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UUnderWorld

A MAGAZINE FOR
FREETHINKING
UNITARIANS,
UNIVERSALISTS
& SPIRITUAL
LIBERALS

this month

Frank Casper: Republican Theocracy (book excerpt)

UUnderWorld Interview: Revs Lynn & Jerry Kerr

Dr Neville Buch: The New UU

Mini Biography: Senator (& UU) Paul Douglas

David Cycleback: What UUism Should be About

Frank Potter: The Purpose of Religion

Andrew Walker: Meaning...

Anne L Schneider: Update on the Trump/Musk Agenda

Cal Yost: The Human Dilemma

You Should know your Bible basics

Plus Letters, Haiku, More!

March 2025

Volume 1, Number 11

Table of Contents

We've got so many great submissions, from all over the world, that we need to list them here so you won't miss anything. UUnderWorld is getting to be a little more than can be digested in one sitting! (Longer pieces are sometimes continued at the end.)

Letters from Readers, *page 2*
Frank Casper: Republican Theocracy
(book excerpt), *page 3, 31-59*
UUnderWorld Interview Rev Lynn &
Jerry Kerr, *page 4-8*
UU Haiku, *page 8*
Dr Neville Buch: The New Unitarian-
Universalism - A Choice between
Models, *page 9-10*
Biography: Senator Paul Douglas,
page 11-12
First Wednesday Universalist Service,
page 12
David Cycleback: What I believe
Unitarian Universalism should be
about, *page 13-14*

Frank Potter: The Purpose of Religion,
page 15
Third Wednesday Vespers Service,
page 15
Seven Principles, *page 16*
Andrew Walker: Meaning, *page 16-20*
Anne L. Schneider: An Update on the
Trump / Musk Agenda, *page 21-23*
Cal Yost: The Human Dilemma, *page*
24-25
UUnderWorld Masthead, *page 26*
George Atherton: Line by Line, *page 27*
John Keohane: Why every minister
and layperson should know Bible
basics, *Page 28*
A Day in the Life of Sue Republican,
page 29-30

LETTERS FROM READERS & CONTRIBUTORS

Thank you John, a great February issue
and inspiring.

Best wishes,

--Roland Lee, he/him,

(Register of One Spirit Interfaith Ministers)
(Non-Religious Pastoral Support Network)

John, Thank you! Beautiful
publication! Keep up the good work!

--Vernon Chandler

Number 10 is a great issue Thanks for
staying with it.

--Rebecca Pace

...very excited to see this! You are a
miracle worker, John. Thank you for all
you do!

--Terri Keller

Thanks for the great work on this.

--David Lawrence

...was unaware your magazine existed,
but the article list already fit some of my
thinking lately.

--Sherry A. Wells

Great work. Keep 'em coming.

--Judy Robbins, Hartford CT

I look forward to these magazines. Thank
you,

--Johnnie Clemens May, Tempe AZ

Would love to receive this. Still
traumatized from last year's GA

--Michele Rodin Jawin

BOOK EXCERPT

Republican Theocracy Why Democratic Compromise Has Died

By Frank Casper ©

On November 6, 2024, what the Founding Fathers feared came to pass: America voted for autocracy, which may very well be the last vote we cast and could signal the end of our democracy. Worried that the American people might one day elect a dictator, the Founding Fathers took care to distribute power. They viewed their work as an experiment in self-government, with Ben Franklin questioning whether we could keep our Republic. But those safeguards have failed; they are gone, and the outcomes reflect what the Founding Fathers dreaded.

As we might have expected, the press, with few exceptions, has been filled with expressions of fear, regret, bewilderment, and blame. How could the American people have gone so wrong? The answer lies in the structure of our government, designed to distance us from ourselves and our worst instincts. Those instincts were evident at Mr. Trump's October 27, 2024, campaign rally at Madison Square Garden in New York, the same venue as an American Nazi rally in 1939. Those who insisted it couldn't happen here appeared to be unaware of our history.

Instead of blaming racism, misogyny, or even the economy— all sad facts of our nature and deserving of some blame— perhaps we should [2](#) join the Founding Fathers in looking a bit deeper. Among the issues that gravely concerned them

was the role of religion in the new Republic they had bequeathed to us. This essay follows their lead and seeks the origins of our present travails more thoroughly in religious sources, primarily, though not exclusively, in what we now call the radical right.

This (essay/book) contends that there is a growing wave of opposition to the Enlightenment's philosophical legacy, arising from both the radical right and the illiberal left. Since its inception in the 17th and 18th centuries, the Enlightenment's impact has been significant. Enlightenment thought has shaped nearly every aspect of modern life and laid the groundwork for contemporary democracy, including key American documents like the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

The opposition to this legacy primarily targets the Enlightenment concept of equality, which was established by the Declaration of Independence as our nation's founding principle and later institutionalized in both the First and Fourteenth Amendments to the Constitution. The radical right's main argument is that equality does not exist and that striving for it has led our country towards moral and political decay. Meanwhile, the illiberal left contends that equality is a deception, a strategy for promoting and safeguarding the white majority while supporting the resulting oppression of minorities. In both scenarios, democracy must be dismantled because it rests on the principle of equality.

Continued on page 31

UUnderWorld INTERVIEW: FLINT MINISTERS Rev Lynn Kerr and Rev Jerry Kerr

UUnderWorld: Tell us a little about your background and training.

Rev Lynn: Rev Lynn Kerr is a graduate of the Unitarian Universalist, Starr King School for the Ministry in Berkeley, California. Before coming to Flint UU, she served as minister to the Maumee Valley Unitarian



Universalist Congregation in Bowling Green, Ohio for eight years. She also served as the Minister of Religious Education at the First Unitarian Church of Toledo, OH and the Minister of Youth and Young Adults at First Parish UU in Concord, MA. Other positions include the Executive Director of The Greeley Foundation for Peace and Justice, Hospice Chaplain, and a fundraiser for the UUA. Throughout her career, Lynn has consulted with churches in organizational development and specialized in volunteer

search planning.

Rev Jerry: Lynn's husband and co-minister, Jerry Kerr, is a graduate of Duke Divinity School and also attended the Starr King School for one year where he met Lynn. Before going to divinity school he was the perennial adult Sunday school teacher in several Methodist churches and without realizing it, was determined to turn them all into UUs. Jerry served as assistant minister with Lynn in Bowling Green, Ohio and also worked in HIV/AIDS prevention for a total of 19 years in



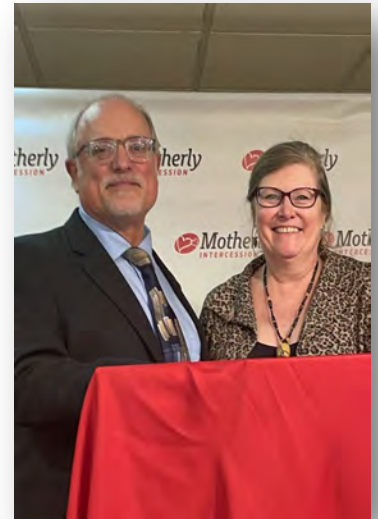
Jerry and Poodle

Toledo, Ohio and Boston, Massachusetts. Jerry is the founder of the Toledo-based "Northwest Ohio Syringe Services" that works to get injection drug users into care by treating them as individuals with inherent worth and dignity.

UUnderWorld: Why both Duke and Starr King?

become a minister were very liberal Christians. They gave me books written by

Rev Jerry: By either luck or fate, the Methodist ministers encouraging me to



very progressive Christians such as Bishop John Spong and Matthew Fox. I was also reading Joseph Campbell at that time so I was convinced of the absolute importance of transforming today's religions into something that would serve the planet and its people. I chose to go to Duke as it was a big divinity school where I hoped I would find progressive professors, and I did find an important few. Others were more conservative, so I spent three years as something of a theological outsider. I think those years in a Christian Divinity school helped me find the universal aspects of that faith. That now allows me to help UUs appreciate the Jesus of history, along with the many other faiths we honor.

I discovered UUism while I was at Duke and was eager to get immersed in that tradition. I hadn't spent all of my life's savings yet, so I decided to attend the Starr King School for the Ministry in Berkeley, California for one year.

Rev Lynn: I was raised Catholic in a small country church that did their masses in Polish in Northern Wisconsin. After my parents' divorce when I was nine, and my father received custody of me, it was apparent that we were no longer welcome there. I began attending a Mennonite church with my best friend. I enjoyed my experience very much until we became teenagers and the Mennonite church began encouraging us to attend youth retreats sponsored by a local Assembly of God church. They gave us cartoon booklets showing characters burning in hell for eternity for various sins. I could not reconcile this theology with the loving God I found in other faiths.

By this time, my father, an architect, had moved to Madison, WI and while on a tour of Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture at the UU church there, he picked up a brochure on UUism. He quickly became a UU and insisted I try it when he visited me at college. I soon became a member of the First Universalist church in Minneapolis and helped them create their Coming-of-Age curriculum. I became so involved in the church, I decided I wanted to make it my profession and I enrolled in seminary.



UUnderWorld: Tell us about your church and the city. Flint has had some hard times recently. How has that affected membership?

Rev Jerry: The City of Flint is like many other cities in the U.S. A lot of people are just barely getting by, through no fault of their own. We are on the outskirts of the city, but we try finding ways to be relevant and helpful to those who are struggling. I think the Flint Water crisis even enlivened the Flint UU congregation. That was before our time as ministers, but to have something like that in your face makes

social action especially real and urgent. They called themselves the “water warriors.”

It is difficult to diagnose why our church is smaller than 30 years ago, because church attendance is down everywhere in America. But we are growing again and have faith that a truly progressive and loving spirituality will grow it. This feels like a great time in history to be a UU church. Christianity is changing and losing members quickly, and research shows that’s because many people no longer want metaphysical doctrines demanding specific beliefs about a god. But they do want to meet on Sunday and talk about life and how they can serve others. We can do that!

Rev Lynn: I think one of our attempts to help was born from our proximity to those in need. Just two blocks from the church are three small, inexpensive hotels that are often used by local shelters when they become full. I contacted the managers of each hotel to discuss the needs of the people who are sent there. We began an ongoing collection at the church for the most needed items. Periodically, we split up the products and drop them off and the front desk distributes them to those in need.

We have also just started a program called “Flint Period.” The idea came from an NPR story from Florida with the same idea. Jerry and I have unofficially adopted a young trans man, and he has told us how emotionally and financially taxing it is to purchase period products. There are only three places in Flint that give such products away in their restrooms. We are constructing weatherproof boxes that resemble the little sidewalk libraries seen throughout the US. Inside, we will stock menstruation supplies. We plan to recruit other churches to place them on their property throughout Flint and we are looking for grants to purchase the supplies.

Lastly, we have become more aware of the plight of prisoners in America due to our book group on a book entitled, “[The Sun Does Shine](#)” and also from our interaction with a group from the UU Church in Ann Arbor. They meet at our church monthly with people returning from prison and mentor their re-entry into society. We’ve learned there are 32,374 people in 26 Michigan prisons right now and we are among the states with the longest sentences. Like many states, Michigan’s prisons are understaffed and criminally overcrowded according to federal law. Infectious diseases are rampant, and doctor and dentist visits are months behind. In response, we are beginning a pen pal program with Michigan inmates as a first, small step to help ease these problems. We hope to expand to support groups for the formerly incarcerated in the future.

UUnderWorld: What are you doing to enlarge the church, and get more members?

Rev Jerry: Our advertising budget is very small so we rely on making sure our Sunday YouTube stream is getting noticed. We even broadcast our philosophy/theology with our flagpole. We often fly a flag of planet Earth with some



other flag beneath it like a rainbow flag, a Black Lives Matter flag, an ecology flag, or the flag of Ukraine. When we fly the American flag, we fly one of those other flags underneath it to show we are far from being uncritical of our country. Our front electronic sign features what we hope are attention-getting messages like “Not Your Ordinary Religion,” or “Our Religion is Kindness.” We don’t shy away from the word “religion” because we want to reclaim it.

We also host and advertise concerts with performers that align with our values and represent marginalized populations. We often have guest speakers who represent causes and populations we support and we host free community events such as a recent Conference on Aging. We have made ourselves available as ministers in the community to officiate at non-member weddings and memorial services, which increases awareness of our progressive values. All of these are held in our very attractive church with beautiful grounds and a memorial garden that also helps increase our membership.

UUnderWorld: How and why did the church choose to join NAUA? Are you remaining affiliated with the UUA, also?

Rev Jerry: Our congregants learned about the firings of Peter Morales, Kate Rhode, Todd Eklof, and also the silencing of long-time UUA advisor the Rev. Thandeka, and came to believe that this kind of censorship was not in keeping with UU values.

Rev Lynn: Perhaps because I was a former UUA employee, I was especially dismayed when a UUA good-offices person was removed from that program simply because he was doing his job as an advocate for Todd. Shortly after that I served as a good officer for a minister who was accused (but found not guilty) of racism, and I was accused of racism as well simply because I was representing and supported a colleague.

Rev Jerry: Flint is a union town, and our congregation’s leaders naturally get very concerned when they see managers or coordinators (of any kind) overstepping their authority.

Rev Lynn: When we asked for space in the UU World to discuss Article 2, we were disappointed to hear from our President that there was no room or time to have other opinions represented. Our congregation also found that the UUA no longer supported or honored a congregation’s ability to choose their own minister, and they felt that was neither helpful, nor respectful.

Rev Jerry: Lynn and I supported our congregation’s open and honest discernment process and over the course of two years they finally decided to join NAUA while keeping their UUA membership. I believe there is a sense among the UUCF congregants that NAUA is committed to preserving the elements of UUism that make us a truly progressive, living faith. For myself, I think history shows that when UU churches are free of hierarchical rule, it allows our faith to evolve and meet the needs of the times. Any UU organizing body has to have faith in progressive people

and let them be fully heard and respected, or the fragile dynamic of congregational wisdom is damaged.

Rev Lynn: We continue to use the UU Principles & Purposes and Sources of Wisdom and our congregation fully embodies what they stand for.

UUnderWorld: What do you look to do with other churches? How do advances in technology, such as zoom, effect things?

Rev Jerry: Your question brings up some important ideas that we are exploring as we also do the important work of keeping a traditional brick and mortar church going. When the pandemic hit, we started doing Sunday services on Zoom, but quickly decided to buy the equipment needed to do a two-camera, YouTube broadcast every Sunday. It was a very big task for such a small church and the growing pains were many. We now have a dedicated audio-visual tech crew of eight congregants who taking turns running all the switches and buttons that would scare most people away.

During the pandemic we did so much on Zoom that many of our folks now want to do book groups and educational sessions in-person rather than online. But now we are thinking of launching a Zoom Dream Work group and make it available to UUs everywhere. I was lucky to have studied with the UU minister and Jungian dream guru, Jeremy Taylor, and have led many dream groups over the years. It can be a lot of fun and very enlightening at the same time.

UU HAIKU

by Charles Suhor

I like living in
the cracks between debunking
and dead certainty.

I subscribed to that
creed. It didn't deliver.
I didn't renew.

I'm all out of "shoulds"
and "musts." Can I interest
you in a "maybe"?

Take no one's good deed
for granted. Let gratitude,
love, awe, flow freely.

