoony’s criticism of clerical politicking, were trying to avoid showy theological arguments that might alienate theologically and socially moderate members of the evangelical coalition.

The resulting conflict between Pew, Henry, and Rushdoony provides a clear illustration of the tensions surrounding the creation of the social, institutional, symbolic,

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59 Pew’s vetting seems to have been particularly thorough. In an undated letter that appears to have been authored in 1965-1966, C. Gregg Singer wrote to Pew assuring him that the ultra-conservative Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) had accepted Rushdoony’s divorce. Singer reported on the facts of the divorce and explained, “The OPC committee and presbytery accepted Rushdoony and found his grounds valid. In its 30 year history, the OPC has only accepted two divorced men, and, in the other case, it was an annulment rather than a divorce. … The fact of the situation is that a state court and a church court both clearly found in favor of him in a decisive way” (Undated letter from C. Gredd Singer to J. Howard Pew, CGS Papers). This exchange suggests that Pew was serious enough about including Rushdoony into his circle of religious advisors that he felt it necessary to understand all aspects of his personal history and that Rushdoony’s divorce was still a matter of serious concern for his friends and foes alike.

60 J. Howard Pew to Howard E. Kershner, January 24, 1966, JHP Papers.
and theological boundaries emerging at the edges of the shifting limits of what we now call neo-evangelicalism. As Pew recruited Rushdoony and deployed him as an ally in this fight, the two men certainly did not get the outcome they hoped for. Also, by the time the struggle was over, Rushdoony had been effectively marginalized from the emerging boundaries of the neo-evangelical coalition.

Failed Mediations

From the outset, Pew maintained tight financial control over Christianity Today during its first few years of operation. He did not hesitate to insist that, since his money was at stake, he had a right to review advanced proofs of each edition of the publication.\(^\text{61}\) On each of these points, Pew ran into substantial resistance from Carl Henry.\(^\text{62}\) Henry, supported by Bell and Kik,\(^\text{63}\) believed such arrangements reduced the

\(^{61}\) As historian Kim Phillips-Fein notes, Pew had previously focused his attention on denominational publications with limited appeal, and on polemical inter-denominational publications such as Faith and Freedom and Christian Economics that warned of the dangers of liberal politics. Unlike these latter efforts, which Phillips-Fein notes had little popular support, Christianity Today was a project genuinely rooted in the network of revivalism and evangelicalism, and it was far more successful than fringe groups [such as Spiritual Mobilization, the Christian Freedom Foundation, and the Foundation for Economic Education] that had wanted to bring capitalism to Christianity and businessmen into the church. But its very independence—its determination to be a “forum” rather than an “organ”—at times frustrated the oilman, and in 1964 he offered his resignation from the board of the magazine (Invisible Hands, 77).

But even though Pew resigned from the board, he retained a keen interest in the publication and never lost his hope of developing Christianity Today into a popular and more widely read version of Faith and Freedom or Christian Economics. His work with Rushdoony is but one example of such efforts.

\(^{62}\) Apparently Pew had heard a rumor that “Carl Henry is a socialist” who might use Christianity Today to covertly spread a collectivist Christian agenda. Henry was unaware of the rumor until years later and was therefore unsure why Pew systematically worked to limit his position at the magazine. Bell, Kik, and Graham apparently intervened on his behalf, but never fully convinced the oilman of Henry’s capitalistic \textit{bona fides}. See Henry, \textit{Confessions of a Theologian}, 162.

\(^{63}\) Nelson Bell specifically worked to keep the peace between Pew and Henry and often worked to conceal some of Pew’s more aggressive demands from Henry to avoid the latter’s resignation. Bell went so far as to secretly pass material to Pew for his approval and to hide this process from Henry. They eventually reached a compromise that would allow Howard Kershner to approve the proofs as Pew’s surrogate. See Henry, \textit{Confessions of a Theologian}, 160-162.
editorial staff’s “professional dignity” to the level of “salaried propagandists.”

Besides his hope to approve final editions of the publication, Pew also used his influence to hand-select authors and articles that he wanted, believing they could counterbalance the liberal drift he perceived in the journal’s editorial direction.

Pew clearly intended Rushdoony’s “Mediator” series to be a clarion conservative voice in what he perceived to be mealy-mouthed, perhaps even crypto-socialist, publication. Pew wanted the series to highlight the theologian’s skepticism of clerical activism, and the essays did not disappoint. In an unpublished draft of the first essay in the series, Rushdoony didn’t pull his punches: “The modern attempt to reduce Jesus to the level of political reformer, and the church to the same level, is a denial of Christ’s true Kingship.”

When Rushdoony submitted the first article for consideration, Pew declared, “I am entirely in agreement with it,” and encouraged the editors of Christianity Today to publish it immediately. In a letter to Dr. L. Nelson Bell, Billy Graham’s father-in-law and executive editor of Christianity Today, Pew wrote, “Mr. Rushdoony is a scholar and I believe as well equipped to write on this subject as anybody I know. … Time is running out and we should get these articles in Christianity Today very quickly.” In fact, Pew pushed the issue so aggressively that Rushdoony believed that it was a foregone conclusion that his material would eventually appear in the magazine. To C. Gregg singer Rushdoony explained, “I have at least one article soon to

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64 Ibid., 161.
appear in *Christianity Today*, but not because the staff wants it there, but because Mr. Pew does.”

Given Rushdoony’s certainty about the nature of Pew’s support, what happened next likely came as a surprise. Dr. Carl F. H. Henry, *Christianity Today’s* editor, accepted the first article in the series, but rejected the second. Henry and his editors homed in on a key passage in which Rushdoony interpreted Satan’s Temptation of Jesus in the wilderness as a rejection of socialism. “In the Temptation,” Rushdoony argued,

Jesus has maintained the integrity of his vocation. The First Temptation was to turn the stones of the wilderness into bread. The world was full of hungry men, starving babies, economic problems and Satan demanded in effect that Jesus prove Himself a savior, a compassionate redeemer, by dealing with the politico-economic crises of man....

Rushdoony interpreted Jesus’ rejoinder—“Man shall not live on bread alone”—as a categorical rejection of socialism. “Salvation is not in the manipulation of man’s environment: it is the regeneration of man’s heart, and hence... the apostles were clearly forewarned against proclaiming a social (or socialist) gospel in place of the atoning, redemptive work of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ.”

Henry, citing both his reading of the article and the authority of his reviewers, responded by asserting that this interpretation of the Temptation was “highly fanciful.” Henry also shared with Rushdoony one of his anonymous readers’ comments. These added further insult to injury, by declaring the essay “bizarre,” “laughable,” and suggesting Rushdoony knowingly “twisted” the passage and was therefore trying to

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70 Ibid.
“pervert” scripture. Rushdoony curtly responded to Henry, demanding the return of both essays: “Kindly return my first essay to me. It is one of a series of four, and I have no desire to break up the series. Moreover, it is for me more a liability than an asset to be published in Christianity Today.” Henry acquiesced to Rushdoony’s demand, but insisted that he and his editors found the first letter adequate after making “some factual corrections.”

Ultimately, Henry’s motivation for rejecting the essay may have had as much to do with Rushdoony’s budding relationship with Pew as it did with concerns over Rushdoony’s theological impertinence. Over a year before this conflict, Henry wrote a brief response to one of Rushdoony’s many critical letters, noting, “I’m sorry that about the only time we hear from you in relation to Christianity Today is by way of criticism.” Henry concluded the letter by calling for a more positive relationship between the magazine and Rushdoony: “Now I would like to invite you to become an appreciative participant in the dialogue also.” Henry’s willingness to share the accusatory personal attacks on Rushdoony’s second “Mediator” essay suggests that Henry’s pervious invitation to an “appreciative” dialogue was no longer an option. In fact, one is left to wonder if Henry shared the comments of his fellow editor in order to embarrass Rushdoony in front of Pew and to force Rushdoony into an antagonistic stance.

Further, it is possible that Henry and his editors knew about Pew’s proposal to

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72 R. J. Rushdoony to Dr. Carl F. Henry, April 19, 1966, RJR Library.
73 Carl F. H. Henry to R. J. Rushdoony, April 26, 1966, Archives of the Billy Graham Center, Wheaton College Archives and Special Collections, Wheaton IL, collection 8, box 20, folder 42 (hereafter cited as the BGC collection).
75 Henry carbon copied the letter and editor’s comments to Pew, RJR Library.
Rushdoony. Given Pew’s initial strong support for Rushdoony as Kik’s successor it is also likely that Henry was concerned about the possibility of a vocal critic of *Christianity Today* becoming a patron of one of the magazine’s major financial supporters.

Regardless of the exact reasons for the essay’s rejection, Rushdoony abruptly ended any hopes of developing a potentially lucrative patronage arrangement with Pew when he demanded the return of both articles. In a letter to Pew, Rushdoony briefly summarized his reluctance to work further with *Christianity Today*, concluding, “I cannot work with pygmies; you are in a position where you can command them, and I am not. … I am sorry that this terminates our association, because I do have a very great respect for you and your faith.”