*Charles Suhor is a
retired educator and a former member of UU congregations in Urbana, IL, and
Montgomery, AL. He currently attends the Fairhope,
AL, Unitarian Fellowship*

DR NEVILLE BUCH

The New Unitarian-Universalism - A Choice between Models

This short article explains the emergence of a new Unitarian-Universalism, as a traditional philosophical model which is not actually new, as well as its nemesis in a type of “anti-model model” of ‘life functioning’, of political gaming, and of anti-philosophy. So, as to be not confused we need clear labels, and this will upset greatly those in the latter grouping. However, without labels, we, simple human beings get confused. Thus, the former grouping of *Lebensphilosophie* is what I called the NAUA Project, and its historical legacy is the “Church of the Larger Fellowship (CLF)”. The latter grouping of confused game playing is the current administration of the *American Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA)*, coming after the unofficial schism. I am an Australian-American relational historian who has research and written on how *Americanism* skews the thinking in Liberal Religion, and not only for American evangelicalism. The average American is caught in their cultural bubble, as, indeed, the average Australian is caught in their cultural bubble.

Sensitive Warning: I burst bubbles! I am the thinker, the compatibilist philosopher, who crush the binary thinking into common sense progressivism. Nevertheless, in certain contexts, one side can have more of the truth stance. I do not have patience with Institutions that reduces its thinking, at the top and bottom of the organisation, through oversimplification of deep understandings. That loss of patience comes from:

1. The Loss of **Historical Memory**:¹ Hermann Ebbinghaus (1850–1909) studied memory and forgetting curves. His work heavily influenced the study of serial position and its effect on memory. The theory was developed by William James (1842–1910) who examined aspects of cognition such as perception, memory, reasoning, and attention. Mary Whiton Calkins (1863–1930) focused on human memory capacity. The work revealed that there is the tendency for individuals to be able to accurately recollect the final items presented in a sequence of stimuli. Distant memory becomes difficult. Metamemory, a solution, is defined as knowing about memory and mnemonic strategies, and is an important aspect of metacognition.
2. Inability to have **Communitive Action**: Psychological dissonance affects the conservatives – the avoidance of admitting mistakes – by the logicism which is something like rationalising in Aristotelian universal spirals (adding cycles upon cycles Infineum). Radicals do not have the traditional recourse and so, despite its universality, the argumentations became fragmented and only signal holism without substantiation. For a conservative and radical thinker, none of this is pre-determined, and the solution is the model of communicative rationality (Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of society*, 1979).²
3. Inability to listen to, and understand, **Scholars of the Higher Order**:³ Julian Baggini proceeds in an article with a description of how the historical ‘Republic of Letters’ worked, and what is important to notice is that the exchange of ideas, the academic dialogue, involved both those with academic status and those who lost favour with the institutions; socially, politically, and significantly, cognitively isolated. Perhaps, historical scholars, like Nietzsche, had to take such a prophetic tone by necessity. It speaks to the unintelligible rage we hear against higher education institutions on social media. The public, again, is

isolated from the instituted system of higher education. The solution is the bursting the bubble of an inward viewing cognition. For example, are realisation, that the excuses do not work anymore; there is more a need to be 'correct' than to be 'right'.⁴

I might have started the preliminary thinking for the NAUA Project, from afar, when my essay, "Preliminary Conclusions in the Search of Philosophical Grounds for Contemporary Unitarian Identity", was published in *The Journal of Liberal Religion* for the Summer 2002 issue.⁵ In that essay I concluded:

"We need to be concerned to see Unitarian bodies re-establish their place in wider and current intellectual debates. This can only happen if stated Unitarian principles can be bridged with Unitarian identity."

The words were prophetic in the reverse inference. The UUA did **not** achieve a unity of religious/spiritual plurality by reducing a good set of principles to a vague statement. The Institution fracked under an intellectual confusion about Unitarian identity. There was also a confusion for Universalist identity since the leadership *appears*, for the logic of decision-making, there is a large knowledge-gap and skill gap.⁶ There is clear and logical scoping from a set of philosophical principles to a state of Universality, and diversity, distinction, and *Différance* makes it so. The existing administration of the UUA are still living back in 1961 even as it rejects the set of principles. The New is not always correct, but in this case, the NAUA Project has carried the perennial truisms.

--Dr Neville Buch, Professional Historian
Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

ENDNOTES

¹ Buch, Neville (2021). The Philosophy Cafe's History of Cognition. Discussion Sheet 2016-future Public Cognition, ? Dr Neville Buch ABN: 86703686642, 24 February 2025.

²Habermas, Jürgen (1992). *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, Polity Press.

³Buch, Neville (2021). Julian Baggini's Idea of Dialogue and Academy's Isolation for Independent Scholars, The Importance Of History In Our Own Lives? Dr Neville Buch ABN: 86703686642, 19 February 2021. Julian Baggini in *The Times Higher Education Supplement* on 17 February 2021.

⁴Buch, Neville (2025). "I rather be Right than Correct" : Needing to be Correct Not Right, Intellectual History, Dr Neville Buch ABN: 86703686642, 24 February 2025.

⁵Buch, Neville (2002). Preliminary Conclusions in the Search of Philosophical Grounds for Contemporary Unitarian Identity. *The Journal of Liberal Religion*. Volume 3, No. 2, Summer 2002.

⁶The current UUA leadership would be able to pass a Cosmology or Philosophy course on Universality, *today*.

THIS MONTH'S BIRD On The Cover

Toucans appear in the mythology of many cultures, including the Aztecs, Incas, Maya, and Ayoreo. They are associated with communication, showiness, and the ability to move between worlds: they are traditionally seen as conduits between the worlds of the living and the spirits.



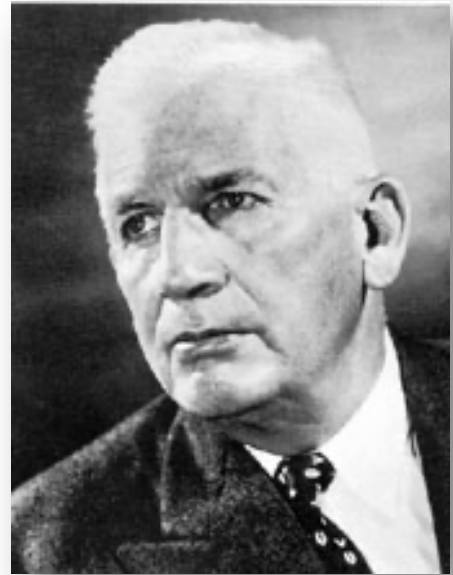
BIOGRAPHY

Paul Douglas (1892-1976)—Unitarian, Individualistic, Exceptional. May he be a hero to you.

By John Keohane

It's Paul Douglas' birthday on the 26th of this month. Paul Howard Douglas (1892-1976) was both a Quaker, a Unitarian, and a UU. A United States senator from Illinois for eighteen years (1949-67), he was a Democrat, but independent, exceptional, resistant to outside authority. The inner sanctum, in his senate office, for when depression set in, had photos of six of his heroes, including three Republicans, one Democrat, one Socialist, and Clarence Darrow.

A leader in civil rights, the voting rights law of 1965, which LBJ takes credit for, is one Paul fought for years. It was years of frustration in the 50s when Sen. Lyndon B. Johnson was majority leader beholden to Sen. Richard Russell of Georgia. Sen. James O. Eastland of Mississippi chaired the Judiciary committee of the senate. Bills would pass the house, then get bottled up in committee by Eastland. The only way to get them to be voted on by the senate, was to get them either through the committee, or get them away from the committee. When, in the mid 50s, Sen. Douglas proposed a discharge petition, Johnson called for a roll call vote, and Douglas got six votes. But Douglas kept at it, developed support through churches and synagogues and more throughout the country, and years later, when LBJ was president, it got into law. Here in Austin, at the LBJ Presidential library, Johnson takes full credit, but it was Douglas' bill...



Robert Caro, LBJ's biographer, told me that Douglas was the senator that Johnson hated the most, because Douglas wouldn't deal. Did Paul want money, patronage, women? No. Douglas wanted 100% enforcement, no quid pro quo on the Constitution of the United States. He fought for all three post Civil War civil rights amendments to be fully enforced. That includes the fourteenth, the one which Donald Trump is now trying to void.

But Paul Douglas didn't put efforts just into civil rights. A labor economist, at the University of Chicago for over twenty years, he helped FDR create social security. As a marine, he fought, and got wounded, lost the use of his left arm when it was riddled by machine gun bullets as Douglas was helping evacuate a wounded marine in World War II. As senator, he reported his net worth and his income in detail to his constituents every year, and refused his partial pension from the marines for all those years in the senate.

Early on conservation, the Indiana Dunes National Park, protecting irreplaceable dunes from greedy steel companies, is largely his work.

The annual percentage rate, APR, now required to be disclosed, was his. Before credit lenders could say, "we have only 1% interest", and it could be 1% per week, 52% per year.



I'm the skinny one

Do take time to read more about Paul Douglas. Time to celebrate him. I wrote a good short biography which you can find if you search the UU Dictionary of Biography. You'll even see this picture of me and my brother with Douglas, taken by my mother, on the day that Douglas had taken those three Keohanes to lunch in the senate dining room.

So advance your knowledge, and see that picture by doing a google search: "UUDB Paul Douglas."



First Wednesday Universalist Service

"The Dana Vespers"

How the Universalist congregation in Dana, Mass. responded to the destruction of their town

--Rev. Richard Trudeau

April 2, 2025

8:00pm Eastern (5:00 Pacific)

Sponsored by

Universalist Convocation
universalistconvocation.org

For ZOOM link, send an email to
universalism101@gmail.com *Link will be sent the day before.*

DAVID CYCLEBACK

What I believe Unitarian Universalism should be about

Making UUs better, more thoughtful, open-minded, and understanding people

1st Principle: The inherent worth and dignity of every person

4th Principle: A free and responsible search for truth and meaning

A Unitarian Universalist congregation serves various roles for its members. Some seek community amongst like-minded people, some a Sunday morning refuge from the outside world or an education program for their kids. Others join for social justice and activism.

As a freethinking, pluralist tradition, Unitarian Universalism should, at its core, teach its members open-mindedness, curiosity, and how to engage with diverse ideas and perspectives. A church or belief system should promote spiritual and intellectual growth by broadening perspectives and deepening knowledge and understanding.

This means offering classes, sermons, discussions, and programs that explore different religious and secular belief systems, cultures, ideas, and viewpoints—including those that challenge our beliefs, assumptions, and prejudices.

The Spiritual Destructiveness of an Increasingly Politicized and Politically Narrow Church

One of the greatest intellectual and spiritual challenges to UU is the increasing politicization of the church and the narrowing of perspectives. Though founded on freethought, many congregations have become politically and ideologically narrow and sometimes even intolerant. The Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) now resembles a mirror image of a politically conservative Evangelical church. A church is not supposed to be a political party.

This makes critical thinking, open dialogue, and understanding differing viewpoints more essential than ever.

Political hyperpartisanship harms a church, creating a spiritually poisonous us versus them mentality. Many UUs who claim to value open discussion and understanding abandon those principles when it comes to politics. People are often at their intellectual and emotional worst when engaged in partisan politics and this mindset should be discouraged in a spiritual center. I have seen otherwise thoughtful, kind, and open-minded UUs mischaracterize, defame, and make no attempt to understand people simply because of differing beliefs and backgrounds.

Echo chambers must be countered, as they promote an illiberal, close-minded mindset. A free and responsible search for truth cannot be confined to a single ideology. To claim that truth can or should only fit within one ideology—political, religious, or other—is both arrogant and obviously false.

These days, dissent and heterodoxy are critical to the health of the church and congregations and to preserving liberal religion. Those who promote

groupthink and partisanship and suppress heterodoxy should not be in leadership positions.

The Importance of Critical Thinking

UU congregations should teach their members critical thinking skills. Even if most members of a congregation belong to the same political party, being able to intelligently assess diverse ideas is crucial for thoughtfully engaging with the diverse world. All UUs should learn how to recognize cognitive and cultural biases and irrational thinking, practice intellectual humility and understand the limits of our knowledge, identify logical fallacies, and impartially consider diverse perspectives.

With today's tribalism, a common read for a UU congregation could be moral psychologist Jonathan Haidt's *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*. This book explores how people arrive at different moral and political perspectives.

Honoring the Worth and Dignity of Everyone Through Knowledge

One of Unitarian Universalism's core principles is the inherent worth and dignity of every person, rooted in a rejection of the biblical doctrine of original sin. To me, this is the church's foundational value, and why I support UU congregations welcoming people of diverse identities and backgrounds. However, truly respecting others' worth and dignity requires listening to and learning from all people—not just those who share our views—something UU today often falls short of.

Too often, UUs learn about different racial, ethnic, national, and cultural groups through a narrow progressive lens and from just a tiny partisan subset of the groups, even though the people within those groups hold a wide range of views and experiences. This does not create understanding; it reinforces existing biases and ignorance. If we see others only through our own ideological framework, we are not respecting or even trying to understand them.

A Better Vision for UU

Critical thinking, open-mindedness, curiosity, lifelong learning, and meaningful engagement with diverse and challenging perspectives are essential not only within UU congregations but in life beyond them. These skills, which UU should be taught in their congregations, transcend religious affiliation and are vital for navigating a diverse world.

UU congregations have the potential to model a more open, inclusive, and thoughtful society—one that values honest discourse, respects differing viewpoints, and seeks understanding over division.

This, to me, is what Unitarian Universalism should be about, and is the only Unitarian Universalism I am interested in.

-- *David Cycleback*



PURPOSE OF RELIGION

To Control

By Frank Potter

I submit that most religions can be summed up in two words: “to control.” I do not recall when I figured it out, but the bottom line in all religions is that the purpose from day one to today is “to control.” First, it was to control the weather, such as lightning, defeat one’s enemies, protect crops, have fertile women, etc. It was to control others and also oneself. It was the way to establish guidelines or rules for ethical behavior for society members and oneself.

A primary mechanism of control is prayer. It attempts to have something happen or not happen by bargaining with an abstract entity to whom one has projected power. It does not mean that prayer is all bad; it helps one or a community get through trying times. It is used when a person feels fear due to a lack of understanding or how to deal with certain forces. They can function if they perceive a sense of control.

Consider the Old Testament: The Jews were (or are) the chosen people with leaders to show the way (Ten Commandments, etc.) to God and consequently be looked after by Yahweh. Muslims are protected by God, who they have given all the power, “God willing.” They give God the power, and in turn, God will protect them.

I got on this topic when I picked up Hector Avalos's, book, *Slavery, Abolitionism, and the Ethics of Biblical Scholarship*. In discussing slavery, Dr. Avalos challenges Christian scholarship, which has, from its beginning, justified slavery until relatively recently. (Avalos was a teen Christian evangelist, but after graduating from Harvard Divinity School, he became an atheist scholar and professor.) Slavery is an extreme way to control others. We enslave others and even ourselves to hopefully get our needs met. I suppose the next topic could be superstition.



3rd Wednesday Vesper Service

Sponsored by the UU Multiracial Unity Action Council (UUMUAC)

Wednesday, March 19 • 7:00 pm Central Time
(8:00 Eastern, 6:00 Mountain, 5:00 Pacific)

“Jesus & the Gay Couple”

An antidote to all the anti-gay passages in the Bible
-- Rev. Richard Trudeau

FOR THE ZOOM LINK: please send your name, email address, and congregation (if any) to richard3point@gmail.com. (If you received a Zoom link to a previous service from that email address, you will automatically receive one for this service.) The link will be sent Tuesday

WE WON'T FORGET

Seven Principles & Six Sources

We affirm and promote UU's Seven Principles:

1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person
2. Justice, equity and compassion in human relations
3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations
4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
5. The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large
6. The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all
7. Respect for the interdependent web of existence of which we are all a part

Unitarian Universalism draws from many Sources:

- Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life
- Words and deeds of prophetic people which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love
- Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life
- Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves
- Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit
- Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature

ANDREW WALKER

Meaning is a psychological value state of being, and the singularities influence upon Humanities psychosis

Four words and my definitions used throughout this paper

Whatis (a single compounded word) = What was in the past? What is now in the present? What will be in the future? An unknown completeness. Only partially known but something we delude ourselves we know better than we do. :-)

compared to:

What is (two words in regular use) = That which current attention is paid to.

Singularity = That from which the universe and its content emerged from. With no good reason to be convinced there is only one singularity.

Psychosis = The Meaning, Value, Knowledge and Ignorance bubble. All humans co-create for their self. Often engulfing groups, tribes and cultures.

Apparent to me, although your understanding and interpretation may differ.

Because of Truth's ambiguity. Humanity requires constant truth seeking of the best values and meanings that serve Self, Other, and everything that is current and everything which will be in the future while evaluating its past. To the best possible degree.

Much of our understandings are at best tacit, ineffable, only partially or totally subliminally understood. Often taken for granted as understood when it is not, yet we generally function as humans have for untold generations.

Subjective and objective truths, or in other words solid truths and opinionated truths, along with value, understandings, beliefs, and our very knowings, skate on a foundation of illusion and sometimes faulty conclusions. These conclusions are based on a constructed sense of reality where the first principle of physicality is only assumed even though the assumed smallest particle keeps getting smaller and smaller as we understand it to be. Our thinking has the subjective and objective swapping roles in our thinking without our awareness as we make sense of our senses through our cognitive processing. This confusion along with our conclusions becoming solidified in our thinking once we accept them as fact for our further thinking. This causes resistance to changing our framing of reality. Because revision of an accepted fact requires more effort than the simple acceptance of an established fact, thus creating resistance to change even if one prides oneself on a willingness to change beliefs.

After having lived a life of wonderment and having observed my self and others make conclusion many of which have proven to be wrong in hindsight my current understanding is meaning is the contribution that each consciousness produces into the world, through its interaction with Whatis and the understanding and interpretation of this interaction is what consciousness values most.

Written within each conscious embodiment, because apparently but debatably a consciousness requires a body to exist in our world, there are incomplete instructions, currently known as genes that are in-bedded within the combination of body and consciousness.

(The incompleteness of such instructions are especially noticeable in the human species. Insects and other animals seem more self-contained in deciding upon their next action, and plants even more so are well-equipped.)

These genetic instructions are how this embodied consciousness needs to react to the environment it emerges into, enabling its survival and procreation. These instructions are based on the experience of the diverse lineage that the current specimen emerged from.

While the genetic and instinctual instructions are mainly based on the requirements for the survival of the species. They will be combined by unknown means with the experience of each current individuals experience of living then passed on to any offspring reproduced, to some degree and by some means.

Also within each individual of a species, this incomplete genetic instructions set, is also utilised in combination with the meanings and values co-created through the interaction between the environment and each individualised consciousness. Powering the action decisions of each individual entity of combined body and consciousness.

Further interactions between other individual conscious living beings, go on to co-create the current meanings and value that drive the actions of the current generation of the specific species that is being envisioned. This is my conjecture and I further surmise that such interactions play a part in co-creating the current group psychosis that are at play especially evident within humanities tribes whether these tribes are self-selecting tribes or inherent tribes. This shared psychosis drives the tribe's actions within the tribe and also the interactions between other diverse tribes psychoses. Otherwise, known as cultures, otherwise known as a cult both good and bad. With many denying their culture or attempting to shed it. Truth is we all belong to a cult (culture) even if its membership is one! A psychosis is driven by meaning be it good! Or bad! False! Or true! Any conjecture about the validity of this claim I assume will centre on whether reality is external or not. As for myself I can accept that uncertainty.

Or in other words life is the expression of the singularity through individualised consciousness's and creation of meaning is co-creation between Self, Other, and Whatis.

Balancing the content of Whatis, is what life is all about. As it is experienced and explored through senses and interpretations, focused, filtered and frame by feeling, emotion, reason, cognition, thought, logic, concern, co-created values, will, freedom, and constraints and many unknowns. As the power of the mind is being wielded by our puny humans.

Humanities maturing evolution demands more response-ability, to be both developed, and taken, for the sake and future of humanity and the environment that it depends upon. Because of humanities ability to destroy itself. Whether intentionally or not.

The only way I envisage humanity not destroying itself is through better understanding and appreciation of Self, Other, and Whatis, increasingly and with all due humility.

In closing, meaning is the value state co-created by Self, Other and Whatis, and that value state is valued the most in the



power exchange that happens within every human interaction big or small. Where the psychological and spiritual currency reserve rather than being gold is meaning, mined from our minds which drives an economy based on a never fully satisfied lust for certainty in knowing Whatis. This gives new meaning to paying attention, does it not?

So it is up to humanity to wield such power for the benefit of Self, Other, and Whatis better than previous attempts. :-)

We are tasked with maintaining satisfaction for our self, within a degree awareness of our knowledge, ignorance bubble. This is the great balancing act that humanity has always faced since reaching an unspecified point in its brain evolution and on into its continuing development since instinct became insufficient by itself.

Much to digest there. I hope time serves us all well as we sail upon this sea of faith balancing our knowledge and ignorance in the healthiest way possible. As we develop better systems to live by driven by our intellect and imagination. Learning how to change each other's mind for the betterment of Self, Other, and Whatis with minimum force or encouragement through the power of persuasion via thought, belief, emotion and communication.

Foot note:

As the volume of knowledge expands so does the circumference of ignorance that surrounds it.

This is the paradoxical bubble we can't escape within this lifetime.

It may contain new knowledge and new ignorance according to our perceptions. But we will never escape this paradoxical bubble in this lifetime.

Coming to terms with this paradox is what lifts most of my sadness :-)

Hence, NonAbsoluteAbsolutism. :-)

Along with that understanding I also realise that we are all live within our own psychosis of understanding. Each and every one of us. Eking out sufficient sense of certainty to satisfy our lust.

Which the Trump phenomenon illustrates so well. With every one inhabiting their own meaning psychosis bubble some aligning to some degree with others. With others finding it hard to imagine the understanding of certain others on either side of the political, moral spectrums. With many seeing corruption in others, as justification for corruption of their own morals, thoughts, and action. All be it unjustifiable.

With Trump as the master manipulator reframing situations to suit his ever-changing agenda based on self-preservation above all else

There is always competition to master the largest group psychosis to benefit a self, whether consciously or not. With those with the abilities utilising many and varied tactics to maintain control. Some to a balanced benefit of Self, Other, and Whatis. Others not so much! :-)

Leaving those without sufficient skills to manipulate others psychosis's to either stay within their own psychosis defending it or slavishly adapt or adopt to another's psychosis to variable degrees.

With some more habituated to lying to themselves and others than most.

Of course anyone who believes they experience reality directly to some extent will resist this explanation. Believing the map rather than the reality which cant be seen because of the virtual nature of our perception. Yes we do feel the nature of a solid but miss seeing the totality of its structure. With the more we know the more we don't know, being the rule if we are honest with ourselves.

It is somewhat ironic that president Donald Trump is the one appearing to trump the psychosis of a large swathe of a population spread about the globe, enough to make me wonder if "Whatis" has a sense of humour.

How this entanglement of meaning, psychosis, and value plays out both in hindsight and into the future remains to be seen as it is a new understanding awaiting testing over time.

Culture is co-created by Self, Other, and whatis. By recognising right from wrong over and over, noticing whether it benefits humanities experience and survival. This is done through the experience of living, interpreting through feelings, cognition and language while co-creating values that serve to guide actions willed by each and every humans will, co-creating what is now and what will be in the future at least in the realm of possible human achievement.

Note well this does not necessarily raise humanity to the highest stature in the animal and plant kingdom. But it does raise humanity to the highest response-ability for its actions because, Whatis will likely exist without need of humanities consciousness.

In our ignorance the spectrum of a healthy human is unknown just as the spectrum of a healthy psychosis is unknown to us, with only history/memory and consequence along with experience, feeling, emotion, cognition, and imagination. Leaving us dependent upon Self, Other, and Whatis to guide us, to judge what is healthy and what is not into our future as we have done in the past, and this work is never complete. :-)

This talk and others on NonAbsoluteAbsolutism can be seen and heard on my youtube channel as my philosophy develops, or should I say evolves. :-)

<https://youtu.be/3YCOgOMAz7g>

Andrew Walker is a nonacademic philosopher, a 74 year old ex factory worker, who retired at 50 years old on an invalid pension. He lives in Queensland Australia on an Island half way between Brisbane and the Gold coast. He is a member of Brisbane Unitarian Universalists and SoFiA (Sea of faith in Australia)



ANNE L. SCHNEIDER

An Update on the Trump / Musk Agenda

Resistance is growing and Trump's popularity in the polls is falling. That's the good news. The bad news is that the massive assault on federal spending is not over and its impacts are just now beginning to reach people and programs. We can only hope his drop in the polls plus renewed pressure on all Congressional delegations will put a stop to this craziness.

Gallup Poll for Feb. 3-16 shows Trump with 45% approval and 51% disapproval. Other polls also show Trump's approval rating lower than his disapproval (Real Clear Politics, You Gov, Quinnepac, and others).

WHAT WE CAN DO:

Flood Congress with calls protesting the Trump/Musk agenda. Try using "5 calls." This is a very quick way to make calls to your elected officials. They currently give you 25 topics to choose from. Try it (google or search for 5 calls) or click here <https://5calls.org/all/>

Feb. 28. There is a planned "don't spend any money today" national effort to make a statement protesting the Trump/Musk initiatives. Participate if you can and limit or avoid spending any money.

Update. It is not clear from hour to hour which of Trump/Musk initiatives are temporarily stalled, which have been blocked, and which are still moving. It appears that any program with some reliance on federal funds is expecting to be impacted and many are already preparing for a massive shut

down. Constant vigilance is needed as well as ACTION. And, the ACTION that may be most effective is to FLOOD our U.S. congressional delegation with phone calls. Call 202 224 3121. Or, try the "5 Calls" app linked above. (Just google it). As the results of the Trump/Musk assault on the federal government trickle down to real people, resistance is growing.

DOGE – Federal Spending Freeze – Federal Workforce Layoffs.

DOGE is the Department of Government Efficiency that apparently is being run by Elon Musk (although he denies it) and may have access to the federal payment system that includes all federal government payouts. This is the organization that is attempting to illegally shut down all federal spending and with that, all federally funded programs. However, their access has been blocked but it seems programs are being shut down through Executive Orders. These are being appealed, and temporary holds are being placed. Nevertheless, programs and their workers are fast disappearing. As of Sunday, there were no official figures of how many of the 2.4 million federal work force had been laid off, resigned, fired, or simply gone.

Just this weekend, an email was sent apparently to all federal workers telling them to report what they did last week (using at least five bullet points) and if they did not respond, that would be considered a resignation. The FBI and State Department reportedly told their employees to hold off on this.

DEI- The Trump/Musk program has prohibited DEI initiatives, training, etc. and said funding will be stopped

(including grants and contracts) to any public or private entity that is using it. The federal Department of Education has said schools have two weeks to disband their DEI initiatives, offices, organizations, etc. or lose federal funding. This was reportedly blocked by a judge in Baltimore based on suits filed by several groups. But many agencies, non profits, and private entities are ending DEI anyway, out of fear.

United States Post Office – Trump/Musk are attempting to fire the Board that governs the USPS and turn the USPS over to the Department of Commerce.

Military spending – the Defense department has been given five years to cut 8 percent of its budget. Trump also fired the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Peter Hegseth, the Trump-appointed Secretary of Defense, fired the top lawyers for the Army, Navy, and Air Force.

IRS – the IRS fired about 6,700 employees most of whom handled auditing and collections.

Immigration – Trump has announced on Truth Social that the southern border is closed. It is not clear what this means.

WHAT IS BEING DONE TO STOP THIS?

The courts are the primary source of resistance, but court action is often slow and it can simply be ignored. Thus, the current status of the federal freeze and other executive orders is in a state of flux as temporary injunctions have been issued by courts or individual judges to block the freeze, but non -profits, public agencies, and others with federal grants or contracts have said they do not have access to their funds. This violates the

U.S. Constitution’s provision that Congress has the sole authority to authorize federal spending. Multiple lawsuits have been filed, but the freeze seems to have a life of its own. It is not clear how, when, or who might enforce court orders to STOP the TRUMP/MUSK ATTACK ON OUR DEMOCRACY.

The big question: ARE WE HEADED FOR A CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS?

The big answer: NO. WE ARE ALREADY IN ONE.

What to do? Protest, resist, contact your Congressional delegation (see below). Do “5 calls”. (Put “5 calls” in your browser).

Birthright citizenship- Trump issued an Executive Order declaring a child born in the U.S. is NOT a citizen unless the mother or father is a citizen or has legal immigration status. Status update: this is BLOCKED.

Others: Let’s not forget that Trump also

- pardoned 1,500+ persons convicted of crimes in the January 6 coup attempt,
- imposed tariffs on Mexico, Canada and China,
- has plans for mass deportations,
- has said there should be quotas for ICE officials,
- fired numerous heads of agencies,
- plans to take over and “own” the Gaza strip in violation of international law.

WHAT'S BEING DONE?

State Attorneys General (including Kris Mayes, AG of Arizona) have filed suits and are continuing to do so. Democrats in Congress, including those from Arizona, are using what power they have, as a minority party, to protest. THINGS ARE IN A CONSTANT STATE OF FLUX. COURTS AND JUDGES ARE SAYING "NO" TO SOME OF THIS.

Need REPUBLICANS and INDEPENDENTS (AND, OF COURSE, DEMOCRATS) to step up and STOP TRUMP/MUSK.

*By Anne L. Schneider,
Valley Unitarian Universalist
Congregation
Feb. 24, 2025*



*"It seems weird because usually
American sponsored coups only happen
in other countries."*

CAL YOST

The human dilemma

What a sad mess our world is in.

Every country has homeless, preventable illness, and hunger. Yet we throw away our work hours everyday, which are our life hours, to pay taxes for things that should not be necessary. Sadly, a big part of every country's budget goes to military spending.

How many hours a week do we all go to work, worldwide? And then the governments use our tax money to make better killing weapons and pay for our armies on land and sea?

This is simply because we can't trust our 195 country neighbors. Why is this?

NATO countries are expected to contribute 2 percent of their Gross Domestic Product every year for their defence spending. Global military spending is over 2 trillion dollars a year.

What the heck?

Humans barely made it through the ice age. We had the bubonic plague wipe out a huge percentage of the European population, and even worse, approximately 70,000 years ago, during the Toba catastrophe, Homo sapiens population may have dropped to as low as between 1,000 and 10,000 individuals.

(The Toba volcanic eruption is one of the largest known explosive eruptions in the Earth's history.)

Yet despite our world-wide educational efforts we have learned little from our violent past, and still fight war after war. As an American, it is quite embarrassing to report that many of our wars weren't even successful. Just a disaster for all concerned (except those companies which sell and develop the deadly war toys).