There is no evidence that Rushdoony wanted Pew to intervene on his behalf, or that Rushdoony tried to save the relationship by editing the essay. In fact, as Gary North remembers, at roughly this time, Pew had said to Rushdoony, “I want you to help me win back the Presbyterian Church” from liberals. According to North, Rushdoony responded, “I am not interested in winning back the Presbyterian Church. It’s too late.” This reaction, North says, “cost him a well-funded career, at least until Pew’s death in 1973. Pew ended the meeting and never called him again.” Ultimately, Rushdoony showed little concern regarding this sudden end to his chances of securing a nationally prominent position as Pew’s favored Presbyterian theologian.

Rushdoony’s failure to cultivate a long-term relationship with both Pew and *Christianity Today* is significant on multiple levels. First, it effectively ended his chances of ever playing in the neo-evangelical court. He had so alienated and been alienated by Henry that his project of Christian Reconstruction would never be recognized as a

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76 R. J. Rushdoony to J. Howard Pew, April 19, 1966, RJR Library.
component of the neo-evangelical coalition. While others from the neo-Calvinist and conservative Reformed worlds joined the neo-evangelical coalition, Rushdoony’s Christian Reconstructionism would not. Second, Rushdoony would have to wait for another two decades before he would find a benefactor with pockets even a fraction as deep as Pew’s.\textsuperscript{77} This meant he had yet again lost a relationship with a powerful benefactor; however, while it is clear that Rushdoony mishandled his relationship with Harold Luhnow and the Volker Fund, it appears that Rushdoony learned something from this earlier event and concluded that any engagement with Pew would be on the oilman’s terms, not his. As a result, the reverend was far less aggressive in asserting his position with Pew and, for his part, Pew was willing to flirt with Rushdoony, but reluctant to go to the mat to protect him.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, Rushdoony’s fight with \textit{Christianity Today} helped establish the way the wider community of America’s theologically and socially conservative Protestants would receive Rushdoony’s ideas. Rushdoony’s decision to stand outside of the neo-evangelical mainstream became not only a point of identificatory distinction for Christian Reconstructionists, but also for neo-evangelicals themselves. Although many within the neo-evangelical coalition adhered to a vaguely conservative social and economic political philosophy,\textsuperscript{78} few cleaved to the totalizing project of Christian Reconstruction. Consequently, Christian Reconstruction emerged as the limit of neo-evangelicalism; it was at once irreducibly imbricated into the textual, institutional, and theological milieu of conservative neo-evangelical Protestantism and also perceived

\textsuperscript{77} I covered this relationship with savings and lone heir Howard Ahmanson in chapter 5.  
\textsuperscript{78} Shipps, “Christianity Today, 1956-,” 174-175.
as a threat to traditional orthodoxy. But as I’ll argue in the next section, evangelicals came to believe that Reconstruction’s theological underpinnings also posed a threat to constitutional democracy.

II. **DEMOCRACY AS HERESY**

Rushdoony’s rejection of the neo-evangelical coalition and its willingness to return the favor had important theological and institutional implications. Theologically, as we saw in the previous section, neo-evangelicals such as Ockenga, Henry, and Kik shared many of Rushdoony’s doctrinal assumptions, but the distinctions—those differences that truly make a difference—eventually solidified into institutional boundaries. Organizationally and institutionally, whether through his connection with Pew or his aspirations with Chalcedon, Rushdoony was clearly proposing the creation of a parallel institutional structure to evangelical ones that undoubtedly, to the eyes of Henry and other publically orientated evangelicals, looked suspiciously reminiscent of the separatist of post-Scopes Fundamentalists. This give-and-take between withdrawal and engagement, separation and connection helped to determine how neo-evangelicals would interact with Reconstruction in the future, and vice versa. Specifically, it created a context in which institutions such as *Christianity Today* and prominent evangelical seminaries in the mold of Fuller and Dallas Theological Seminary could function as gatekeepers that managed to constrain Reconstruction’s influence to the parallel institutional structure Rushdoony longed to create.

This *de facto* gate-keeping strategy proved to be a double-edged sword that effectively obscured and obfuscated the growing influence of Reconstructionist ideas, but it also left evangelicals unprepared to deal with Reconstructionism when its parallel
institutions not only survived by thrived. Significantly, the theological and personal conflicts between Reconstructionists and the wider evangelical community coupled with institutional division to produce profound ignorance about the goals and mission of a coalition of shadowy, highly motivated figures. Unlike many evangelicals, Reconstructionists think in terms of eternity, not individual lifetimes or decade-long election cycles. Not content to win one soul for Jesus at a time, Reconstructionists call for capturing entire social and cultural systems for Christ. This sociological and political mission caught many evangelicals off guard even as they were stepping into the mainstream of American political and cultural life during the 1970s. If Rushdoony was a problem for Henry and others in the 1950s and '60s, Reconstruction as an unorganized, diffuse political project was about to become a disaster for many evangelicals—critics would use it to unfairly paint evangelicals as closeted Reconstructionists and to dismiss the political concerns of a large portion of the American electorate as dangerous, fringe nonsense. But Reconstructionism also became a life raft. By distinguishing themselves from Rushdoony’s political theology, evangelicals could simultaneously lay claim to a space within the pluralistic structure of U.S. electoral politics by identifying with a political tradition rooted in the broader discourse of Judeo-Christian values, and differentiating themselves from a Reconstructionist agenda organized on the premise of theocratic tyranny.

“Forget this is by Rushdoony”

If fractious theological infighting and a nasty clash of personalities between Rushdoony and the magazine’s editors dominated the 1950s and early-1960s, then the late-1960s and 1970s developed into an era of relative peace. Christianity Today’s
Private editors’ notes suggest that Henry and his associates occasionally considered publishing articles by Rushdoony, but in each case decided against it. For his part, Rushdoony himself never personally submitted another article for the editors’ review. Instead, his supporters occasionally sent in unsolicited manuscripts to the magazine only to receive the inevitable rejection. In one instance, Henry prefaced a submission by asking the editor to “[f]orget this is by Rushdoony. Does it have any merit?” Henry’s initial imperative to “forget” who wrote the essay suggests that the magazine’s staff was generally prejudiced against Rushdoony’s work. The reviewer’s response—whether influenced by Rushdoony’s byline or not—illuminates what appears to have been the general sentiment at the publication regarding Rushdoony: “This,” the reviewer began, “has the form of scholarship but none of its content. … Rush’s theology is not much better.”79 Later in 1973, the editors, no longer led by Henry, similarly discussed an article authored by Rushdoony but submitted by Llewellyn Rockwell. They ultimately concluded, “[I]t’s not that this article takes us anywhere.”80 They rejected it.

In a rare exception to this general rejection, Christianity Today did let its guard down long enough in 1974 for Harold O. J. Brown to declare, “Without a doubt, the most

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79 Undated exchange between Carl Henry and a reviewer identified as “Jim,” BGC collection. The article under consideration, “Christian Social Ethics: Love, Justice, and Coercion,” is dated 2 February 1965, but the letter’s place in the Billy Graham Center’s Archive suggests the editors reviewed the article after the 1966 debacle.

impressive theological work of 1973 is Rousas J. Rushdoony’s *Institutes of Biblical Law*, a compendious treatment of a whole gamut of questions in governmental, social, and personal ethics from the perspective of the principle of law and the purpose of restoration of divine order in a fallen world.”

This rare acknowledgement of Rushdoony’s mammoth theological work totaled only two sentences, mentioned nothing of his growing influence in conservative Reformed circles, but it also hinted that ignoring Rushdoony was going to be more and more difficult for the publication.

More commonly in the ‘70s, the publication’s editors tried to ignore Rushdoony’s influence and the work of his growing body of students. A telling example of this effort to sidestep Rushdoony’s influence came in the October 24, 1975, issue’s cover story, “The Reformers.” Authored by Terrill I. Elniff, the article discussed Puritan philosophies of government and jurisprudence and detailed their relevance to modern society. The article leaned heavily on Rushdoony’s ideas, but Elniff was shocked when the article appeared in print: editors that removed all references to Rushdoony, his ideas, and direct quotations from his works. The Elniff wrote Rushdoony apologizing for the sudden omissions:

I was embarrassed and not a little shocked when I received my copy of the printed version… and found that most of my direct quotations from your works plus specific footnotes attributing the sources of indirect quotations and sources of ideas had been deleted. … If I had realized how the text would be edited, I’d have written more of the documentation into the text itself rather than putting it in the footnotes, but that’s hindsight now. 


82 Terrill I. Elniff to R. J. Rushdoony, 23 October 1975, RJR Library.
Given that the article ran, by the author’s own admission, largely as written, the removal of specific references to Rushdoony suggests that the publication’s editors felt it sufficient to expunge Rushdoony without engaging in any direct exchange with him or his followers. But in unacknowledging Elniff’s reliance on Rushdoony, *Christianity Today* was also ignoring his growing influence.