Maybe humans have a "defective gene."

Human behavior is influenced by a wide range of factors, but the desire to kill others is too strong. People are capable of both cooperative and competitive behaviors, and we don't fully understand what pushes us internally to think and act as we do.

The decision to engage in warfare is complex.

War has been dominated by men, and research to why men are inclined to war (and women largely don't) should be examined.

If men disappeared, would the women still continue the world's war machines?

Regardless, if humankind could get their act together, we could put living areas on the moon, Mars, and maybe even the moons of Jupiter. There is a whole universe to explore.

Maybe the civilized societies of outer space will contact us if we run a sane society here?!?!?

Maybe it's not the distance that keeps aliens away. They easily could tap into our news channels and also watch by telescopes the intentional explosions of our various and ongoing wars.

Maybe they consider us too dangerous and primitive to bother with.

On the good side, even if our current world leaders are rich, selfish, and arrogant, there are many ways the common people can make the world a better place.

It often starts with small actions that can have a big impact.

Some ideas:

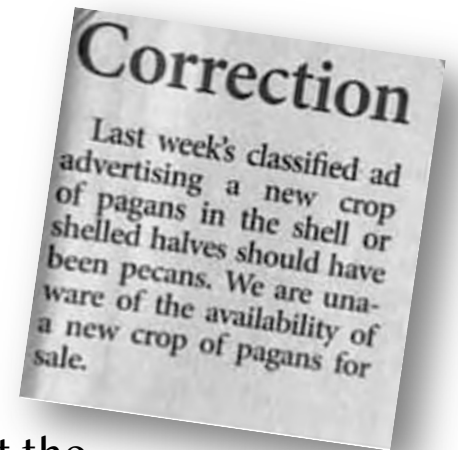
1. Being kind and compassionate to others
2. Volunteering or supporting charitable organizations
3. Being environmentally conscious
4. Educating and advocating for important causes
5. Promoting equality and inclusivity
6. Spreading positivity and encouragement
7. Investing in education and healthcare
8. Building strong communities

Making the world a better place is a collective effort, and every individual does have the power to contribute in meaningful ways.

--Calvin

--Calvin Yost, M.A.

*American retired English teacher writing from the Philippines
who writes about environmental, physical and emotional wellness for 3 newspapers*



Something I've noticed: At the points where in other churches I'd expect to hear a loud "AMEN!", at UU churches I hear a quiet "Hmmm..."



Y'know, it might not seem right, but this is the **eleventh** (OMG!) issue UUnderWorld, which was supposed to be a one-time thing, when I was a child, way back in May, but has now been put together *every single bloody month* for nearly a year! While the original intention was to draw attention to the major changes going on at the national Association, it continues on and on, with hopes of becoming a platform for independent voices and ideas & thinkers on liberal religion, since that other one, I forget the name, doesn't seem to want to do that any more.

The editor is still **John Griffin Miller**, a lifelong UU, with brilliant Assistant Editor, **John A. Keohane**. There are lots of bylined articles, and we get lots of help from lots of others around the world. If anyone would like to help out with future issues, please (pretty please) let us know.

And as we try to make UUnderWorld as relevant and as widely read as possible, it is imperative that readers help by *forwarding* the newsletter and website to friends, fellow UUs, church leaders, ministers and total strangers. Post a notice on your Facebook page and maybe even your congregation's. And be sure to direct people to our super cool website uunderworld.com (thanks Steve!) for past issues and to join hundreds of others on the growing email list. Encourage input and contributions that will spur discussion from all corners. (Of the world!)

Please send Letters to the Editor, submissions, input & suggestions, comments, complaints, unsolicited praise, book reviews, solicited praise, anxieties, requests for a pdf of UUnderWorld current and past issues or other info to: **UUnderworld74@gmail.com**

GEORGE ATHERTON

line by line – lines selected from a link log

creation spirituality and Matthew Fox, former Dominican [\(!?\)](#) / +AI*

Enlightenment values have been replaced by a vision of cultural revolution, guided by ... [\(!?\)](#) *

extreme pessimists: what we are doing will eventually cause the extinction ... / Brozović [\(!?\)](#) [!g](#) *

logical fallacies prevalent in UU spaces: ad hominem attacks, slippery slope ... / Cycleback [!g](#) *

today's self-realization might be tomorrow's "what the hell was I thinking?" / impermanence*

insights from Jiddu Krishnamurti's The Flight of the Eagle / +AI*

... a universe we never once in our lives understood / awe-filled agnosticism [!?](#) [!g](#) [!*](#) *

individuals have dignity and rights that they realize and protect by acting together / Snyder [\(!?\)](#) *

Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest? [\(!?\)](#) / see 2-minute video clip from inaugural service*

we are all human here and no one has final answers to ultimate questions / Saltzman [\(!?\)](#) *

the first foundation for unity is honoring the inherent dignity of every human being / Budde, 8:01*

five principles of peaceful coexistence: respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, ... [\(!?\)](#) *

explicit knowledge: stories we can tell / ... a tale that is told [\(!?\)](#) – often with sound and fury [\(!?\)](#)

tacit knowledge [\(!?\)](#) – internal, nonverbal – available for recall, like stories / All we know ... [\(!?\)](#)

the song within all of us calling us home saying: "It's here! It's here! Buddha nature is

here!" [\(!?\)](#)* When someone refers to Buddha nature, what do they mean by that? / +AI*

all you have to do is be – that's all you have to do, it's all you can do / transcript, at 15:19*

appreciating beauty during grief and stress [\(!?\)](#) / Camilla Dietrich, 14-slide presentation*

2025-02-27* / date posted the lines above, selected* – for UUnderWorld* – from a link log*

asterisks and DDG bang commands [\(!?\)](#) here are links – hover/click on links for destinations

JOHN A KEOHANE
**Why every minister
and layperson should
know Bible basics**

Bible? Didn't we reject that when we were ten years old?

A Sunday school teacher tried to foist that upon me at a Protestant church my parents thought liberal. I remember being told we'd all go to Hell if we didn't take a "Leap of Faith". The Jewish kids I went to school with, they'd go to Hell too, if they didn't leap.

I remember telling my parents I was done with Sunday school. Didn't get away with that one, but I could choose. The Unitarians were one block less to walk with no special leaps required.

Every minister is going to do marriage counseling. Every minister is going to lead memorial services and comfort grieving families. Each and every minister is going to have to cope with other religions, particularly those who take the Bible as inerrant.

The "higher criticism" which has two centuries of understanding, in some of our best universities, involves a different approach. It's taught in some of our best universities, but it's not taught enough. I propose a course that aspires to teach the Basics in one three-hour course. We'll talk about higher criticism, this alternative to inerrancy.

Lots of people have no idea about it. Some years ago, I wandered into the large bookstore of the First Baptist church of Dallas, and asked what they had on higher criticism. The clerks

were friendly but baffled. Eventually one said, "show him pamphlets on inerrancy". Clearly they didn't understand.

Our first hour is on what higher criticism is. How it looks at archeology, geology, historic circumstances of each book or passage, prevailing conditions of language and style, at other cultures and their writings in those areas at that time.

The second class focuses on one of our most illustrious predecessors, Dr. William Ellery Channing. This, from Channing's sermon at the ordination of Jared Sparks as minister of the First Independent Church of Baltimore in 1819.

"We are particularly accused of making an unwarrantable use of reason in the interpretation of Scripture. We are said to exalt reason above revelation, to prefer our own wisdom to God's.

"Loose and undefined charges of this kind are circulated so freely, that we think it due to ourselves, and to the cause of truth, to express our views with some particularity. Our leading principle in interpreting Scripture is this, that the Bible is a book written for men, in the language of men, and that its meaning is to be sought in the same manner as that of other books. We believe that God, when he speaks to the human race, conforms, if we may so say, to the established rules of speaking and writing. How else would the Scriptures avail us more, than if communicated in an unknown tongue?"

Our third class explores a bit of how higher criticism affected and affects one particular denomination. A bishop in South Africa wrote a book supportive of the higher criticism. A priest in England, wrote a hymn in response. That hymn is widely known and often sung, in Protestant churches of almost all denominations. It starts with "The church's one foundation, is

Jesus Christ our Lord", and yet the split between higher criticism shows up in a verse in which the priest spears the bishop, because of the bishop's support of higher criticism. We'll see all six verses, including the verse which is left out, in every hymnal I've seen, and in almost every performance I've found.

FROM ANOTHER WEBSITE

A Day in the Life of Sue Republican

Sue gets up at 6 a.m. and fills her coffeepot with water to prepare her morning coffee. The water is clean and good because some tree-hugging liberal fought for minimum water-quality standards.

With her first swallow of coffee, she takes her daily medication. Her medications are safe to take because some stupid commie liberal fought to insure their safety and that they work as advertised.

All but \$10 of her medications are paid for by her employer's medical plan because some liberal union workers fought their employers for paid medical insurance - now Sue gets it too.

She prepares her morning breakfast, bacon and eggs. Sue's bacon is safe to eat because some girly-man liberal fought for laws to regulate the meat packing industry.

In the shower, Sue reaches for her shampoo. Her bottle is properly labeled with each ingredient and its amount in the total contents because some crybaby liberal fought for her right to know what she was putting on her body and how much it contained.

Sue dresses, walks outside and takes a deep breath. The air she breathes is clean because some environmentalist wacko liberal fought for laws to stop industries from polluting our air.

She walks to the subway station for her government-subsidized ride to work. It saves her considerable money in parking and transportation fees because some fancy-pants liberal fought for affordable public transportation, which gives everyone the opportunity to be a contributor.

Sue begins her work day. She has a good job with excellent pay, medical benefits, retirement, paid holidays and vacation because some lazy liberal union members fought and died for these working standards. Sue's employer pays these standards because Sue's employer doesn't want his employees to call the union.

If Sue is hurt on the job or becomes unemployed, she'll get a worker compensation or unemployment check because some stupid liberal didn't think she should lose her home because of her temporary misfortune.

It's noon and Sue needs to make a bank deposit so she can pay some bills. Sue's deposit is federally insured by the FSLIC because some godless liberal wanted to protect Sue's money from unscrupulous bankers who ruined the banking system before the Great Depression.

Sue has to pay her Fannie Mae-underwritten mortgage and her below-market federal student loan because some elitist liberal decided that Sue and the government would be better off if she was educated and earned more money over her lifetime.

Sue is home from work. She plans to visit her father this evening at his farm home in the country. She gets in her car for the drive. Her car is among the safest in the world because some America-hating liberal fought for car safety standards.

She arrives at her childhood home. Her generation was the third to live in the house financed by Farmers' Home Administration because bankers didn't want to make rural loans. The house didn't have electricity until some big-government liberal stuck his nose where it didn't belong and demanded rural electrification.

She is happy to see her father, who is now retired. Her father lives on Social Security and a union pension because some wine-drinking, cheese-eating liberal made sure he could take care of himself so Sue wouldn't have to.

Sue gets back in her car for the ride home, and turns on a radio talk show. The radio host keeps saying that liberals are bad and conservatives are good. He doesn't mention that Republicans have fought against every protection and benefit Sue enjoys throughout her day. Sue agrees: "We don't need those big-government liberals ruining our lives! After all, I'm self-made and believe everyone should take care of themselves, just like I have."

posted by Jel Coward



Canadians for Truth, Justice & Democ...
Frank Lingohr · 28 Dec 2024 · 🌐

We would like to invite various states such as Vermont, Maine, and Massachusetts in the east or Washington, Oregon, and California in the west to join Canada and become our 11th+ province. To our American cousins, sorry to have to say this, but the benefits of joining Canada include:

- Life expectancy will go up from a world ranking of 48th (USA) to 20th (Canada).
- Education will get better from 31st (USA) to 19th (Canada).
- Math scores will improve from 34th (USA) to 9th (Canada).
- Robberies will go down from 98 per 100,000 population to 62.
- Traffic accident deaths will drop from 12.7 per 100,000 to 5.3.
- You will spend half as much on health care yet get better outcomes.
- Poverty in Canada is 1/3 the rate in the USA.
- Although Canada has fewer millionaires, we more fairly distribute wealth (better income equality).
- The minimum wage in Canada is double that in USA.

and most important you will be happier (Canada ranked 15th, USA 23rd in happiness).

(We couldn't find a politeness index, but thank you for reading)

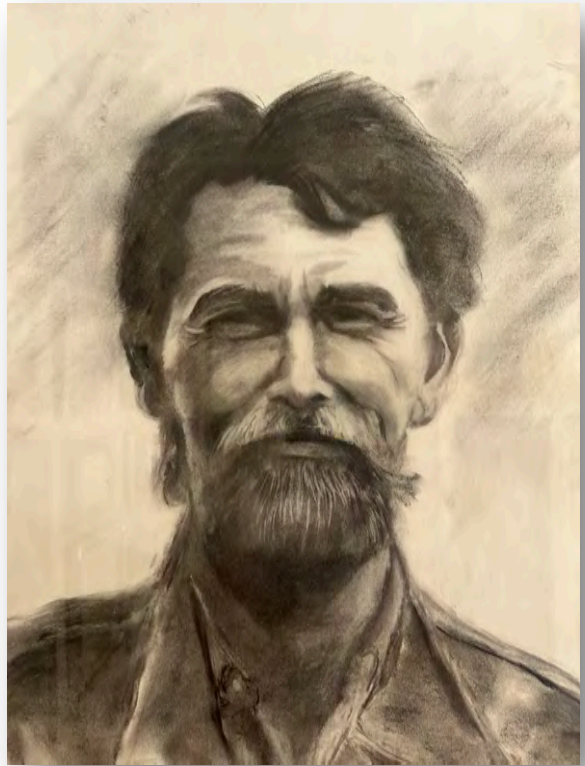
Casper: Republican Theocracy Continued from page 3

This paper/book seeks to shed some light on these sources of opposition to our Enlightenment legacy.

Some Related Distinctions

For simplicity's sake, this paper/book divides what was once termed the right-wing fringe into two distinct yet related camps: the religious right and the racist right. A third camp consists of the radical or illiberal left.

For their own reasons, all three camps promote anti-democratic views and engage in anti-government rhetoric, asserting that the United States government has become oppressive, even dictatorial, and needs to be overthrown. The religious right views our democracy as a façade for imposing a state religion they label secular humanism, which they believe targets Christianity and, in fact, all values. The racist right sees our democracy as a guise for enforcing a form of reverse racism. For the illiberal left, the entire democratic system serves as a cover for imposing and preserving power and privilege solely for straight white individuals. The term “straight” reflects their belief that democracy also disguises the oppression of gender identity and cisnormativity, with the assumption that everyone is cisgender (i.e., that everyone’s gender identity aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth).



Drawing by the author's wife

Appealing to the Mainstream

The appeal to the mainstream is rooted in the widespread belief that our government has turned into a form of tyranny from which we, the people, need to be rescued. This message is promoted by all three groups, a tactic that allows each to portray itself as the savior of the democracy it aims to dismantle while concealing its true intentions. The religious right asserts that they are defending traditional values against a government that wants to erase them. The racist right claims to be preserving freedom from a government that has adopted the very racism they profess to oppose. The illiberal left frames their opposition to democracy as a matter of social justice. They present “woke” ideals as a proactive, inclusive, and

transformative approach to addressing the systemic inequality intentionally created by the democratic system. Each of these groups employs anti-government rhetoric, proposing solutions that are always framed as either reforming the structure of our government or dismantling our public institutions.

Additionally, there are more mainstream conservative sources that believe our country has succumbed to some form of tyranny. In the '90s, for instance, *First Things*, a publication examining the intersection of 4 religion and public life through articles on theology, politics, and culture, released a two-volume work titled *The End of Democracy*. This work was a collection of mainstream conservative figures, some of whom openly considered the possibility of overthrowing the American government because it had become an immoral, oppressive regime.

While the radical left has made inroads into our higher education institutions, some churches, and the Democratic Party, the radical right has clearly penetrated the mainstream of our political and religious culture, dominating the Republican Party and a significant portion of the Evangelical movement. Analysts examining trends from post-election surveys and polls have found that much of our country's shift toward the undemocratic right is a reaction to the illiberal left. Yet, while these two camps are firmly opposed to each other and largely contribute to the partisan divide in our political landscape, they share a belief that democracy is a cover for some sinister political, cultural, or religious agenda, and both seek democracy's downfall.

The Presidential Election of 2000

In the 2000 election, one of the main themes in George W. Bush's campaign was that Vice President Al Gore was not morally fit to lead the country. From the Republican National Convention onward, there was a sustained effort to undermine Mr. Gore's character, initially by attempting to link him to President Clinton's actions in the Monica Lewinsky affair. This character assassination was executed by insinuating that Mr. Gore's support for the President was a tacit, if not explicit, endorsement of or apology for Mr. Clinton's indiscretions. "Where you see one," Mr. Cheney remarked, "you'll think of the other." When that argument appeared to backfire, the disparagement resurfaced as a distinct yet related accusation—the ongoing suggestion that Mr. Gore was either unable or unwilling to be truthful with the American people. "Serial exaggerator" was the clever yet insulting term that Mr. Bush repeatedly used. By the time of the Florida recounts, conservatives were fully engaged, labeling Mr. Gore as a liar, a thief, and a cheat, and foreshadowing events to come, they intensified their claims of moral unfitness by alleging that Democrats were attempting to steal the election.

At the time, many Americans would likely have dismissed all this namecalling as the typical hyperbole of politics. After all, attacking the character of a political opponent has always been part of American political culture. However, during the '90s, there was a seismic shift in this strategy as Newt Gingrich transformed this practice and amplified it with a linguistic strategy aimed at reshaping the public

perception of the Democratic Party. He circulated a memo to fellow Republicans recommending language that depicted Democrats negatively. Words from the memo, such as “corrupt,” “pathetic,” and “traitors,” were designed to create a moral contrast between the parties, making Republicans appear principled and Democrats morally unfit. This rhetorical approach has since become a common conservative practice when referencing the Democratic Party and exemplifies the strategic language choices Gingrich introduced into public political discourse.

Before Gingrich, however, in the ‘80s, President Reagan successfully transformed the term “liberal” into one associated not only with excessive government control but also with moral failures in politics. Through an “us vs. them” dynamic, Reagan consistently expressed, in his folksy manner, that the “we” represented everyday people with traditional values. At the same time “they” were liberal “intellectual elites” who opposed and undermined “our” values. Conservatives became linked with principles, while liberals were labeled as degenerate, a connotation that Gingrich adopted and amplified. With his influence, it endures to this day.¹

In the presidential election of 2000, 16 years before Trump’s, the discourse was filled with rhetoric that would come to dominate all future elections. The Florida recounts ignited conservatives across the spectrum, as Republicans heightened their accusations of moral unfitness to encompass our democratic system itself. Conservatives argued that the process of counting votes in Florida was unconstitutional, illegitimate, or corrupt. They disparaged the courts that disagreed with them, depicting judges as either sham or partisan, anything but members of the institutions essential for upholding the rule of law. Expanding on their view of Gore as morally unfit, some asserted outright that if Gore prevailed in the recount, they would refuse to recognize what they would then deem an illegal government. Some Republicans promoted a thinly veiled suggestion of civil war, implying that a Gore victory would lead to a “constitutional crisis” and civil unrest, showing a readiness to favor the use of force over persuasion and the rule of law.

Republicans referred to Florida voters as stupid and labeled the local election commissions as partisan and corrupt. They disrupted recounts, especially in Miami Dade, using threats and intimidation against local election commissioners by paid operatives of the Republican Party and challenging every ballot counted solely to ensure that the deadline set by the Florida Supreme Court could not be met. Throughout these assaults, Republicans consistently and persistently undermined public trust in the electoral process, inflamed those on the extreme right with rhetoric of war and rebellion, and exhibited a sinister and cynical view of our public institutions, portraying them as little more than manipulable levers of power intended solely for those in charge.

When the situation called for faith in the democratic process, our democratic institutions, and our people, the conservatives’ reaction was to malign these very processes, people, and institutions. None of this should have been considered politics as usual, yet here we are, 24 years later, and it has become the norm. Half of the country has lost faith in the democratic prospect and voted to send the main

messenger of mayhem back to the White House. This distinguishes the current situation from other moments and movements when our Republic faced peril from internal forces. We have voted for what could be the end of democracy as we have known it. Why?

What's the buzz, tell me what's happening.

In the autumn of 1994, Daniel Levitas, a nationally recognized expert on the political agenda of the Far Right and author of “The Terrorist Next Door,” conducted a five-week seminar at the Adult Forum of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Atlanta. The topic was the origins and contemporary influence of the Far Right on American public life and policy.

The well-attended seminar focused on the contemporary impact of religious extremists, fundamentalists, white supremacists, and other ultraconservatives, their organizations, and their think tanks. While Mr. Levitas was in no way alarmist in his demeanor or tone, the seminar itself was certainly disturbing. It was clearly the first time anyone in attendance had even heard of any of this, and some in that audience were shocked into skepticism. It all sounded so over the top. How could people believe in things so clearly at odds with the kind of civil and humane country we all believed we were living in? But many doubts were dispelled when, with what he knew of these movements, Mr. Levitas accurately predicted, months in advance, the beginning of events like the Oklahoma City bombing.

Levitas's seminar focused on the two most prominent examples of extreme right-wing ideology and the theology behind them: Christian Reconstructionism within the religious right and Christian Identity within the racist right. Of the two, Christian Reconstructionism has been by far the most influential. As we will see, the inflammatory rhetoric of the 2000 election has deep roots in this movement. In contrast, those who attacked our nation's capital on January 6, 2021, were driven by the extremely racist and anti-Semitic ideology of Christian Identity and related racist beliefs.

Until Levitas's seminar, few had heard of Christian Reconstructionism, and for good reason: Most mainstream theologians consider it a fringe theology. However, despite being relatively obscure, it has significantly influenced our political landscape, primarily because its ideas lie at the core of a diverse collection of related right-wing and conservative groups, all coordinated by the Council for National Policy (CNP), arguably the most powerful conservative organization in the United States today. The CNP has a track record of building alliances among conservative leaders, donors, and organizations. Perhaps the most prominent example is the CNP's support for both of Trump's campaigns, especially their efforts to fund and coordinate the “Stop the Steal” campaign following the 2020 election.

The Political Theology of Christian Reconstructionism

Although Christian Reconstructionism may not be fully embraced by everyone influenced by it, all those impacted by it share the movement's fundamental doctrines in some form. While mainstream theologians consider it on the theological fringe, it remains sophisticated, rigorously systematic, and unwaveringly severe in its political, cultural, and religious application.

Its influence on the religious right is evident even among Christian conservatives who reject it. They have had to grapple with its ability to highlight the religious and political implications of their own theological commitments. Consequently, as we will observe, the religious right has not fully embraced Christian Reconstructionism, even as it has pursued programs that exert similar religious, cultural, and political effects on the broader political landscape of the United States.

Reconstructionism is a theological and political movement within certain conservative branches of Protestant Christianity, particularly Reformed and Calvinist traditions. It emerged in the mid-20th century, primarily through the writings of R.J. Rushdoony, whose book, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (1973), serves as its foundational text.

Theonomy and Dominionism

Reconstructionists advocate for Theonomy (derived from the Greek *theos* meaning God and *nomos* meaning law), a theological perspective that promotes applying Old Testament biblical laws to contemporary civil governance. They regard the Biblical law of the Ten Commandments as the highest authority, offering a comprehensive framework for all aspects of human life. This belief underpins their commitment to Dominionism, which encourages Christians to engage with or govern all critical areas of society: government, education, business, media, arts, family, and religion. The entire movement of the religious right straddles the line between influence and control, a distinction that is often ambiguous. Their viewpoint stems from their interpretation of Genesis 1:28, commonly called the Dominion Mandate: "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"



The Consequences of Rejecting God's Law – Religious War

The commandment, "Thou shall have no other gods before me," independent of me, or having priority over me. The commandment can also read, "Thou shalt have no

other law before me.' The powers that today, more than ever, present themselves as other gods are the antichristian states. The antichristian state makes itself a god and, therefore, sees itself as the source of both law and power. Apart from a Biblical perspective, the state becomes another god, and instead of law, legality prevails.²

Dues valt! (God wills it. Rushdoony decreed that life itself is warfare.³

According to Reconstructionism, when societies reject God's law, they lose the foundation for religion, morality, and justice—all essential values for nations. This rejection leads to a lack of reliable authority in these crucial areas. Reconstructionism depicts the pluralistic world we experience as a chaotic mix of diverse religious and moral perspectives, where states and governments take on a god-like status. These entities can only create overwhelming moral relativism, which, in turn, undermines the legitimacy of laws and institutions, ultimately resulting in social unrest, power struggles, and disorder.

In response to this chaos, governments turn into tyrannies, often employing authoritarian measures to impose order. The people, desiring freedom from chaos, will eagerly worship at the altar of the tyrannical state, granting it and its institutions a godlike status. Worshipping other gods and alternate systems of law is viewed as idolatry, defined as "every attempt by man to be guided by his own word rather than God's law-word."⁴ For Reconstructionism, the penalty for idolatry is death. This is Biblically supported in Deuteronomy 13:6-10, which commands the execution of those who persuade others to worship other gods, and in Deuteronomy 17:2-5, which states that anyone found guilty of idolatry, following a proper investigation, should be stoned to death.

"In brief, every law order is a state of war against the enemies of that law order, and all law is a form of warfare. Every law declares that certain offenders are enemies of the law order and must be arrested... Law is a state of war; it is the organization of the powers of civil government to being the enemies of the law order to justice... Since law is a form of warfare, it follows that there is a required continual barrier to peace with evil, Man cannot seek co-existence with evil without declaring war against God."⁵

This is why, for Reconstructionism, Biblical law must be ultimate and absolute. The fallen condition of humankind necessitates God's law to prevent chaos and its tyrannical consequences, both politically and morally. Whether we recognize it or not is irrelevant. This perspective is somewhat shared among the Religious Right, and once these premises are accepted, the logic of Reconstructionism becomes inescapable. The essence of that logic is that Christian Reconstructionism can never coexist peacefully with the secular state or secular society. The only feasible relationship is one of resolute religious conflict.

To grasp the agenda of Reconstructionism, it is crucial to concentrate on the last line of the quote above. The world, including all states, governments, and communities that do not adhere to God's law, has declared war on God. This notion is at the very core of the religious right's beliefs. They perceive themselves as besieged by the outside world and are unwaveringly committed to fighting back. Failing to do so would violate the divine order of God's law, and there is no room for compromise, as that would mean tolerating evil. Furthermore, from this perspective, tolerance is deemed impossible because every law order and society is rooted in a religion and a way of life, and these religions do not coexist peacefully. Any form of tolerance or compromise is seen as inherently evil. "Tolerance is a device used to introduce a new law system as a prelude to a new intolerance." ⁶

Given the Fall, On What Authority is this Religious War Declared?

Reconstructionism is postmillennialist, believing that Christ's second coming will only happen after Christians establish His kingdom on earth through widespread conversion and adherence to biblical law. This is what this religious war is about. However, there is a problem: the Fall disrupted humanity's God-given power of dominion as charged in Genesis 1:28, often referred to as the dominion mandate, highlighting humanity's role in stewardship and governance over creation. *"God 6 Ibid., 5 12 blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"*

If this is the case, if the Fall permanently undermined the legitimacy of a human claim to divine authority and disrupted humanity's ability to exercise dominion, then on what authority does Reconstructionism wage a religious war based on the dominion mandate? This question leads to the critical theological idea that distinguishes Christian Reconstructionism from mainstream Christian theology. In mainstream Christian thought, despite Christ's work, the effects of the Fall continue to be felt in the world. Full restoration or reversal will only occur in the eschaton when Christ returns and brings about the new creation. However, Rushdoony's post-millennialism bolsters his argument. Since Christ will not return until Christians prepare the way by establishing God's kingdom on earth, he can assert that the atonement of Christ and the sanctifying power of Biblical law are the two essential mechanisms that enable Christians to progressively lift the curse of the Fall and claim the necessary authority of dominion. One significant consequence of this perspective is that no other sources of authority—reason, science, other religions, or even other Christian theologies—hold any legitimate authority. It is through the combination of Christ's atonement and the sanctifying power of the law that the reconstructed Christian male can "progressively take dominion over the planet and 'reconstruct' all life in Christ's image."⁷

The Reconstructed Christian Male

The authority of dominionism is confined to 'reconstructed' Christian men within the 'reconstructed' Christian faith. Rushdoony refers to them as 'dominion men', and the first thing they are directed to dominate is their families. Reconstructed women are deemed essential yet secondary partners in the effort to subdue all human life to follow Biblical law.

"The primary purpose of marriage is to manage a man's capacity to exercise dominion; in this regard, marriage cannot be simplified to romantic love, procreation, or economic survival. A man's life centers around his work, not his wife, and his work involves dominion in service to the Lord." ⁸

In fact, within Christian Reconstructionism, the family becomes the most significant and powerful human institution in society. Chapter 5 of the Institutes of Biblical Law is entirely devoted to establishing the family as "the productive institution responsible for ushering in the future of the Kingdom of God."⁹ Rushdoony opens this chapter with a commentary on the Fifth Commandment, noting that of the Ten Commandments, four specifically pertain to the family: honor thy father and mother, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, and thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house. "The family is clearly central to the Biblical way of life, and it is the family under God that possesses this centrality."¹⁰ More explicitly, Rushdoony states, "Thus, essential to the function of the family under God, and to the role of man as the head of the household, is the call to subdue the earth and exercise dominion over it. The fall of man has not altered this calling, although it has made its fulfillment impossible apart from Christ's regenerating work."¹¹ The regenerating work of Christ is evident in what Rushdoony refers to as theonomic thought.

Presuppositional Epistemology, Creating an Alternative Reality

The power of the reconstructed family and, by extension, the larger reconstructed community to claim and implement world dominion relies on Rushdoony's 'presuppositional theology.' A thorough examination of this concept or method goes beyond the scope of this paper or book. It is based on or derived from the work of Cornelius Van Til (May 3, 1895 – 14 April 17, 1987), a Dutch American Reformed theologian. For our purposes, it is crucial to recognize that according to Reconstructionism, all human thought stems from some form of religious presupposition— some foundational religious commitment, whether acknowledged or not. Epistemology, in general, is as old as philosophy itself. It serves as a foundation for many other disciplines, including science, ethics, religion, and law. It involves the examination of how we acquire and justify beliefs, clarifying our claims to knowledge and guiding our pursuit of truth across various fields.