*Theocracy and Democracy*

As I outlined in chapter 5, broad interest in Rushdoony’s work developed slowly over the course of the 1970s and 1980s. In previous decades, Rushdoony remained content to publish in specialized journals read mostly by like-minded clergy and in libertarian and conservative publications read by movement insiders who longed for coherent, religiously astute analyses of American culture. Further, he narrowly focused his public ministry on small Christian colleges, activist meetings, and Christian schools. This patient, small-scale grassroots work eventually led to higher profile appearances on programs such as Pat Robertson’s 700 Club, and D. James Kennedy’s television broadcasts. As I documented in the previous chapter, by the 1980s Rushdoony’s ideas had so suffused Christian schools and colleges that they seemed to be everywhere even though few in the evangelical movement had heard of Rushdoony or actually read his writings. How had Rushdoony managed this slippery end-run around *Christianity Today*, the “flagship” publication of American evangelicalism? In effort to answer this question, a new narrative emerged that redefined the publication’s old foe not in theological terms, but in political terms.

In “Democracy as Heresy” Rodney Clapp, an editor and essayist at *Christianity Today*, settled on the narrative that has since become the controlling discourse on
Rushdoony and his project of Christian Reconstruction.\textsuperscript{83} Clapp’s 1987 exposé portrayed a dystopian, twisted nightmare society built on Rushdoony’s ideas. By focusing on the crimes and punishments enumerated in Rushdoony’s \textit{Institutes of Biblical Law} and the tensions between Rushdoony and his son-in-law Gary North, Clapp’s article presented a theological movement in which violence trumps benevolence and theology is degraded to a generational grudge match. More conveniently, Rushdoony’s focus on theonomy over autonomy and God’s will over humanity’s allowed Clapp to make a rather simplistic but nonetheless compelling argument that Rushdoony’s ideas are anti-democratic. As the editor’s note at the beginning of the story asked, “Do Reconstructionists really want to trade the freedoms of American democracy for the strictures of Old Testament theocracy?” Clapp’s article answered the question with an enthusiastic “Yes!” therefore insinuating that at some fundamental level Rushdoony is not only anti-democratic, but also anti-American. In a single article Clapp distilled the spirit of a decades-long theological fight into a fundamental accusation: Rushdoony is a heretic. But Clapp did not charge that Rushdoony is a \textit{religious} heretic. Instead, in Clapp’s article, Rushdoony emerges as a \textit{political} heretic, one who is out of touch with contemporary evangelicalism and, worse still, contemporary American political sensibilities.

To call the article effective is an understatement. Clapp’s cover story laid the groundwork for nearly all of the popular press coverage of Rushdoony and Christian

Reconstruction that followed. In effect, Clapp secularized a debate that had previously been irreducibly religious in nature. Secular concepts of force, violence, domination, and political legitimation replaced traditional Christian concepts to become the metrics for measuring Rushdoony’s theology. In fact, it is reasonable to assert that “Democracy as Heresy” helped expose Christian Reconstruction to the secular media and ultimately helped bring Rushdoony’s ideas to a national audience. For secular reporters the article is one of the ur-texts of Christian Reconstruction journalism. It presented Rushdoony’s thought as a microcosm of a timeless struggle between democracy and religion, theocracy and freedom. In short, it reduced Rushdoony’s ideas to their secular political implications while studiously neglecting their theological and epistemological foundation.

*Anxieties of Influence*

Clapp’s essay embodied a broader trend on the part of evangelicals coming to terms with the problem of Christian Reconstruction. The most frequent criticism of Reconstructionism that emerged within evangelical literature during the 1980s dealt with the question of political power and the relationship between God’s government and the government of men. Not surprisingly, evangelicals raised these issues during an unprecedented era of political and social engagement. As so many observers have noted, the 1980s marked the rise of the Christian Right and the importance of “values voters” as an electoral bloc in American politics. In chapter 5, I outlined how many Protestants turned to the writings of Reconstructionists and dominionist-inspired thinkers such as Francis and Franky Schaeffer to ground their actions theologically. Essays like Clapp’s warned against this trend and raised direct challenges to the Reconstructionist and
dominionist models of political engagement. Specifically, a host of authors challenged evangelicals to think through the ultimate implications of Reconstructionism and encouraged them to reject the temptation to seek the Kingdom of God in the here and now. The result was a series of books and essays that betrayed deep ambivalence about the rise of the Christian Right and that warned that evangelicals must be humble and careful stewards of their newfound political power.

At the heart of this evangelical attack on Christian Reconstructionism were the political implications of the eschatological position known as postmillennialism. Postmillennialists believe that Jesus Christ will return to rule the earth after Christians have first established His Kingdom on earth and it has stood for a millennium. In contrast, premillennialists hold that Jesus will return before the establishment of the millennial kingdom. As historian Randall Balmer notes,

this distinction has had enormous repercussions for the ways that evangelicals approach society. If you believe that Jesus will return after the millennium with no disruption in the advance of time, the corollary is that it is incumbent on believers themselves to construct the righteous kingdom. If, on the other hand, your reading of scripture leads you to believe that Jesus will come for his followers before the millennial age, then the onset of the millennial kingdom will come later in the apocalyptic calendar, thereby absolving believers from responsibility for bringing about the millennial kingdom in this age.84

Historians generally agree that postmillennial urges dominated the actions of nineteenth century evangelicals in the U.S. who spent so much time and effort addressing monumental social issues such as slavery, temperance, and public education in order to usher in the millennial moment.85 During the late nineteenth and early twentieth

85 For a concise summary of this consensus, see ibid., 27-42.
centuries premillennial eschatology became an important component of the successful emergence of fundamentalism and neo-evangelicalism as a coherent theological movements. After the decline of the Social Gospel and disillusion caused by the violence of World War I, premillennialism began its ascendency within American Protestantism.

During the 1980s, evangelical critics homed in on difference between pre- and postmillennialism as both the central problem with Christian Reconstructionism and the source of its underlying danger to the American Republic. First, theologically and scripturally, evangelical critics insisted that Reconstructionism “just doesn’t work.” According to Thomas D. Ice and H. Wayne House, both associated with Dallas Theological Seminary, a bastion of premillennial theology, “Though many of their leaders are brilliant, though its worldview is intriguing, and though it has noble goals, it is just not in the Bible. A proper exegesis of God’s Word will not produce their most basic ideas”—especially those related to world conquest. In a similar vein, in Whatever Happened to Heaven? Dave Hunt insisted that Christian Reconstruction seduced Christians into believing that heaven could be achieved on earth and that they longer need the promise of future heaven. Hunt specifically blamed the appeal of the Reconstructionists on the “unbiblical hope that, by exerting godly influence on upon government, society could be transformed.” This hope emerged, he claimed, “[d]uring the Reagan years” “when evangelicals became more intrigued by periodic marches on

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88 Ibid.
Washington and getting their candidates voted into key offices.” Similiarly, Hal Lindsey, the author of *The Late Great Planet Earth* and one of the dons of popular premillennial theology, argued that Reconstructionists confuse human political ambitions with Godly sovereignty. As with House and Ice and Hunt, Lindsey believed that Reconstruction could be differentiated from mainstream evangelicalism because “modern-day Dominionists” want “a crown before a cross.” “No matter how appealing the idea of the Church taking over the world and establishing the Kingdom of God is, it is not what the Bible teaches.” In short, for many evangelicals, Reconstructionism posed a particular threat because it threatened to explicitly unify religion and politics in the here and now. They deemed this union to be neither Biblical nor conducive to evangelism.

Of the books cited above, Ice and House provide the most insightful and thoughtful embodiment of this argument. For Ice and House, Reconstructionists do not

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90 Ibid., 8.

91 Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970).

92 Hal Lindsey, *The Road to Holocaust* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989), 274. For Lindsey and many like-minded evangelicals who worry about the influence of Reconstructionism, another issue directly related to postmillennialism is the problem of the modern nation-state of Israel. Since Reconstructionists believe that the law will reconstruct human beings and these dominion men will build theocratic states that will eventually coalesce into the New Jerusalem prophesied in the New Testament, Reconstructionists tend to downplay both the place of Israel and the Jews in their eschatology. For premillenarian evangelicals who emphasize the role of the modern state of Israel in ancient prophecy, Reconstructionists look suspiciously anti-Zionist and even anti-Semitic. Lindsey made this point most aggressively in his *Road to Holocaust* where he asserted that Reconstructionism is the latest manifestation of an ancient and disturbing Christian tradition of demonizing and scapegoating Jews: “I believe we are witnessing the same false interpretation of prophecy that in the past led to such tragedy for so many centuries by a movement that calls itself either Reconstructionism, Dominion Theology and/or Kingdom Now” (25). These Rushdoony-inspired movements, Lindsey insisted, use “the same sort of rhetoric that in the past formed the basis of contempt for the Jews that later developed into outright anti-Semitism” (25). Lindsey’s point further demarcates the limits of Reconstructionism for many American evangelicals.

93 In many ways, Hunt’s and Lindsey’s books are rather sloppy. They rely heavily on secondary sources and show little indication that either author read much of the literature produced by Reconstructionists. In fact, Barron, in his excellent study of Christian Reconstructionism, specifically called out Hunt for his poor scholarship, noting, “his analysis of dominion theology falls short in many respects. He apparently has not read Reconstructionist material in sufficient depth… and shows no sign of
“consistently apply to their eschatology the Calvinistic recognition of man’s depravity.”