This is not the place for a thorough presentation of the history of epistemology, but a few examples will help clarify Rushdoony's position. Two of the most prominent epistemological traditions are rationalism and empiricism. Rationalism asserts that knowledge comes primarily through reason and logical deduction, rather than sensory experience. Key figures in rationalism include Plato, René

Descartes, and others. A primary example of rationalism is mathematical truths (e.g., “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ”), considered a priori knowledge, accessible without empirical observation. In this context, the power and reliability of human reason serve as its foundational presupposition. Empiricism, on the other hand, posits that knowledge arises from sensory experience and observation. Two principal figures in this tradition are John Locke and David Hume. They argue that knowledge, particularly scientific knowledge, depends on observation and experimentation. For them, the law of gravity, for instance, is based on observation and experimentation and cannot be known by reason alone. Here, the reliability of our senses and our ability to verify them empirically form the foundational premise.

As presented, these foundational presuppositions lack any religious aspect. However, for Rushdoony, there is something deeper, transcending reason, empiricism, skepticism, pragmatism, or any other Western epistemological traditions. A presupposition underlies them all, which he calls autonomous epistemology. Rushdoony argues that there are only two epistemologies: autonomous and theonomous. Autonomy signifies the belief that humans can independently discover and justify truth without God and His revelation, placing human reason, experience, or intuition at the center of knowledge. In contrast, theonomy asserts that all knowledge, truth, and authority stem from God and His revelation, particularly as articulated in the Bible. Autonomous epistemology signifies a rebellion against God and is thus incapable of producing truth.

Every theology throughout history has indeed required an epistemology. Theology asserts claims about the nature of the divine, reality, and moral truths, all of which depend on a method for knowing or justifying these claims. Epistemology is the foundation for acquiring, interpreting, and validating theological knowledge. Therefore, interpreting sacred texts or traditions entails an epistemological process. The way a text is interpreted (whether literal, allegorical, historical-critical, etc.) is influenced by a fundamental epistemology. Most theological systems, if not all, explore the relationship between faith and reason. This exploration necessitates epistemological frameworks to clarify how faith is understood, its compatibility with reason, and its influence on knowledge.

Most theological systems find common ground between faith and reason, arguing that faith informs reason, and that reason supports faith. However, this does not hold for Reconstructionism. The religious presupposition of theonomous thought is God's sovereignty, the authority of Scripture, the relevance of Biblical law, and the dominion mandate. Without belief in these truths, they claim that true knowledge is impossible, making reason inconsistent, arbitrary, and unable to provide a coherent worldview. This theonomous epistemology serves as the foundation of dominionism. Any thought outside this faith commitment is considered autonomous, worshipping different deities— false deities like reason or science. By definition, these deities are idolatrous and incapable of providing true knowledge. Reconstructionists contend that secular reason, separated from biblical faith, results in moral relativism and societal decline.

The clear, distinct, and critical consequence of this position is that no creative relationship can exist between these two modes of thought, these two epistemologies: the theonomous and the autonomous. They exist in entirely different and mutually exclusive realms. There is also no possibility for compromise because the autonomous epistemology, which is based on rational and scientific principles, is regarded as idolatry from the theonomous perspective. According to Reconstructionism, autonomous thought is completely incapable of providing any truth or legitimate values and, consequently, cannot support or guide human life. It is essential to highlight that this is the reason Reconstructionism considers all modern Biblical scholarship that questions the accuracy and truthfulness of scripture as ungodly. More importantly, the practical application of Reconstructionist epistemology, embraced by various right-wing conservative groups and movements, has led the religious right to isolate itself from criticism arising from any form of autonomous thought. Furthermore, as we shall observe, a similar phenomenon is emerging within the illiberal left. The illiberal left has adopted a postmodern epistemology that denies even the possibility of objective truth, claiming that knowledge is shaped by power dynamics, language, and social contexts. These competing epistemologies are not only at odds with one another but also with democracy and its foundational Enlightenment principles, significantly contributing to the recent decline of democratic compromise.

The Weapons of the Religious Right's Religious War

This thoroughly theocentric and Bible-centered theonomous epistemology serves as the foundation for the movement's theological, ethical, and societal prescriptions, including its advocacy for dominion. For all intents and purposes, this epistemology presents an alternate cosmos with a distinct method of establishing facts, truth, and values across every area of human society. It has compelled the Christian Right to establish its own media outlets (e.g., CBN, conservative talk radio), educational institutions (e.g., homeschooling movements, Christian colleges), and think tanks (e.g., the Family Research Council and the Heritage Foundation, author of Project 2025), coordinating with the CNP to counter what they view as biased or hostile secular institutions. These parallel institutions frequently promote narratives that challenge mainstream consensus on issues such as evolution, climate change, gender roles, and historical interpretations, emphasizing to conservative Christians that their faith is under attack by the secular state.

The Critical Role of Home Schooling

The primary responsibility for spreading Reconstructionism lies with the institution of the family. The family is tasked with promoting Reconstructionism from one household to another and ultimately to society, including the state. This dissemination occurs through the homeschooling efforts of the religious right. The religious right has achieved considerable success in advancing and establishing homeschooling as a prominent educational choice in the United States.

Homeschooling has become a cultural hallmark of the religious right, representing resistance to what they perceive as secular indoctrination in public schools. It enables families to educate their children in accordance with their religious beliefs, including Christian ethics, biblical history, and creationism.

According to the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI)¹² homeschooling has grown significantly in the U.S., with an estimated 2.5 to 3.7 million students being homeschooled as of 2023. A substantial portion of homeschooling families identify as conservative Christians or are motivated by religious reasons. The religious right, spearheaded by organizations like the Home School Legal Defense Association¹³ (HSLDA), has played a key role in:

- legalizing homeschooling in all 50 states (homeschooling was illegal or heavily restricted in many states until the 1980s), and
- ensuring minimal state regulation over homeschooling curricula and methods.

The Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) and the CNP have a documented relationship. The CNP plays a significant role in how Christian Reconstructionist ideas influence American public policy. Founded in 1983 by Michael P. Farris, the HSLDA is a nonprofit organization that advocates for homeschooling rights in the United States. Farris has connections to the CNP, with records showing that he was a member of the CNP in 1996, 1998, and 1999. Reports indicate that the organization paid membership dues to the CNP to enable Michael Farris's participation in its meetings.

Reconstructionism and Democracy

According to theonomous epistemology, Reconstructionists oppose all forms of modern government that do not conform to God's law order as they interpret it. Their opposition arises from the belief within theonomous epistemology that the nation-state is a product of humanism; for them, it embodies "the worship of a new idol, man, a new image carved out of man's imagination." They argue that the nation-state represents an attempt at auto-salvation, striving to redeem itself without God through the veneration of the state.¹⁴ The attempt of nation-states to supplant God is central to what Reconstructionists refer to as socialist or communist, as well as to their view of nation-states' efforts to support their citizens through social programs. The economic implications of these beliefs clarify why many wealthy individuals back the initiatives of the religious right.

One could argue, however, that for Reconstructionism, democracy exemplifies the most problematic manifestation of modern state idolatry, significantly contributing to the world's drift toward chaos and tyranny. Democracy upholds the principle of equality, which is the foundational idea of the United States, as articulated in the Declaration of Independence. This belief in equality is what Reconstructionists refer to as equalitarianism, a byproduct of humanism. Equalitarianism fosters tolerance and is regarded as the ally of relativism. In this

context, relativism implies that all religions and values are inherently equal. No authority can claim that one religion, culture, set of values, or morals is superior to another. Under the guise of tolerance, secular humanism is viewed as engaging in a nihilistic crusade to undermine all legitimate values through a tyranny of moral relativism. This state of complete relativity inevitably leads to moral and political collapse, culminating in tyranny imposed for the sake of social and political order. This is precisely how Reconstructionism interprets democracy in the United States: as a tyranny of relativism, both religious and moral.

Reconstructionism and The First Amendment

Reconstructionist theonomous epistemology posits that the standard interpretation of the disestablishment clause of the First Amendment is fundamentally flawed. According to Reconstructionism, neutrality between religion and the state is a myth. The primary idea of their epistemology is that all cultures, nations, and legal systems arise from religious assumptions. The doctrine that law is inherently religious asserts that “no disestablishment of a religion as such is possible in any society. A church can be disestablished, but the change merely represents another religion.”¹⁵ From the Reconstructionist perspective, the disestablishment clause effectively established another religion, which they term secular humanism—a religion that they claim has initiated a conflict with God’s law order. They contend that this clause has been used to exclude Christianity from the public sphere, creating a moral vacuum in a pluralistic society that undermines Biblical authority. Additionally, they dismiss the intentional promotion of religious freedom that the First Amendment upholds. In a Reconstructionist society, individuals are free to believe as they wish, but they would not be considered citizens unless they are Christians of the Reconstructionist kind.¹⁶

In fact, the standard interpretation of the entire First Amendment is rejected for the same reason: it is not grounded in God’s law, which Reconstructionists view as the sole source of true freedom for both religion and the press. Reconstructionism teaches that true freedom is found only through obedience to God; thus, freedom of religion in society cannot extend to the public promotion of false religions. Likewise, freedom of the press within God’s law order is based on the prohibition of false witness. “The Biblical law gives freedom to the truth, not to false witness.” According to Reconstructionists, the First Amendment elevates freedom to the level of its own absolute, thereby protecting false witness. They argue that this is not freedom but rather anarchism.¹⁷ Reconstructionists advocate for restrictions on speech or practices they deem sinful or blasphemous, even when such activities are protected by the First Amendment. For example, they may support banning practices like abortion advocacy, pornography, or atheistic promotion, a view that resonates in some form across the religious right. It is also important to point out that in the Republic, as understood by Reconstructionists, citizenship itself is not based on birthright but on faith, that is, devotion and adherence to Biblical law.

Reconstructionism and The Fourteenth Amendment

For Reconstructionism and its theonomous epistemology, there is only one true form of equality: equality before God. Anything else, especially the state enforcing equality, as seen in the Fourteenth Amendment, stems from humanism, the worship of equalitarianism, and deserves condemnation. In fact, the law's primary function should have nothing to do with equality. Its role "is to establish justice and to protect the godly, law-abiding individuals."¹⁸ Consequently, "the law must discriminate against lawbreakers and rigorously pursue their judgment."¹⁹ "The fact of the law introduces a fundamental and inherent inequality in society. Abolishing the law will not remove inequality because the very act of sheer survival will create an elite and establish a fundamental inequality."²⁰ The law does not exist to establish or enforce equality. Some social conservatives, who do not seem to share the religious foundations of Reconstructionism, make a similar argument. Among them are Russell Kirk (1918–1994), Thomas Sowell, Robert Bork (1927–2012), Patrick Buchanan, Rod Dreher, Ben Shapiro, Jordan Peterson, and Roger Scruton (1944–2020).

It is useful to contrast theonomous epistemology with the Enlightenment philosophy on which our Constitution is based, highlighting the significant difference between theonomous and autonomous epistemology as understood by Reconstructionism. In Reconstructionism, the law has essentially one purpose: to distinguish between the godly, the lawbreakers, and the ungodly, while protecting the godly from the ungodly. In Enlightenment thought, criminal law is merely one of the legal system's functions. The far more important role of the law is as a vital tool for structuring society, safeguarding individual rights, and promoting rational government. This difference arises from the Reconstructionist view that all life, and therefore all law, is warfare.

Reconstructionism and Capitalism

Christian Reconstructionism advocates for a type of capitalism grounded in Biblical law, which highlights private property, voluntary charity, and minimal government intervention. It maintains that this perspective aligns with many elements of free-market capitalism, while also criticizing the greed and materialism found in modern secular capitalism. It perceives wealth creation as a means of exercising dominion over the earth, thereby fulfilling the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28. It posits that economic productivity should reflect God's glory and promote His kingdom.

Reconstructionism supports low taxes, views progressive taxation as un-Biblical, and argues that charity should be managed by families, churches, and local communities instead of the government. Consequently, it rejects all social programs, including Social Security and Medicare. Additionally, it opposes centralized banking systems like the Federal Reserve and promotes a return to hard money (e.g., gold and silver) as a Biblical standard.

Influence on the Religious Right

Christian Reconstructionism has significantly and consistently influenced the religious right. Its most important impact has been confronting religious conservatives, Evangelicals, and Fundamentalists with the political implications of their theological commitments. In other words, the influence of Reconstructionism arose within the ongoing debate it sparked among the religious right regarding the political consequences of its theology, effectively steering the religious right toward an acceptance of dominionism. However, this has not yet led to a complete endorsement. While the religious right has adopted the epistemology of Reconstructionism, it has also sought to publicly distance itself from the strict severity of Reconstructionism's theocratic politics. This deliberate strategy has resulted in the religious right, while denying theocracy, employing language that obscures the fact that their agenda and the methods used to promote it amount to the same thing, allowing them to advance their agenda while concealing its intent in plain view.

Two excellent examples of this strategy include the election of 2000 and the language used by Ronald Reagan and Newt Gingrich in the years leading up to it. Reagan's delivery was folksy, while Gingrich's was caustic and combative, yet they conveyed the exact same message: that liberals are morally unfit to lead because they do not see the world in the same way that the religious right does. This attitude originates from the theonomous epistemology of Reconstructionism. Liberals do not share the same theonomous epistemology; they are viewed as secular humanists who adhere to autonomous thought, which inevitably leads to chaos and moral decline. Their position is, and must remain, nonnegotiable.

This message remains unchanged and may be even stronger in 2024. In conservative rhetoric, any mention of Democrats or the party itself, with Trump leading the charge, is filled with insults, condescension, and misinformation. Such attacks can also target Republicans who fail to adhere to this ideological message. This rhetoric often involves personal attacks aimed at questioning the morals or integrity of a party member for showing any inclination toward independence from the party line. A recent example, as of this writing, is the expulsion of former Lt. Governor Geoff Duncan by Georgia's Republican leaders for criticizing them for not standing up to Trump. "He sold out to Democrats," they said.

The trend of Republican incumbents losing primaries to figures from their own party indicates a dynamic and evolving political landscape in which the party's base strongly prefers representatives who are closely aligned with the Republican Party.

Appealing to the Mainstream

Since the early 1980s, the religious right has been working diligently and effectively to create a majority that embraces Reconstructionism's theonomous epistemology, which deems everything outside of it morally unworthy. Once this epistemology is accepted and brought to the polling stations, a theocracy is

established without being formally declared. Compromise becomes impossible, and as a result, our democracy is at risk.

The Government is anti-Christian

There are multiple ways to express this connection. One prevalent method derives directly from Reconstructionist epistemology, which posits that the United States government has declared secular humanism as the religion of the state. Consequently, the government is perceived to be at war with Christianity and aims to marginalize or eliminate it from the public square. The religious right recognizes this whenever the government curtails religious expression, restricts the display of religious symbols in public schools, or limits the inclusion of religious content in educational curricula. This strategy fosters a sense of victimhood that can then be leveraged to promote the spiritual warfare central to Christian Reconstructionism. The rhetorical approach of Newt Gingrich serves as a prime example of the combative stance of Christian Reconstructionism.

Playing the Savior

The appeal to the mainstream is furthered by the insistence that the government is religiously secular humanist and, as a result, is responsible for pushing our country toward moral and political chaos, leading to tyranny. Through this approach, the religious right can portray themselves as the saviors of the very democracy they aim to dismantle.