Instead, Reconstructionists emphasize the “abilities of man” to Christianize the world, rather than the far less ambitious evangelical desire to evangelize the world while leaving the Christianizing to God. Ice and House insist that this eschatological framework of building the Kingdom is both arrogant and dangerous. Postmillennialism—especially of the Reconstructionist sort—is a danger to Christians and non-Christians alike because it may convince non-Christians that the “Christian takeover” proposed by Reconstructionists is nigh and resistance and persecution is necessary to avert the creation of a tyrannical theocracy. This, they concluded, “could draw out a more severe reaction to Christianity than would have normally occurred.”

Thus, many evangelicals in the 1980s viewed Christian Reconstruction as intriguing, but also as a direct threat to their goal of preaching the Gospel. This threat emerged from the Reconstructionist and dominionist desire to Christianize all spheres of human life. Many evangelicals not only saw such a goal as impossible, but also as a danger to the very secular democratic system that allowed them to freely preach the Gospel. Reconstructionism, many concluded, may actually hurt the chances of non-Christians hearing the Gospel and lead to unneeded conflict between Christians and non-Christians. This point is critical for two basic reasons. First, it is important to underscore that many evangelicals in the 1980s believed that voting their values was important, but

having grasped its philosophical foundation” (Bruce Barron, Heaven on Earth? The Social & Political Agendas of Dominion Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 20.).

94 House and Ice, Dominion Theology, 337.
95 Ibid., 336.
96 Ibid., 342.
97 Ibid., 338.
this did not necessarily translate into a direct or concerted desire to “Christianize” the United States through political mechanisms. At best, many evangelicals believed that they should vote for people who shared their religious beliefs and against those who did not. Second, it points to the general diversity of American evangelicalism. Rushdoonian Christian Reconstruction motivated thousands (perhaps more) Americans; it terrified many, many more. In short, as theological and socially conservative Protestants came to terms with their collective political power, they worried about the nature and meaning of their influence. Further, many feared that their peers were engaging in politics out of a hubristic and failed attempt to Christianize a world that was chronically un-Christianizable.

III. THE VAST THEOCRATIC CONSPIRACY

By the end of the 1990s and beginning of the third millennium Ice and House’s warnings about the possible public relations disaster seemed accurate. After such religiously motivated outbursts of violence such as the Waco, the Oklahoma City bombing, various murders of abortion doctors, and, most dramatically, the September 11, 2001 attacks, many American had grown weary of religious figures with grand political aspirations. At no time was this more clear than shortly after George W. Bush’s successful 2004 re-election campaign when a new word emerged in American political discourse: theocracy. Theocracy, a noun generally reserved for Islamic countries such as Iran, suddenly became a buzzword for both conservative and liberal critics of Mr. Bush. In a series of editorials, interviews, and articles observers from across the political spectrum commented on the importance of religion in the 2004 elections. In many of
these exchanges, critics of the president openly worried about the seemingly theocratic
type of many of Bush’s policies.

A month before the election, New York Times op-ed author and Nobel Prize-

winning economist Paul Krugman told CNBC’s Tina Brown,

Some of... us fear that what he’s [Bush is] actually doing is he’s managing to
convey to one part of his base the fact that, “Well, just give me a chance. Let’s
get this election behind us and I will ram a theocracy down the throats of the
people,” while at the same time conveying a message to the swing voters that “I
won’t.” And then the question is which is the real Bush? 98

Krugman wasn’t alone in his worries about the secular/sacred tension at the heart of Mr.
Bush’s reelection strategy. In an editorial dashed off shortly after the election, regular

USA Today opinion writer DeWayne Wickham worried about the debt Mr. Bush owed to
his Christian supporters and warned, “Putting God in the public square runs the risk of
turning our democracy into a theocracy.” 99 In each case, these authors noted the complex
ways in which Mr. Bush’s rhetoric straddled a precarious divide between secular politics
and sectarian obligation and offered the concomitant warning about the dangers of this
sort of politicking.

98 “Transcript of CNBC Topic A with Tina Brown,” The Unofficial Paul Krugman Web Page,
2001) Historian of religion Bruce Lincoln made a more sophisticated version of this argument in “Bush’s
God Talk,” Christian Century 121, no. 20 (October 5, 2004): 22-29. Lincoln noted that Bush seemed to
walk a tightrope in his public comments about religion, at once deploying highly refined theological
justifications for everything from his responses to the 9-11 terrorist attacks to his motivation for the
invasion of Iraq. Lincoln suggested that Bush used a “doubly coded” theological discourse that allowed for
those “so inclined [to] see a humble man of faith” while allowing others to see in Bush’s speeches a “divine
call” to be a “new Moses” (22). This double coding suggests the latter “stronger interpretation to those
who find it congenial,” but also allows the former “more modest reading for anyone who considers such
views either presumptuous or preposterous” (22). Unlike Krugman, however, Lincoln never mentions the
danger of theocracy.

99 DeWayne Wickham, “Bush Faces Keen Pressure to Reward Faithful,” Newspaper,
11-07-wickham_x.htm (accessed August 8, 2010).
If pundits had begun to worry about the mingling of religion and politics, Democrats—and even some Republicans—began to panic. In a *Time* magazine editorial, columnist Michelle Cottle summed up Democratic angst:

You can’t even have a beer with a rank-and-file liberal these days without the conversation degenerating into paranoid fantasies about how evangelical leaders are at this very minute hunkered down in Bush überadviser Karl Rove’s office plotting to institute an Old Testament theocracy overseen by Attorney General Jerry Falwell.  

In a similar vein, veteran NBC political reporter Tim Russert posed the following question to presidential advisor Karl Rove, “One Democrat said to me, ‘Are we on the verge of a theocracy, where if you don't agree with the president and evangelical Christians on abortion or on gays, there really is no room for you to practice what you believe in the United States?’” Even former Democratic Senator and presidential candidate Gary Hart noted the Bush administration’s “disturbing tendency to insert theocratic principles into the vision of America’s role in the world.” Speaking several months later regarding Terri Schiavo, a comatose woman who sparked a national debate about euthanasia, then-Republican Senator Christopher Shays seconded Hart’s concern, exclaiming, “This Republican Party of Lincoln has become a party of theocracy.”

Again and again, pundits and politicians asserted that the GOP was now a religious party

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operating well outside of the normative boundaries of generally accepted in the United States’ historically secular, democratic system.

*The New Fascism*

Because of some of its apparent affinities with the Bush regime, many critics either implicitly or explicitly argued that Rushdoonian Christian Reconstructionism or its softer expression in the wider dominion theology movement represented a dangerous fascistic tendency within American Protestantism that had high jacked the U.S. political system. In fact, attempts to link Rushdoony to recent political realities became an obsession for some. For example, from the political left, New York University professor of media studies Mark Crispin Miller argued in 2004, “What’s most significant here, and yet gets almost zero coverage in our media, is the fact that Bush is very closely tied to the Christian Reconstructionist movement. The links between this White House and that movement are many and tight.” In a book-length study of Bush’s presidency Miller lumps Reconstructionists in with a wide variety of non-Reconstructionist figures, including inflammatory right-wing radio host Michael Savage, to conclude, “With their eyes on the future, those at work on forging an all-Christian USA are overjoyed that Bush is president, for they correctly see the regime’s imposition on the people as itself a signal victory for their movement.” Ultimately, Miller’s book seeks to define Bush as a

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104 Journalist Chris Hedges makes this connection *explicit* in *American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008). I discuss other texts that *imply* such a link below.


Rushdoony-style theocrat, but fails to note that most Reconstructionist disliked Bush’s policies.\footnote{107}

Surprisingly, this attempt to construct the contemporary Republican Party as a theocratic force was not limited to left-wing professors. From the right, Republican strategist Kevin Phillips argued, “[B]oth George W. Bush and Florida Governor Jeb Bush drew on thinkers and administrators with ties to reconstructionism in their implementation of faith-based social services. ... On this dimension, at least, the two men have been willing to turn to reconstructionists.”\footnote{108} Phillips, a GOP insider long known for his hostility to the Bushes,\footnote{109} is a prominent conservative thinker and activist whose \textit{The Emerging Republican Majority}\footnote{110} prophesized the electoral success of the American conservative movement. Phillips cautioned that the Republican Party has lost its way and squandered its previous electoral gains because of its dangerous conflation of religious purity with free market ideas.

Miller and Phillips’s assessments of Reconstructionism reflect a general tendency among the movement’s critics to use Rushdoony to situate their wider target of attack—the GOP and the Bushes, respectively—as a dangerous outliers or marginal extremists.


\footnote{110} Kevin Phillips, \textit{The Emerging Republican Majority} (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1969).}
Among the harshest critics of Reconstruction there is a tendency to assert that Reconstructionists infect everything with which they come into contact with the disease of Christian fascism. Much of this work relies on the popular appropriation and flattening of the Frankfurt School’s analysis of right-wing psychology typified by Theodor Adorno’s concept of the “authoritarian personality”\textsuperscript{111} and Eric Fromm’s theorizing of why human seek to escape freedom for authoritarian regimes.

One of the most popular and frequently read works in this mold is journalist Chris Hedges’s \textit{American Fascists}. Hedges charged, “Christian reconstructionism… has, like all fascist movements, a belief in magic along with leadership adoration and a strident call for moral and physical supremacy of a master race, in this case American Christians. It also has, like fascist movements, an ill-defined and shifting set of beliefs, some of which contradict one another.”\textsuperscript{112} Before Hedges’s work, investigative journalist Chip Berlet and archivist Matthew N. Lyons identified a nearly identical list of similarities between Reconstructionism and fascism to ultimately argue that Reconstructionism is a form of American-grown fascism: “Reconstructionism’s theocratic vision represents a new form of clerical fascist politics.”\textsuperscript{113} Most recently, journalist Max Blumenthal relied on Eric Fromm’s psychoanalytical assessment\textsuperscript{114} of the Nazis as a foundation for his wildly hyperbolic attack on the Republican Party.\textsuperscript{115} Blumenthal singles out Rushdoony

\textsuperscript{112} Hedges, \textit{American Fascists}, 11.
and the Reconstructionists as the Ur-source of the GOP’s most religiously authoritarian aspects.\footnote{Ibid., 17-22.}

The suggestion that Christian Reconstruction is somehow the wellspring of a dangerous theocratic or even fascistic tendency within American politics emerged most clearly during the late 1980s and 1990s in the investigative journalism of a group of reporters related to Political Research Associates (PRA),\footnote{Other important groups who focused on Christian Reconstructionism during the 1980s and nineties include Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the Anti-Defamation League, and the now-defunct Institute for First Amendment Studies. Americans United’s publication \textit{Church \& State} frequently covered Reconstructionists and dominionists.} a small “progressive think tank devoted to supporting movements that are building a more just and inclusive democratic society” and exposing “movements, institutions, and ideologies” that undermine its stated goals.\footnote{“About Political Research Associates,” \textit{PRA: Political Research Associates}, n.d., http://www.publiceye.org/about.php (accessed August 8, 2010).} During the 1980s and nineties, researchers associated with PRA took an acute interest in the emergence of the New Christian Right and sought to document the ties and connections between politicians, activists, and the religious ideas that motivated their entrance into politics. Giving Rushdoony’s status as an organizer, thinker, and fundraiser, he became a central node in the network researchers uncovered.

Under the leadership of its chief analysts John Foster “Chip” Berlet, an investigative journalist with a background in sociology, and Jean Hardisty, a Northwestern Ph.D. in political scientist, PRA supported and helped publish pioneering secular studies of Christian Reconstruction that documented its connections to wider
political and religious trends in the United States.\textsuperscript{119} These studies follow the framework established by four prominent journalists in the alternative press: Russ Bellant,\textsuperscript{120} Berlet,\textsuperscript{121} Frederick Clarkson,\textsuperscript{122} and Sara Diamond.\textsuperscript{123} The controlling theme in the articles and books produced by these authors focuses on the threat that Rushdoony and Christian Reconstruction pose to liberal democracy and to various minority groups. As Clarkson’s oft-cited \textit{Eternal Hostility} argues, Christian Reconstructionism threatens American democracy because its followers explicitly reject the separation of church and state embodied in the establishment clause of the first amendment to the U. S. constitution. Though the subject matter in each author’s body of work on Rushdoony and Christian Reconstruction varies, all essentially agree that 1) Christian Reconstruction dangerously mixes religion and politics and that 2) Reconstructionism poses a genuine

\textsuperscript{119} I should note that PRA has also helped my research and published one of my essays on the subject, although my work hardly falls into the “pioneering” category. See, McVicar, “Libertarian Theocrats.”

\textsuperscript{120} Russ Bellant, \textit{The Coors Connection: How Coors Family Philanthropy Undermines Democratic Pluralism} (Boston: South End Press, 1991). As the title suggests, Bellant’s book focuses on the influence of Coors family money in American politics. Rushdoony and his Chalcedon Foundation are but one of the beneficiaries that Bellant discusses.

\textsuperscript{121} Chip Berlet, ed., \textit{Eyes Right! Challenging the Right Wing Backlash} (Boston: South End Press, 1995); Berlet and Lyons, \textit{Right-Wing Populism in America}, 247-264.

\textsuperscript{122} Frederick Clarkson, \textit{Eternal Hostility: The Struggle Between Theocracy and Democracy} (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1997) is the probably most frequently cited secular source on Christian Reconstruction. As I noted above, Clarkson’s framework of the “struggle between theocracy and democracy” has dominated the discussion of Christian Reconstruction.

\textsuperscript{123} Strictly speaking, Sara Diamond is not a journalist, but a sociologist whose carefully researched \textit{Roads to Dominion: Right-Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States} (New York: Guilford Press, 1995) is one of the best studies available on origins of the American right. I list her here with Bellant, Berlet, and Clarkson because of early her association with PRA. This early reporting on the religious right helped to bring Rushdoony and Reconstruction to the attention of a wider secular audience. See also, Sara Diamond, \textit{Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right} (Boston: South End Press, 1989); Sara Diamond, \textit{Not by Politics Alone: The Enduring Influence of the Christian Right} (New York: Guilford Press, 1998).
threat to American democracy because 3) its a “stealth theology”\textsuperscript{124} that influences people who often conceal their theocratic intentions in order to win elections.

The work of these journalists and scholars provided the initial swell behind the wave of post-2004 treatments of Christian Reconstruction cited above. The more recent accounts of the movement fall into three categories: 1) Most accounts are by secular journalists who follow the work developed by Clarkson, et al. to frame Reconstructionist influenced Christians as radical fringe figures who pose a sinister threat to American society.\textsuperscript{125} 2) A large number of books and articles authored by moderate and left-leaning religious leaders seek to define the nature and authority of “true” religion against the radicalized fundamentalism of which Christian Reconstruction is proffered as an exemplary model.\textsuperscript{126} 3) Finally, a small number of conservative authors metonymically

\footnote{124 As Clarkson notes, “Christian Reconstruction is a stealth theology, spreading its influence throughout the Religious Right. Its analysis of America as a Christian nation and the security of complete control implied in the concept of dominion is understandably appealing to many conservative Christians” (Frederick Clarkson, “Christian Reconstruction: Theocratic Dominionism Gains Influence,” in Eyes Right! Challenging the Right Wing Backlash, ed. Chip Berlet [Boston: South End Press, 1995], 71).}

\footnote{125 There are numerous of works that fall into this category. Most only make passing reference to Christian Reconstruction. Perhaps the best of these studies is Michelle Goldberg, \textit{Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism} (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006). While books like Goldberg’s give a broad overview of the political implications of socially conservative Protestants, other authors have offered more focused studies. For instance, Hendricks, \textit{Divine Destruction} provides an uneven and factually challenged account of Rushdoony’s influence on evangelical thinking about the environment. She also consistently misspells “Rushdoony’s” name. Miller’s \textit{Cruel and Unusual} leans heavily on Clarkson’s text. In fact, many of Hendricks’s factual errors can be traced directly to Miller’s book.}

\footnote{126 These works are of uneven value and often replace facts with sensationalistic stories about Rushdoony’s supposed desire to stone homosexuals and children. For example, Rabbi A. James Rudin, \textit{The Baptizing of America: The Religious Right's Plan For the Rest of Us} (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2006) is notable here for its generally sloppiness. Rudin consistently misidentifies Rushdoony as “John J. Rushdoony” and makes other errors that undermine his credibility as a critic. In a similar vein, Hedges’s \textit{American Fascists} is essentially a secular-theological work that mixes Hedges’ Popperian assumptions about a free society with his own liberal Presbyterianism. In \textit{Thy Kingdom Come: An Evangelical's Lament} (New York: Basic Books, 2006), noted historian Randall Balmer abandons his scholarly objectivity to attack Christian Reconstruction and similar movements as dangerous and antithetical to the true spirit of evangelical Christianity.
use Christian Reconstructionism to stand for all extremists who give decent conservative Christians a bad name.¹²⁷

In each case, this small avalanche of popular works on Christian Reconstructionism has appeared since the contested 2000 election of George W. Bush and his reelection in 2004. Each deploys Christian Reconstruction within a carefully constructed discursive field related to the policies of Bush administration. In each of these texts, the problem the authors seek to deal with is not only the danger of “fascistic” or “theocratic” danger posed by Reconstructionism but also the meaning and nature of “religion” itself. What is religion? What is its proper place within a secular democracy? And what do we do with expressions of religion that reject the very constitutional system that allows them to thrive?