There are numerous examples of this technique. One of the most enduring and prominent is the conservative initiatives promoted under the label of “family values.” While it appears to be an effort to safeguard the integrity of the family from a state that aims to undermine it, these initiatives have always served as a facade for anti-LGBT efforts, targeting a lifestyle that the religious right has consistently claimed is immoral and defended by an immoral state.

Another enduring example is the Religious Freedom Amendment (RFA) to the Constitution, proposed in the 1990s by Representative Ernest Istook (R-OK). While it never passed, it sparked significant debate over the balance between religious expression and the separation of church and state. As titled, it sounds as if it is meant to protect the freedom of religion. However, since the First Amendment assures and protects religious freedom, what did this new amendment aim to protect religion from? The answer lies in the disestablishment clause, which safeguards religious freedom by enforcing the state's religious neutrality. This clause is the reason the First Amendment prohibits religious expressions in government and certain public settings, such as public schools, where multiple religions are likely to be represented. Primarily, this is what the RFA aimed to counteract. To the religious right, the prohibition of religious expression in specific public settings discriminates against religion, particularly Christianity, a view that stems directly from Christian Reconstructionism. The religious right positions itself

as saving true religion from the oppression of the secular state that advocates the anti-Christian ideology of secular humanism.

Other examples include the “right to work” laws that seem to want to protect labor, when the real agenda is to oppose the protections laborers can find in labor unions, all wrapped in an appeal to freedom of choice. Similarly, the proposed bills regarding the voting franchise purport to protect the integrity of the vote, when all they really do is insinuate constantly that Democrats are somehow rigging elections. Similar subterfuge surrounds the issues of religious rights and civil rights.

However, R.J. Rushdoony would likely not support this obfuscation of the religious right's agenda. According to Michael J. McVicar he was honest and straightforward about his views and theocratic intentions, and he would neither endorse nor approve of this subterfuge. He was dismayed, frustrated, and occasionally angry that his ideas were being utilized in ways he neither intended nor condoned.

How This Message is Spread – The Council for National Policy

The primary vehicle for spreading this message and transforming it into a voting powerhouse is the Council for National Policy, the largest and most influential conservative organization in the country. Since its inception, the CNP has functioned as a private, invitation-only, and secretive organization that has played a crucial and lasting role in shaping the agenda of the religious right and conservative politics in the United States. Its influence is profound and extensive. To illustrate its impact, consider that one of its main affiliate organizations, the Heritage Foundation, with which it shares both leadership and agenda, is the leading organization behind Project 2025, a comprehensive policy agenda designed in preparation for Trump’s administration and authored by former Trump administration officials, including Dr. Ben Carson, former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development and CNP member; Christopher Miller, former Acting Secretary of Defense under Trump; and Russ Vought, former Director of the Office of Management and Budget under Trump. The project includes contributions from over 400 policy experts from various conservative organizations and seeks to establish a detailed roadmap for governing and implementing conservative priorities.

Origins and Agenda of the CNP

The religious right emerged after cultural shifts during the 1960s that leadership viewed with alarm. Among these shifts were,

- The Sexual Revolution refers to the emergence of permissive attitudes toward sex, which includes greater acceptance of premarital sex, contraception, and, later on, LGBTQ rights.

- Prayer in Schools: The Supreme Court rulings in Engel v. Vitale (1962) and Abington School District v. Schempp (1963) prohibit school-sponsored prayer and Bible readings. 27
- The Counterculture Movement involved an embrace of drug use, communal living, and anti-establishment ideologies that were seen as threats to traditional Christian morality.
- Feminism: the emergence of second-wave feminism, which advocated for gender equality and women's liberation, was perceived as challenging traditional family structures.
- Civil Rights Movement: Although some leaders endorsed civil rights, others worried about the wider social and cultural impacts of societal upheaval.

Race, not Abortion

The religious right aimed to unite a group of frustrated and angry Christians into a strong voting bloc. The movement's emergence accelerated alongside its increasing sense of moral urgency, but it was notably not a reaction to Roe v. Wade. Instead, as Randall Balmer, a Professor of Religion at Dartmouth, notes, events related to civil rights ignited the religious right. A court ruling mandating the desegregation of private Christian schools during the 1970s truly energized the religious right.

One of the most durable myths is that the religious right galvanized as a political movement in direct response to the Roe v. Wade decision of January 22, 1973. And it is utterly false. Jerry Falwell, by his own admission, did not preach his first antiabortion sermon until February of 1978, that's more than five years, after the Roe v. Wade decision. Religious right responded to a court ruling, but it was not the Roe v. Wade decision. It was a lower court ruling on school desegregation. June 30, 1971, the court ruled that any institution that engages in racial discrimination or racial segregation is not, by definition, a charitable institution.²¹

"I'm very sad for America," said Bob Jones after the desegregation ruling. "I think we witnessed today the death of religious freedom murdered by the Supreme Court." It was this issue, and not abortion, according to the film *Bad Faith*, "that provided the catalyst for the religious right. It had nothing to do with abortion. It was, however, Weyrich's clever move to recognize that if they wanted grassroots evangelicals to be part of this movement, they needed an issue other than the defense of racial segregation in the late 1970s." In this connection, Jerry Falwell, by his own admission, did not preach his first antiabortion sermon until February of 1978, that's more than five years after the Roe v. Wade decision.

Key Leaders

Key leaders of the movement emerged from evangelical and fundamentalist Christian communities, as well as conservative Catholic circles. These leaders aimed to mobilize conservative Christians against what they viewed as moral decline, secularization, and threats to traditional family values. Among them were Jerry Falwell, Baptist pastor and founder of the Moral Majority; Pat Robertson, televangelist and founder of the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN); political activist Francis Schaeffer, an evangelical theologian, philosopher, and author; Tim LaHaye, an evangelical pastor, author, and political activist; Phyllis Schlafly, a conservative Catholic activist and leader of the anti-feminist movement; James Dobson, a psychologist and founder of Focus on the Family; and Paul Weyrich, a political activist and strategist.

The movement gained momentum in 1980 after Paul Weyrich approached Jerry Falwell, a fundamentalist preacher, and Pat Robertson, the head of the Christian Broadcasting Network. Together, they established the Moral Majority. This was a political initiative from the right aimed at integrating evangelicals into a Republican power bloc. According to *Bad Faith*, it is not a religious organization; rather, it is a highly political entity, with membership based on citizenship in the country and a commitment to pro-life values and traditional family principles.

The key figures of what was then known as the New Right included Jerry Falwell of the Moral Majority, theologian Francis Schaeffer, Pat Robertson of the Christian Broadcast Network (CBN), Paul Weyrich, recognized for connecting evangelical Christians with political conservatives, and James Dobson, the founder of Focus on the Family.

Reagan's Betrayal and the New Direction

The movement peaked in the 1980s, particularly during Ronald Reagan's presidency. It became closely aligned with the Republican Party when the religious right mobilized Evangelicals to elect Reagan. However, after Reagan appointed pro-choice Sandra Day O'Connor to the Supreme Court, Paul Weyrich decided that the Republican Party was not committed to his goal of a theocratic America (*Bad Faith*). It was in 1981 that Paul Weyrich and Tim LaHaye, then head of the Moral Majority, founded CNP. The CNP reflected the new evangelical consensus that conservative Protestants must engage in direct political action and seek to influence public policy.²² To achieve that influence, Weyrich believed they needed to take over the Republican Party and remove Democrats from office.²³ This would lay the foundation for the modern Christian Nationalist movement.

*The will of the majority. The will of the majority. If we love these liberals as we must, if we love these people who are, despite the terrible pain that it takes to even say it, helping to murder the unborn as we must, then we want what is right for them. And what is right for their immortal souls is to get them out of public policy in this country.*²²

I don't want everybody to vote. Elections are not won by a majority of people. They never have been from the beginning of our country, and they are not now.

*As a matter of fact, our leverage in the elections quite candidly goes up, as the voting populace goes down.*²⁴

In Paul Weyrich's view, the goal was to place conservative Christians in positions of power, enabling them to dictate the direction of our country, rather than to ensure fair elections. Alongside LaHaye and Weyrich, early supporters of this new direction included members of the religious right, notably Texas oil billionaire Nelson Bunker Hunt and Richard Viguerie, the conservative direct-mail pioneer.

Hunt and other affluent oilmen were recruited into this movement by Paul Weyrich. According to the film *Bad Faith*, Weyrich recognized that changing the culture required a much larger donor base. He negotiated a deal with oil and gas billionaires: in exchange for their support, he would transform the CNP into a powerful political advocate for eliminating their corporate taxes and regulations. This was a promise Weyrich could fulfill because it aligned with Reconstructionism's Biblical economics, which emphasizes private property, free markets, and opposes government intervention in the economy, particularly progressive taxation.

In addition to Nelson Bunker Hunt, other wealthy donors included:

Joseph Coors (Adolph Coors Company): Coors was one of Weyrich's earliest and most important supporters. In 1973, he provided funding to help establish the Heritage Foundation, the think tank co-founded by Weyrich that became a cornerstone of conservative policy development.

Richard Mellon Scaife (Mellon Family): A prominent philanthropist and supporter of conservative causes, Scaife financed several initiatives linked to Weyrich, including the Heritage Foundation and various projects that promote conservative values.

DeVos Family: The DeVos family, linked to Amway, has supported conservative causes in line with Weyrich's vision, though specific direct support is less well-documented.

Bradley Foundation: The Bradley Foundation has a long history of funding conservative intellectual infrastructure, including think tanks and advocacy groups shaped by Weyrich's ideas.

The Council for National Policy was established as an organization for significant financial investment. It aimed to position its narrative as the dominant interpretation of moral issues in public discourse.

Rushdoony and the CNP

According to Michael McVicar (ref), Rushdoony's relationship with nearly the entire religious right was contentious and confrontational. Since the early 1960s, he worked to promote Christian Reconstructionism at the grassroots level in churches,

schools, and local communities. Interest in his ideas grew within the religious right, but it was inevitably accompanied by controversy and criticism.

He was furious with other evangelical leaders whom he felt were seeking ecumenical and cooperative strategies at the expense of theological purity. He went 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 mused, 'I was told a couple of years ago that one scholar said, 'Rushdoony is damned good to steal from.' His anxieties about whether scholars and activists on the Right were stealing from him only increased over the course of the 1980s. His concern was not simply a function of some petty desire for recognition; it was rooted in this fear that evangelical leaders might compromise too much on important issues. While it is impossible to suggest that Rushdoony's ideas and writings alone motivated 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 this very shift.²⁵

Due to the contentious relationship that Rushdoony developed with leaders in the religious right movement, he was frequently excluded from direct political organizing at the national level, a situation he resented. "Nowhere," writes McVicar, "was this tension clearer than in his love-hate relationship with the secretive Council for National Policy (CNP)."²⁶ Rushdoony was not invited to the initial planning meetings, despite his son-in-law, Gary North, a prominent Reconstructionist theologian significantly influenced by his father-in-law, being part of the planning committee.

In the early 1980s, the CNP accepted Rushdoony's nomination, and in 1982, he joined the Board. After leaving the board, he remained an active member until the late '80s. During the meetings, he interacted with and influenced several of its leaders, notably Howard Phillips, the founder of the Conservative Caucus and later of the Constitution Party, "and carefully modeled its platform on Rushdoony's ideas."²⁷

The Lasting Legacy of Reconstructionism at the CNP

Eventually, Rushdoony stopped attending CNP meetings. According to McVicar, he suspected that many of the leaders were politicians first and Christians second. He also remained outraged that numerous CNP leaders stole his ideas and used them without proper attribution.

For instance, during a meeting in Phoenix in 1984, the participants watched a taped speech of Pat Robertson and heard floor speeches from the US representative Newt Gingrich and Herbert Titus, the Harvard-educated law professor turned Reconstructionist who would helm Pat Robertson's CBN... All three men, Rushdoony noted, 'called for the reconstruction of America, religious renewal, etc....but without regeneration in God's law mentioned... General awareness of these connections led one participant at the CNP meeting to observe, "Everyone steals from Rushdoony."

“In the end,” says McVicar, “it is impossible to assess whether or not this or that political operative at CNP meetings stole Rushdoony’s ideas or simply couched their political projects in a generalized Christian rhetoric that simultaneously echoed Reconstructionist concepts while still adhering to a pluralistic, majoritarian view of social organization.”²⁸ This may be true, but it is also true that while Rushdoony left the CNP, his ideas did not. The main ideas that influenced and endured at the CNP are:

- 1) Rushdoony’s theonomous epistemology posits that all other modes of thought are immoral.
- 2) Christianity is involved in a non-negotiable battle against secularism.
- 3) that democracy is the enemy.
- 4) that liberals, meaning anyone who does not align with the religious right, are consistently portrayed as morally reprobate and unfit to lead;
- 5) that the CNP is equivocal regarding theocracy.

The endurance of these ideas at the CNP is abundantly clear through two distinct yet related documents: Paul Weyrich’s “A Moral Minority? An Open Letter to Conservatives,”²⁹ written on February 16, 1999, and “The Integration of Theory and Practice,” authored by Eric Heubeck with guidance from Paul Weyrich in 2001.³⁰

Weyrich’s Open Letter to Conservatives

Paul Weyrich’s letter is a lament. He despairs that, after 30 years of hard work, the movement he spearheaded appears no nearer to reaching its objectives. While the movement has dominated the Republican Party and secured electoral victories, it has not succeeded in implementing Weyrich’s favored policies.

First of all, we have assumed that a majority of Americans basically agree with our point of view. That has been the premise upon which we have tried to build any number of institutions and, indeed, our whole strategy. It is I who suggested to Jerry Falwell that he call his organization the “Moral Majority.” The second premise has been that if we could just elect enough conservatives, we could get our people in as Congressional leaders, and they would fight to implement our agenda. In looking at the long history of conservative politics, from the defeat of Robert Taft in 1952 to the nomination of Barry Goldwater to the takeover of the Republican Party in 1994, I think it is fair to say that conservatives have learned to succeed in politics. That is, we got our people elected. But that did not result in the adoption of our agenda. The reason, I think, is that politics itself has failed. And politics has failed because of the collapse of the culture. The culture we are living in becomes an ever-wider sewer. In truth, I think we are caught up in a cultural collapse of historic proportions, a collapse so great that it simply overwhelms politics.³¹

The letter acknowledges that the movement has assumed a majority of Americans share the views of the religious right. Frustrated, it then concedes that this is not the case and contemplates this reality, pondering what to do about it.

Weyrich's reference to 1994 pertains to Congress under Newt Gingrich's leadership, the author of that now-infamous directive to consistently link Democrats with moral corruption and Republicans with moral integrity, an election strategy the CNP has employed ever since. As noted, the 2000 election helped Bush secure the presidency partly due to the actions of Republicans during the Florida recounts. The backing of the religious right also played a role in Bush's re-election in 2004, participating in what became known as swift boating, a stream of falsehoods aimed at portraying John Kerry as morally unfit to lead.

In later elections, the success of the Tea Party was backed by various CNP members and affiliate organizations. The Tea Party's campaigns often aimed to undermine opponents' credibility through ideological attacks based on Reconstructionist doctrine, equating liberalism with socialism and communism. This rhetoric was central to the Tea Party's messaging.

Under the leadership of CNP member Dick Armey, the Tea Party further degraded American political discourse during a series of protests in 2009 aimed at depicting President Obama's bailout policies as government overreach.³² President-Elect Trump has embraced this rhetoric and often employs it in his speeches, interviews, and social media posts, representing the Democratic Party as adopting a far-left socialist agenda.