Performing Religion

In the wake of recent work by J. Z. Smith,¹²⁸ Talal Asad,¹²⁹ and Russell T. McCutcheon¹³⁰ “religion” has become a problematic term. All three scholars—with varying degrees of nuance—suggest that “religion” is a western category of socio-cultural classification that emerged from the complex interplay of colonial expansion, the

¹²⁷ Here, the notable book is the previously cited American Theocracy. The book paints Rushdoony as the shadowy theologian behind the radicalization of the American religious right. Phillips, an avowed conservative, views Rushdoony as a radical who has corrupted religion for political purposes. Byron York, The Vast Left Wing Conspiracy: How Democratic Operatives, Eccentric Billionaires, Liberal Activists, and Assorted Celebrities Tried to Bring down a President, and Why They’ll Try Even Harder Next Time (New York: Crown Forum, 2005), briefly takes up Rushdoony only to dismiss him as irrelevant. York’s main interest is attacking Mark Crispin Miller’s charge that the Bush Administration is influenced by Rushdoony’s ideas, and he rightly dismisses the idea.


end of the Wars of the Religion in Europe, and the concomitant rise of the modern
nation-state and capitalism. William E. Arnal neatly summarizes the implication of these
insights by noting, “the academic future of religion as a concept will need to focus on
deconstructing the category and analyzing its function within popular discourse, rather
than assuming that the category has content and seeking to specify what that content
is.”131 I concur with Smith, et al. and see little utility in defining religion in such a way
that either embraces or denies the legitimacy of Christian Reconstructionism qua religion.
Consequently, my intention is not to answer the questions that posed at the end of the
previous section. Instead of posing an answer to the question, “What is religion?” I
believe it is more practical to investigate how others have answered such questions in an
attempt to define religion and its relationship to Rushdoony’s ideas. It is particularly
informative to investigate the discursive processes that have led to the invention of
Christian Reconstruction as a dangerous “fascistic” political movement.

As I outlined in the previous section, much of the available research tends to
dismiss Christian Reconstructionism as a fascist political ideology that has more to do
with resentment and the desire to reassert social control than it does religion. While this
may (or may not) be a legitimate way of conceptualizing Christian Reconstruction, it
certainly belies an under-investigated normative discourse about the meaning and nature
of religion that has dominated journalism and scholarship in the U.S. for decades. As
Robert A. Orsi has pointed out in a harsh critique of the academic study of religion,
“Both in content and method, Religious Studies has long been occupied with ‘good’

Orsi argues that this tendency to seek the “good” in religion is hardly limited to scholars. Journalists, Orsi explains, tend to seek out deviant traditions (particularly those marked by exuberant worship, hateful rhetoric, and violent tendencies) precisely because they are incompatible with this search for “good” religion. Such outsider traditions are “valuable as others, as the unassimilable and intolerable…. So long as the point of religious scholarship, even implicitly or unconsciously, is to seal the borders of our own worlds of meaning and morals,” then the business of religion and its study is the creation of marginalized others.

From this perspective, it is hardly surprising that most journalists and many of the scholars who have studied Christian Reconstruction have attempted to relegate the movement to the outermost fringes of American culture. Indeed, the few scholars who have dealt with the movement have portrayed Christian Reconstruction as an especially dangerous “other” within American culture that has the potential to spawn violence. Journalists are even more blatant in their efforts to exoticize Reconstructionists. Such perspectives generally betray a concern for finding an appropriate role religion in American society and arguing that movements such as Christian Reconstruction are not it.

This search for the normative ethical limits of acceptable religion demonstrates the inherent difficulty in defining religion because of the problematic pluralism inherent in the term. In fact, most of the current research on Christian Reconstruction betrays


what Bruce Lincoln refers to as a minimalist approach to religion.\textsuperscript{134} From a minimalist perspective, “religion” is a restrictive classificatory category. The minimalist restricts “religion” to a specialized sphere of otherworldly, supernatural concerns that has little relevance to everyday life.\textsuperscript{135} Lincoln suggests that this minimalist perspective grew from the Enlightenment effort to draw people together, underscore unity, and universalize the naturalness of religious belief. Contemporary religious scholarship often implicitly supports this minimalist perspective in its effort to present religion as “goodness, purity, and unity, or the center or origin”\textsuperscript{136} of our shared humanity. More popularly, journalists and social critics use this minimalist conception of religion as a prescriptive normative ruler for measuring all religious traditions. Those traditions that exceed this minimalist limit—no matter how imprecise it is—are larded with ridicule, contempt, and derision. In some cases (as I discuss below), journalists have actually called for the use preemptive force against such movements. Of course, this search for the limits of American religiosity is not lost on Christian Reconstructionists. As maximalists, to borrow another term from Lincoln, Christian Reconstructionists have declared “war” on these normative boundaries established by advocates of the minimalist perspective by insisting that Christianity must permeate all aspects of humanity’s social existence.

To close this section, I want to suggest that religion is not necessarily (although it could be) understandable in terms of the sacred, society, or some other form to which


\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.

theorists have attempted to reduce it. Instead, religion is a problem.¹³⁷ For social critics, philosophers, theologians, journalists, and political activists religion is not something that can be identified, defined, quantified, interpreted, or explained, but it is a problem. From the processes of addressing the problem of religion, the term’s constitutive definitions, boundaries, and limiting horizons emerge. As a problem, religion cannot be ostensively defined. Bruno Latour suggests that an ostensive definition assumes that in principle it is possible to discover certain principles, practices, and phenomena that can be concretely indexed as religion or religious much as one might ostensively define a table, a bird, or a building. Any controversies about an ostensive definition “are only practical difficulties that will be eliminated with more data, a better methodology, and better insulation of the [definer’s] endeavour from ideology and amateurism.”¹³⁸ If religion, however, is taken seriously as a problem that cannot be defined in principle as the “referent of a ostensive definition,” it nonetheless be defined in practice. Thus, rather than an ostensive definition, we can explore performative definitions in which definitions of religion are “preformed through everyone’s efforts to define it.”¹³⁹ Whether it is the scholar’s effort to create a disciplinary horizon or a journalist’s attempt to define Christian Reconstructionism as fascism, both attempts perform something they refer to as religion, but as soon as the performance ends the religion in question disappears.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 273.
With this notion of performative definition established we can finally return to our central controversies: What is religion? What is its proper place within a secular democracy? And what do we do with expressions of religion that reject the very constitutional system that allows them to thrive? These questions are difficult to answer, especially because of the general assumption that Reconstructionism is a dangerous other. Ultimately I have no intention of entering into this debate of whether or not Christian Reconstruction constitutes a proper form of American religiosity. Instead, in the next section I some the ways is has been dismissed as either non-religious, not sufficiently religious, or excessively religious. This performative struggle to the proper limit of religion in relation to Reconstructionism has implications for the study of American religion because so many of those engaged in the struggle understand religion to be at the heart of being an American. Religion is conceptualized as a matter of identity—national, political, and religious—and linked directly to popular concepts of American democracy and citizenship.

Limiting Reconstruction

Journalists typically frame the debate surrounding Christian Reconstruction as a perennial struggle between democracy and religion in America society. In an interesting example of the differential process of “othering” discussed in the previous section, the journalist Frederick Clarkson successfully framed Christian Reconstruction as a representative the forces of “tyranny” that Thomas Jefferson famously lambasted in a September 23, 1800 letter to Dr. Benjamin Rush. Referring to “Episcopalians & Congregationalists” who seek to make their sect the official state religion, Jefferson wrote to Rush, “I have sworn upon the altar of god, eternal hostility against every form of
tyranny over the mind of man.”\(^{140}\) In *Eternal Hostility*, Clarkson elevated
Reconstructionists into *the* latter-day embodiment of this eternal, transcendent threat to
an equally eternal and transcendent democratic ideal. Following this lead, a host of
stories in national publications such as *Harper’s*,\(^ {141}\) *Mother Jones*,\(^ {142}\) *Reason*,\(^ {143}\) and
*Rolling Stone*\(^ {144}\) highlight this struggle and use it as a controlling trope for
contemplating Christian Reconstructionism. And for good reason. Rushdoony never
minced words about democracy. He commonly referred to democracy as “heresy,”\(^ {145}\)
arguing it usurped God’s authority and placed the sovereignty of man in place of Christ’s.

But this is only part of the story. Rushdoony’s real enemy, as I have argued
throughout this project, was the secular state in all its incarnations: “even as [ancient]
Rome declared war on the Christians, so socialism and communism, and progressively
the democracies, are at war against orthodox or Biblical faith…. The state which…
becomes a terror to the godly is committing suicide.”\(^ {146}\) As this implies, Rushdoony was
less concerned with democracy’s threat to Christianity than he was with the state as an
abstract social, moral, and, ultimately, religious phenomenon. Democracy merely
represents one form of governance that Rushdoony identifies as anti-Christian. He was

\(^{140}\) Quoted in Clarkson, *Eternal Hostility*, 6.

\(^{141}\) Jeff Sharlet, “Through a Glass, Darkly: How the Christian Right is Reimagining American

\(^{142}\) John Sugg, “A Nation Under God,” *Mother Jones*, December 2005,


\(^{146}\) Ibid., 1:62.
equally concerned with the Christian implications of socialism, communism, despotism, and state-sponsored theocracy.

The underlying connection between both Rushdoony and his critics is their combined desire to construct Christian Reconstruction as a mythological embodiment of the transcendent struggle between two opposing political orders. This, however, is an obfuscation on the part of both Rushdoony and his critics that is in need of careful historical consideration. As I have argued throughout this project, Christian Reconstruction can be practically as part of the cultural history of the twentieth century and not the interplay of eternal forces. Similarly, the critical response to Reconstructionism by many journalists can be contextualized to lay bare the performative gestures through which Reconstructionism emerges as a dangerous other. Specifically, as I suggested earlier, much of the coverage of Reconstructionism in the popular press emerged in the wake of the re-election of George W. Bush in 2004, which raised many of the questions about theocracy that I cited above. Bush’s election, however, was linked for better or worse to the religiously motivated terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The critical response to Reconstructionism must be placed into this context.

In an effort to explain Rushdoony’s worldview, many critics turned to readymade set of tropes that exhibit an underlying tendency to orientalizing and exotize religious adherents. Perhaps most troubling examples of this orientalizing theme betray a latent Islamophobic tendency in many of these accounts. For example, one pre-9/11 interviewer characterized Rushdoony as “the Ayatollah of holy rollers.”147 In a similar

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vein, in a post-9/11 report another reporter described Rushdoony a “Christian Jihadi.”

That these characterizations do the double duty of marginalizing both Muslims and Christians is a subtle point apparently lost on their authors. In another exposé, a journalist traded in a more traditional form of American religious bigotry—anti-Catholicism—derisively dismissing Rushdoony as Reconstructionism’s “pope.”

This process of othering does have potential consequences beyond dismissive rhetorical tropes and clever phrasings. By pushing Reconstructionists to the outermost boundaries of American political and religious discourse, these authors successfully convinced some secularists that Reconstruction is not only a political and religious enemy, but also potentially violent and, therefore, Reconstructionists should be the object of state-sponsored force. The clearest expression of this sentiment is available in Hedges’s *American Fascists*. The first chapter of his book opens with a favorable quotation of Karl Popper: “But we should claim the right to suppress them if necessary even by force…. We should therefore claim, in the name of tolerance, the right not to tolerate the intolerant. We should claim that any movement preaching intolerance places itself outside the law, and we should consider incitement to intolerance and persecution as criminal….“

Hedges stopped just short of calling for the use of state sponsored violence against the leaders of Christian right. He argued,

The radical Christian Right must be *forced* to include other points of view to counter their hate talk in their own broadcasts…. They must be *denied* the right to demonize whole segments of American society…. They must *be made* to treat

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149 Sugg, “A Nation Under God.”
their opponents with respect and acknowledge the right of a fair hearing even as they exercise their own freedom to disagree with their opponents.\footnote{Emphasis mine. Ibid., 36.}

It is hard to envision how this could be achieved without the use of state-sponsored force. Further, it is ironic that Hedges does not recognize that such a solution only feeds the fears of persecution of those whom he hopes to somehow enlighten through the use of force.\footnote{Hedges might have done well to consider cautionary words of Religious Studies scholar Catherine Wessinger: it is counterproductive to undertake actions that make the members feel persecuted, and the worst thing to do is apply increasing pressure that causes members to despair about achieving their ultimate goals. … If the group members are pushed to the point of despair about the success of their goal, they will not abandon their ultimate concern, but instead they will be motivated to take desperate actions to preserve it (Catherine Wessinger, \textit{How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate} [New York: Seven Bridges, 2000], 18.).}

\textbf{CONCLUSION: ANTITHESIS}

Ultimately, Hedges’s argument makes clear that what is at stake in Christian Reconstruction is the very definition of religion. In his text, the limits of religion are tolerance of democratic pluralism; if Reconstructionists seek to perform a Christian faith that is restrictive, aristocratic, and demonizes others, then Hedges is content to limit their ability to perform their Christianity through the use of state mechanisms. In the case of Reconstructionists’ critics, the dispute over the normative limits of religion construct the vary boundaries of American democracy. This ultimately leads us with the question of

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\footnotetext[151]{Emphasis mine. Ibid., 36.}
\footnotetext[152]{Hedges might have done well to consider cautionary words of Religious Studies scholar Catherine Wessinger: it is counterproductive to undertake actions that make the members feel persecuted, and the worst thing to do is apply increasing pressure that causes members to despair about achieving their ultimate goals. … If the group members are pushed to the point of despair about the success of their goal, they will not abandon their ultimate concern, but instead they will be motivated to take desperate actions to preserve it (Catherine Wessinger, \textit{How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate} [New York: Seven Bridges, 2000], 18.).}
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governance: Who or what has the right to conduct the souls of men? Hedges’s answer to this question is the state; Reconstructionists respond that it is God who conducts the souls of men. The result is that Hedges and many of the critics of Reconstructionism reify and give substantive force to the epistemological “antithesis” between Christians and non-Christians. In fact, one conclusion that emerges from this chapter is that Rushdoony’s project of Christian Reconstruction is, as I argued in chapters 3 and 4, an engine for generating social and cultural differentiation. It succeeds at erecting and reifying rigid boundaries between Christians and non-Christians; indeed, it so effective that it also separates Reconstructionists from groups, such as neo-evangelicals, with whom they share a basic worldview and set of cultural goals.

In this chapter, I have tried to document the complex way that other groups have interacted with Christian Reconstructionists. My intention has been to highlight how Rushdoony and Reconstruction became objects of concern for Christian groups and secular commentators. Evangelicals generally look on Christian Reconstructionists and the ideas of Rushdoony with suspicious. Although evangelicals often share the basic epistemological and religious presuppositions as Rushdoony, they are fundamentally allergic to Reconstruction’s postmillennial eschatology and belief that Biblical law still holds sway in this current dispensation. Although often confusing and opaque to non-evangelicals, these distinctions are important and have reified into institutional divisions over the course of several decades. Such distinctions do not necessarily mean that evangelicals and Reconstructionist cannot compromise. In fact, as I indicated in chapter 5, some evangelicals do embrace the wider idea of dominion theology, even if they do not believe in the wholesale adoption of Biblical law or that Christians are required to
hold higher office. Thus, evangelicals have used Christian Reconstructionism as a limit against which to define themselves. This limit is not a hard and fast boundary of separation. Instead, as with territorial boundaries, discursive identificatory boundaries such as this one come into being as a consequence of the movement and maintenance, transgression and reinforcement.

The subtle intricacies of the differences between evangelicals and Reconstructionists often appear to be distinctions without a difference to non-Christian and more secularly inclined observers. The result is that secular and non-evangelical critics of both evangelicalism and Reconstructionism elide the two movements without recognizing the complex way they mutually co-constitute one another through the mutual outworking of differences. For their parts, secular and non-Evangelical critics actively engage in a process of identificatory conflation of Reconstructionists with their respective target of derision in order to establish discursive boundaries for their own purposes. In this manner, Reconstructionists become co-terminus with any number of groups: Republican operatives, grassroots political organizers, the TEA Partiers, intelligent design proponents, racists, homophobes, etc. The result of this boundary construction is to establish Reconstructionists at the very limit of secular democracy. While Reconstructionists certainly see themselves as constituting this limit, few if any evangelicals would view themselves in this role. The result is a subconscious—and in some cases a conscious and careful—process of othering that has its own troubling implications.
Conclusion: To a Thousand Generations

Governance and Reconstruction

“The victory is ours and so we must fight. May He give you all strength to fight the battle. We have a battle to fight and an obligation to win. “We have a certain victory. We are ordained to victory. “I can’t talk much more.”

– R. J. Rushdoony¹

“… I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

– Deuteronomy 5:9-10 (NIV)

During the late 1990s, R. J. Rushdoony’s health rapidly deteriorated. His hearing and eyesight began to fail him. But his mind remained sharp. He continued to write and deliver the occasional lecture or sermon into his eighties. In fact, his last years were prolific: he wrote on everything from magic to Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, producing manuscripts that his publishing house, Ross House Books, will be editing and printing for years to come. Eventually, however, doctors diagnosed Rushdoony with prostate cancer. His intense daily regime of reading and writing flagged. By 1998 Rushdoony, now 82, regularly found himself too ill to read or write. He needed surgery for cataracts and regular therapy for his cancer. On February 6, 1998, he confided in his journals: “Did

nothing, which is difficult for me.”\(^2\) Shortly thereafter his journal entries became sporadic. They end abruptly in the fall of 2000. With his family at his beside, he succumbed to prostate cancer on February 8, 2001.

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As his health failed during the late 1990s, Rushdoony ceased to be the driving intellectual and fundraising force of the Christian Reconstructionist movement. Following his death in 2001, financial support for the Chalcedon Foundation deteriorated. As a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) religious charity, Chalcedon’s tax returns are a matter of public record. A survey of Chalcedon’s tax records indicate that gifts to the organization peaked just before Rushdoony’s death in 2001 and have not recovered since. Before 2001, the Foundation’s assets never totaled much more than $1 million and they remained largely stagnant during the 1990s. The departure of Howard Ahmanson, Jr., the Home Savings bank heir, from Chalcedon’s board of directors in the mid-1990s, precipitated the fiscal decline. Although a close friend of the Rushdoony family, Ahmanson’s political and philanthropic aspirations ultimately made an intimate relationship with Rushdoony and the Chalcedon Foundation a major public relations liability. Politicians began returning his contributions; art museums and other beneficiaries questioned his motivations for funding their projects.\(^3\) Reconstructionism became a victim of its own success: while Rushdoony openly courted controversy because he believed Christ was controversial—“I am ‘controversial.’ So is the Lord,” he

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once quipped—many of his followers realized they could not maintain their places in polite society by openly adhering to the controversial project of Reconstruction. As a result of Rushdoony’s ill health, financial setbacks, and the premature deaths of theologians such as Greg Bahnsen and David Chilton, the 1990s marked a decade of change for Rushdoony’s Chalcedon Foundation. Even as public awareness of Rushdoony and his ideas grew during this period, it is important to note that declining public support and the contentious factional disputes that plague the movement had seriously weakened Reconstructionism as a *movement*.