Weyrich's letter attributes our supposed cultural collapse to political correctness, which he labels as "cultural Marxism." He also blames rock and roll, mirroring the religious right's reaction to the 1960s. However, attributing the situation to cultural Marxism aligns with the conservative narrative, including that of the religious right, dating back to the 1950s. Communism, Marxism, and socialism have consistently been held responsible for perceived moral and cultural decay. Reconstructionism has provided this theme with a systematic theology. In his dismay, Weyrich declares that "our culture has decayed into something approaching barbarism" and suggests that the movement should consider withdrawing from mainstream culture altogether. This implies a route consistent with Rushdoony's theonomous epistemology and an effort to establish its own institutions. He admits he doesn't have all the answers and calls for a strategy meeting. The strategy that emerged afterward is detailed in the second document, "The Integration of Theory and Practice." It represents a full-scale assault on American culture.

The Integration of Theory and Practice

The first thing his manifesto does is sacrifice truth for persistence. "This essay is based on the belief that the truth of an idea is not the primary reason for its acceptance. Far more important is the energy and dedication of the ideas of the promoters— in other words, the individuals making up a social or political movement."

His introductory paragraph indicates that the religious right will no longer have faith in the idea that most Americans agree with them. In short, it states that the religious right will no longer be concerned with whether the majority of the American people support them. "I don't want everybody to vote. Elections are not won by a majority of people. They never have been since the beginning of our country, and they are not now. In fact, our leverage in elections candidly increases as the voting populous decreases."³³ Nevertheless, the religious right will continue its goal of Christianizing the country, but their tactics will change. The "Integration of Theory and Practice" is worth quoting at some length to understand how raw and determined the religious right has become under the influence of Christian Reconstructionism.

There will be three main stages in the unfolding of this movement. The first stage will be devoted to developing a highly motivated elite able to coordinate future activities. The second stage will be devoted to developing institutions designed to impact the wider elite and a relatively small minority of the masses. The third stage will involve changing the overall character of American popular culture. Our movement will be entirely destructive and entirely constructive. We will not try to reform the existing institutions. We only intend to weaken them and eventually destroy them. We will endeavor to knock our opponents off-balance and unsettle them at every opportunity. Our constructive energies will be dedicated to creating our own institutions.

We will maintain a constant barrage of criticism against the Left. We will attack the very legitimacy of the Left. We will not give them a moment's rest. We will endeavor to prove that the Left does not deserve to hold sway over the heart and mind of a single American. We will offer constant reminders that there is an alternative, there is a better way. When people have had enough of the sickness and decay of today's American culture, they will be embraced by and welcomed into the New Traditionalist movement. The people's rejection of the existing society will thus be accomplished by pushing and pulling them simultaneously. We must create a countervailing force that is just as adept as the Left at intimidating people and institutions that are used as tools of leftwing activism but are not ideologically committed, such as Hollywood celebrities, multinational corporations, and university administrators. We must be feared so they will think twice before opening their mouths. We will be results-oriented rather than good intentions-oriented. Making a good-faith effort and being ideologically sound will be less important than advancing the movement's goals.

We will use guerrilla tactics to undermine the legitimacy of the dominant regime. We will take advantage of every available opportunity to spread the idea that there is something fundamentally wrong with the existing state of affairs, contribute to a vague sense of uneasiness and dissatisfaction with existing society. We need to break down before we can build up. We must first clear away the flotsam of a decayed culture.³⁴

This manifesto clearly reflects the plan advocated by R.J. Rushdoony to the religious right. First and foremost, it declares war on the world as we know it, vowing that “Our movement... will not try to reform the existing institutions. We only intend to weaken them and eventually destroy them.” Its vision of the world—as seen in mainstream culture—aligns with that of Christian Reconstructionism, portraying a chaos of moral decline that is “hostile to traditional values.” Furthermore, it aims to convince people that their world has descended into barbarism, as Weyrich insisted in his open letter.

In line with Rushdoony’s theonomous epistemology, it encourages Conservatives to establish parallel institutions, such as schools, media outlets, and community organizations that reflect Conservative values. The goal is to shift public opinion and cultural norms to favor traditionalist ideals, making political victories a natural result of cultural dominance. In practice, this has led to two distinctly separate worldviews and ways of knowing, where the theonomous epistemology of the religious right recognizes nothing from the autonomous epistemology of modernity—because the presupposition of the former is God, while that of the latter is reason and science. Ultimately, this is why there can be no agreement, no compromise, no collaboration, and no avenue of appeal; modernity is autonomous, anti-God, and anti-Christian. There is virtually nothing someone from the autonomous side, representing the rest of the world, can say that could be accepted as legitimate.

The religious right does not misrepresent anything; it cannot lie because it presupposes knowledge of God. The other side, however, lies consistently. They cannot help it because their epistemology is regarded as a lie. It is the solemn duty of Christians, as Weyrich’s manifesto makes clear, to continuously attack and undermine the enemy and never show them any quarter. We witness this almost daily in our news media and political institutions, especially in Congress. Everything feels chaotic, as if the world is headed to hell in a handbasket. In fact, it is chaos that the religious right has diligently and successfully worked for decades to create, all while blaming the other side because “they” are not Godly.

At this point, the equivocation surrounding theocracy becomes clear. Existing institutions are set to be dismantled, and the dominance of the religious right is intended to be established. Although they amount to the same thing, theocracy is never explicitly mentioned. This represents the movement’s ultimate deception. The document continues to promote the cultivation of dedicated leaders and activists who are committed to a cause that prioritizes dismantling the current institutions.

Trump and the CNP

The CNP did not endorse Trump because of its policy of refraining from public endorsements. However, many of its members and affiliated organizations actively supported Donald Trump’s candidacy in both the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections. While the CNP is a secretive organization, credible reports, analyses, and investigative journalism indicate that meetings included discussions on strategies to

support conservative candidates, including Trump. In both 2016 and 2020, these 40 discussions centered around mobilizing evangelical voters, shaping messaging, and addressing issues of election integrity.

Vice President Mike Pence

In 2016, CNP members and affiliated organizations, including the Heritage Foundation, creator of Project 2025, played a crucial role in advising Trump on policy matters and connecting him with influential conservative groups. Trump's first Vice President, Mike Pence, is a long-time CNP member. Various sources document his association with the CNP, and Pence himself has publicly acknowledged his indebtedness to the organization, describing it as "one of the oldest and most effective organizations in the history of the conservative movement."³⁵

Mark Meadows

Mark Meadows, Trump's chief of staff and a founding member of the House Freedom Caucus (HFC), has connections to the CNP, as does the HFC itself. It remains unclear whether Meadows is a member of the CNP. However, he holds a senior partnership at the Conservative Partnership Institute (CPI), an organization with significant ties to the CNP. Rachel Bovard, the Senior Director of Policy at CPI, is a member of the CNP, and Cleta Mitchell, a senior legal fellow at CPI, sits on the CNP's Board of Governors.³⁶

House Freedom Caucus

While the HFC and the CNP are distinct organizations, they have a significant ideological alignment and overlapping networks. Their alignment is grounded in a shared commitment to conservative principles, such as limited government, free markets, and traditional social values. Prominent CNP members, including Tony Perkins (Family Research Council) and other leaders of conservative advocacy groups, have collaborated closely with HFC members to further their shared objectives. The CNP serves as a hub for strategizing and coordinating conservative efforts, often incorporating HFC members or their affiliated organizations in its discussions. For instance, leaked recordings of CNP meetings have disclosed conversations about supporting conservative legislators and policies that coincide with the HFC's agenda. At the same time, the HFC frequently champions legislation or initiatives that reflect priorities discussed in CNP meetings. CNP-affiliated donors and organizations often indirectly support HFC members through funding, endorsements, and campaign infrastructure. The HFC acts as the legislative arm of this movement, whereas the CNP offers strategic and institutional support. Both groups focus on long-term cultural and political change.³⁷

Kellyanne Conway and Steve Bannon

Kellyanne Conway, Trump's campaign manager and close advisor on political strategy, messaging, and public relations in 2016, is a known member of the CNP. In addition to his involvement with the CNP, Steve Bannon has actively participated in

the organization in recent years. In mid-November 2024, shortly after finishing a prison sentence for defying Congress, he gave a speech to the group. During this address, Bannon stressed the importance of ongoing grassroots leadership and increased awareness among the American public. Leaked recordings from a 2020 CNP meeting uncovered discussions among members about rallying support for Trump and countering Democratic voter turnout efforts. These discussions included strategies to challenge mail-in voting and boost voter turnout in crucial battleground states.³⁸

Speaker Mike Johnson

Mike Johnson, Trump's successful candidate for Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, is connected to the Council for National Policy (CNP), with his involvement recorded in reports and public records. Johnson was listed as a member in CNP directories from 2012 to 2013, documenting his participation in the organization. He reportedly has attended CNP meetings, known for gathering influential conservative leaders, activists, and donors. His strong alignment with CNP priorities—such as religious freedom, pro-life advocacy, and limited government—reflects the values and goals he shares with the organization.

Donald Trump addressed the Council for National Policy (CNP) on August 21, 2020, during a meeting in Arlington, Virginia. The event was a private gathering where Trump spoke to influential conservative leaders, activists, and donors. The meeting included prominent members of the CNP, which serves as a hub for conservative leaders across various sectors, including politics, religion, and business. This speech occurred as Trump campaigned for re-election in 2020, aiming to mobilize support among key conservative constituencies. The CNP's closed-door meetings promote coordination among conservative leaders, making it a strategic platform for Trump to strengthen his base. Trump's appearance at the CNP emphasized the alignment between his administration and the goals of influential conservative organizations. It also highlighted the CNP's role in shaping and supporting conservative political strategies during his presidency.³⁹

This information is derived from investigative journalism, expert analysis, and public records regarding CNP members and their roles in Trump's campaigns. Collectively, these sources illustrate how CNP-affiliated individuals supported Trump's candidacy, even though the CNP did not officially endorse him. Many religious leaders within the CNP played a crucial role in mobilizing evangelical Christians to vote for Trump, who ultimately became a cornerstone of his political base.⁴⁰

Trump's Role

The reader may wonder how the religious right's pursuit of reconstructing society around Christian values and morals aligns with Trump's clear public moral failings as a cheat, convicted felon, and sexual predator. The answer comes from

Lance Wallnau, a prominent evangelical preacher and self-described Christian nationalist with connections to the Council for National Policy (CNP) through his involvement with an organization called Ziklag, which is a funding group that channels money from its wealthy donor network to partner organizations aligned with CNP's objectives. Wallnau serves as an advisor and is its driving force. In 2016, Wallnau's book, "God's Chaos Candidate: Donald J. Trump and the American Unraveling," argued that Trump is a modern-day Cyrus figure, an instrument God chose to fulfill His plans despite personal imperfections. Wallnau's perspective resonates with many evangelical communities, providing a theological framework to support Trump's candidacy. According to his theology, Trump serves as a force of chaos. It is the priority of Weyrich's Integration of Theory and Practice to dismantle our existing institutions. In these terms, Trump and his allies in Congress are doing exactly what the CNP aims to accomplish.

The Seven Mountains and the many alternative institutions developed and supported by the Council for National Policy are the weapons of their religious war.

Trump's election is not the pinnacle, but only the prelude to what's coming

On the evening of November 4, 2016, what can only be described as the existential shock of Trump's election occurred. No one, not even Trump, had ever expected this to happen. In the days following the election, opened and talking heads were reeling from the sudden realization that they were not living in the country they believed they were. When Biden was elected in 2020, the same shocked individuals breathed a collective sigh of relief. However, the religious right did not miss a beat. Echoing the election of 2000, they challenged the results. They spread the claim to their followers that the election had been stolen, managing to convince a growing number of adherents to the theology of Dominionism and its theonomous epistemology that all so-called secularists are capable of lies. The religious right is of God, after all, and God does not lose or lie. This is precisely why the legitimate facts established by current authorities, from courts to recounts, demonstrating that there is absolutely no evidence that the election was stolen, have been and continue to be rejected by most in the Republican party.

What may be even more concerning at this point, especially for those who still value our commitment to democracy despite its imperfections, is the apparent support for what some are calling a slow-moving coup. Given the results of the 2024 elections, this is a significant issue. While there has been a general erosion of faith in our political institutions, it wouldn't be fair to attribute it solely to Trump's victory and the religious right. Over the decades since the Reagan administration, the widening income gap between the top 1% and everyone else has left many Americans living on the economic edge.

This disparity has not only eroded the standard of living for the poorest Americans but as expected, has also diminished faith in our government and its institutions. Hungry individuals, those struggling daily to feed themselves and their families, and people making tough choices between food and medication—scraping

together three dollars to put another gallon in the tank—do not have the time or inclination to think about issues related to democracy. They are angry, as they should be, because our democracy has failed to regulate our capitalism for the benefit of our citizens.

The word “refused” above is intentional because the economic policies that have led to this condition belong to the individuals this piece examines. The Biblical economics of Reconstructionism and the religious right are conveniently aligned with the free market perspective of libertarian economics. Both reject government intervention to alleviate the severe inequalities that threaten to destabilize the economy. Biblical economics views the state as idolatrous, while libertarian economics sees it as violating free market principles. They also oppose government social programs for the same reasons. Therefore, it is no surprise that so many of the uber-wealthy support the religious right.

This is real – It is happening.

At this point, it is vital to remind the reader that we have long left behind the realm of obscure theology and entered the present. In this piece, we have traced the path from obscure theology to its emergence as a profound and enduring influence on public policy. According to numerous academic and journalistic sources, the ideas in Weyrich’s *The Integration of Theory and Practice* have had, and continue to have, a significant impact on the Conservative movement, particularly among Council for National Policy members. As significant a threat as this poses for the future of our democracy, there is, unfortunately, support for these views among more mainstream conservative sources, which will be the subject of part two.

Footnotes next page

Footnotes

- 1 Hoover Institution
- 2 R.J. Rushdoony, Institutes of Biblical Law, 61
- 3 Michael J. McVar, Christian Reconstructionism, 231
- 4 Rushdoony, Institutes of Biblical Law, 68
- 5 Rushdoony, Institutes of Biblical law, 93-94
- 6 Ibid., 5
- 7 McVicar, Christian Reconstructionism, 132
- 8 Ibid., 133f
- 9 Ibid., 134
- 10 Rushdoony, Institutes of Biblical law, 159
- 11 Ibid., 163
- 12 <https://nheri.org/>
- 13 <https://hsllda.org/>
- 14 Rushdoony, Institutes of Biblical Law, 100
- 15 Ibid., 5
- 16 Ibid., 92-93, 99
- 17 Ibid., 583
- 18 Ibid., 60
- 19 Ibid., 60
- 20 Ibid., 60
- 21 Film documentary, [Bad Faith](#)
- 22 McVicar, Christian Reconstructionism, 207
- 23 Film, [Bad Faith](#)
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 McVicar, 206
- 26 McVicar, 207
- 27 Ibid., 209
- 28 Ibid., 207
- 29 Weyrich's [Open Letter to Conservatives](#)
- 30 Weyrich's [The Integration of Theory and Practice](#)
- 31 Ibid
- 32 Anne Wilson, Shadow Network, 154
- 33 Film, Bad Faith
- 34 Weyrich, Integration of Theory and Practice
- 35 ChatGpt
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ibid
- 40 Ibid