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I began with project with the problem of Reagan’s tears. How was it that Rushdoony and group of “conservative” activists and intellectuals so unnerved America’s most conservative president so as to elicit his tears? The answer lies in the complex way that Rushdoony was at once a radically conservative intellectual who called for the conservation of critical American institutions—the family, Protestantism, decentralized local governance—while simultaneously proving un-conservative in his call for subordinating all of life to God’s law. This revolutionary facet of his life’s work has left him in an ambiguous and problematic position on America’s right-wing.

His precarious position within the wider American conservative movement became obvious as assessments of his ideas and actions rolled in during the days and years following his death. For his part, Gary North noted, “The death of Rousas John Rushdoony on February 8 at the age of 84 will not be perceived as newsworthy by the

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5 See chapter 5 for a discussion of the deaths of Bahnsen and Chilton.
American media,” but “being a newsworthy event is rarely the same as being a significant event.” For North, Rushdoony’s significance lay in his “fringe ideas,” which “[flew] in the face of politically correct reality.” Ultimately, North concluded that his father-in-law spent his life “marshaling logic and footnotes on the sidelines of respectable culture” but may be “seen in retrospect as [a] pioneer.” Within the broader evangelical movement, Christianity Today acknowledged in passing Rushdoony as the “founder of the Christian homeschooling movement and an intellectual catalyst of the Christian Right.”

More broadly within the conservative press, other assessments emerged during the 2000s. Many of these judgments, like that of William Edgar, were ambivalent if cautiously positive. Writing in the pages of the theologically and socially conservative First Things, Edgar honored Rushdoony’s “extraordinary brilliance” and “encyclopedic knowledge of human affairs,” but wondered if “Rushdoony’s particular brand of reconstruction might not outlast his death.” Several years later, another writer in First Things answered Edgar by arguing that Rushdoony ranked “somewhere between the Free Mumia movement and the Spartacist Youth League on the totem pole of political influence

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7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.


in America.” More generously, a writer in *The American Conservative*, a magazine founded by Patrick J. Buchanan, labeled Rushdoony “an eccentric outsider” in the conservative movement who “left behind a commanding legacy.”

For all of the general ambivalence among conservatives about Rushdoony’s legacy, it is telling that the Intercollegiate Studies of Institutes (ISI)—that venerable organization of mid-century fusionist conservatism—chose to enshrine Rushdoony and Christian Reconstructionism in its mammoth, *American Conservatism: An Encyclopedia*. There, Rushdoony is honored as the father of a movement that “has united Christians of different backgrounds, offering them an objective standard of ethics, and optimistic vision of national renewal, and a radically theistic interpretation of all disciplines.” In short, the encyclopedia suggests that Rushdoony’s project—for all of its rough edges, “politically incorrect” mandates, and theological harshness—is part of the larger conservative movement, but it is not limited to it.

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Throughout this project, I have argued that Rushdoonian Christian Reconstruction is part of a larger conservative milieu in which intellectuals, activists, and rank-and-file adherents seek to come to terms with the problems of an active, powerful, and centralized federal bureaucracy. Christian Reconstructionism resonates with a wider concern for withholding, withdrawing, and contesting the power of an abstract secular state to claim

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sovereign authority to conduct the lives of men. Reconstructionism is a “revolution” in governance in the truest sense of the term: it calls for the return to a pre-secular and non-modern conception of governance in order to form a foundation for building a new social order here in the United States, and ultimately throughout the entire world.

As a consequence of this focus on governance in opposition to state-centric government, it is quite correct to note that Rushdoony’s national political influence is limited and will diminish in the coming years. Yet, this misses the point of Christian Reconstruction and also ignores the larger point of the American conservative movement. Rather than look for Christian Reconstruction’s direct influence on this or that aspect of national policy, it is best to look for its indirect influence on a network of local Christian concerns. At the local level, Rushdoony’s ideas have helped to mobilize any number of movements. In particular, Reconstruction has spurred “reform” movements in church groups both large and small. I would point to two ways that Rushdoony’s ideas have influenced a generation of local activists. First, as I explored in chapter 4, Rushdoony’s insistence on the familialization of conservatism has shaped the thinking of a large number of activists in the Christian patriarchy, or “quiverfull” movement. As Kathryn Joyce has demonstrated in her excellent study, Quiverfull: Inside the Christian Patriarchy Movement,14 Rushdoony’s ideas have had a direct impact on host of Protestant organizations such as Doug Phillips’s15 Vision Forum which stresses “the necessity of building large family dynasties, generations of families with six, eight, ten or

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15 Doug Phillips is the son of Rushdoony’s close friend and political confidante, Howard Phillips.
more children” that will “raise a godly seed for Christ and the salvation of America.”

These families, whether explicitly “dominionist” in Rushdoony’s sense or simply “Christian” in a more generic sense, are precisely the sort of patriarchal units that allow for cultivation of the forms of “Christian self-government” envisioned by Rushdoony.

Second, as I documented in chapter 5, because of the centrality of the family in his thought, Rushdoony was a pioneer in the American homeschooling movement. He and a sizable number of activists have worked for nearly five decades to encourage Christians to remove their children from public, state-funded schools and educate them at home in order to short-circuit the state’s ability to create citizen-subjects. Along with Phillips’s Vision Forum, high profile homeschooling reform organizations such as Rev. E. Ray Moore’s Exodus Mandate have worked to “encourage and assist Christian families to leave government schools for the Promised Land of Christian schools or homeschooling.” As an expert witness in numerous court cases defending homeschoolers and with his theoretical and practical writings in a number of books and textbooks, Rushdoony will remain a prominent feature in American homeschooling curricula used by theologically and socially conservative Christians for years to come. In the case of both the wider “quiverfull” and the Christian homeschooling movements, Rushdoony has served as a major influence on Protestants who seek to reclaim governance at a local level and reassert the sovereignty of the family over that of the state.

Ultimately, critics of Rushdoony who emphasize his discussion of the death penalty in the *Institutes* and wring their hands over the threat of a genocidal theocracy

\[16\] Ibid., 4.

\[17\] “Christian Children Need Christian Education,” *The Exodus Mandate Project*
have essentially missed the “danger” inherent in Christian Reconstructionism. They focus on the goal of Christian Reconstruction—that is, the establishment of a Godly order—and ignore the process of creating that order. That process does not happen through elections, the drafting of legislation, or the organization of political parties. The process of Christian Reconstruction happens in homes, living rooms, schoolrooms, board meetings, and in church basements. It is a slow, multigenerational process that might, from time to time, lead to the election of Reconstructionist to a high political office or to a local school board, but, by and large, Reconstruction is a silent process of self-creation that works on children and their parents, and this process happens far away from any site of state-centered, top-down political power structures.

Would citizens in a Reconstructed order stone homosexuals? Yes, quite likely they would. But, the decentralized nature of a future Reconstructed society and its rigid social hierarchy would ensure that stonings would be infrequent because a Reconstructed world would have long erased the social and cultural spaces necessary for the survival of the forms of “homosexuality” that most Americans currently understand as a sexual identity and personal lifestyle. In short, the hypothetical Handmaid’s tale many tell to envision a future Reconstructed America is beside the point. The question posed by Reconstructionism is the problem of governance: How should men conduct the conduct of other men? Christian Reconstructionists have offered a simple answer to this question of governance: men must conduct themselves according to the precepts of Biblical law. If men and women conduct their lives via the standards of Biblical law, they will govern their family in a certain way. They will also govern their churches, schools, and local communities accordingly. Eventually this may mean the establishment of a wide-scale
national theocracy, but that’s unlikely. Instead, Reconstructionists will continue to be a troublesome “other” in American democracy for generations to come. Most Christians—even those most disposed to the prescriptions of a Reconstructed world—will balk at the notion of establishing theocracies and stoning incorrigible children, witches, and homosexuals. But they will continue to read, publish, and teach Rushdoony’s writings. His musing on the limits of the secular state and the problems of democratic pluralism will likely remain potent, especially in the near future as some many conservative Americans worry about the resurgence of “big government” intervention in their lives as embodied in the policies of president Barack Hussein Obama. The result will likely be the kind of “brushfire” flair ups of resistance dreamed of by Gary North.

Reconstructionist ideas will stay in print and circulate wide and far beyond the limits of the institutional confines of the Chalcedon Foundation, Vision Forum, or any of the other explicitly Reconstructionist organizations. Instead, Christian Reconstruction will give shape and meaning to the fringes, borders, and margins of many other Protestant organizations while simultaneously uncomfortably inhabiting the recesses of the American conservative movement. Neither a parasites nor a driving force, Reconstructionist ideas will be perpetuated, adapted, and diffused through many other institutional channels for decades to come.
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