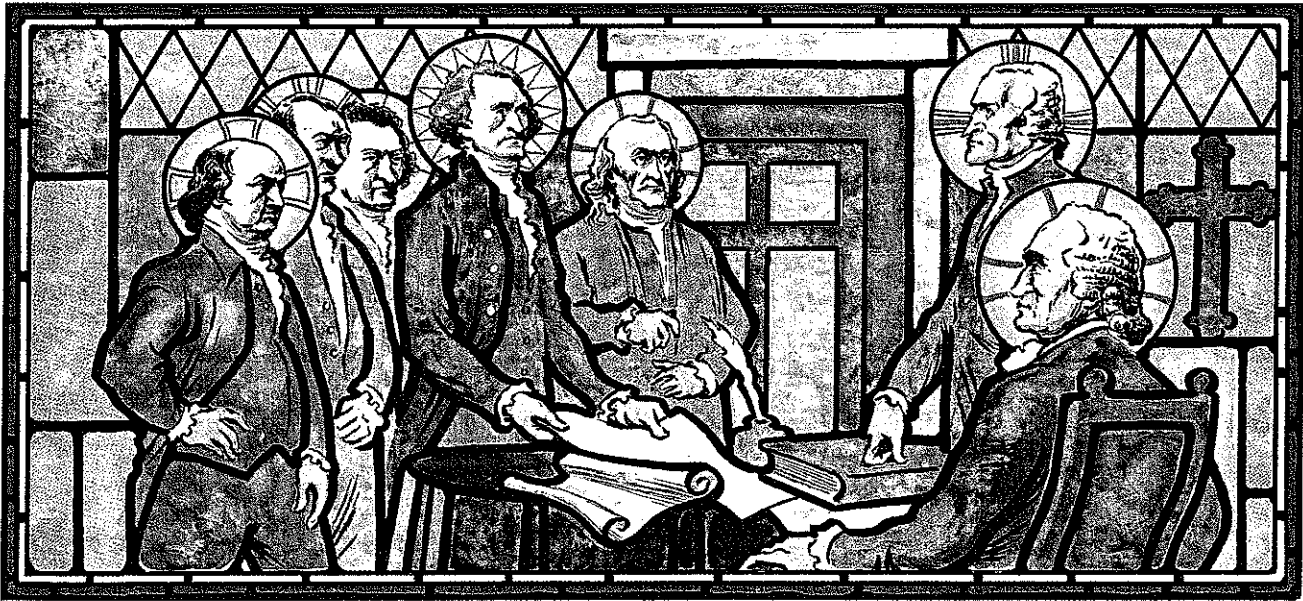


GARRET KEIZER: THE PROGRESSIVE CASE FOR GUNS

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THROUGH A GLASS, DARKLY

How the Christian right
is reimagining U.S. history

By Jeff Sharlet

We keep trying to explain away American fundamentalism. Those of us not engaged personally or emotionally in the biggest political and cultural movement of our times—those on the sidelines of history—keep trying to come up with theories with which to discredit the evident allure of this punishing yet oddly comforting idea of a deity, this strange god. His invisible hand is everywhere, say His citizen-theologians, caressing and fixing every outcome: Little League games, job searches, test scores, the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, the success or failure of terrorist attacks (also known as “signs”), victory or defeat in battle, at the ballot box, in bed. Those unable to feel His soothing touch at moments such as these snort at the notion of a god with the patience or the prurience to monitor every tick and twitch of desire, a supreme being able to make a lion and a lamb cuddle but unable to abide two men kissing. A divine love that speaks through hurricanes. Who would worship such a god? His followers must be dupes, or saps, or fools, their faith



illiterate, insane, or misinformed, their strength fleeting, hollow, an aberration. A burp in American history. An unpleasant odor that will pass.

We don't like to consider the possibility that they are not newcomers to power but returnees, that the revivals that have been sweeping America with generational regularity since its inception are not flare-ups but the natural temperature of the nation. We can't conceive of the possibility that the

dupes, the saps, the fools—the believers—have been with us from the very beginning, that their story about what America once was and should be seems to some great portion of the population more compelling, more just, and more beautiful than the perfunctory processes of secular democracy. Thus we are at a loss to account for this recurring American mood.

Is “fundamentalism” too limited a word for a belief system of such scope and intimacy? Lately, some scholars prefer “maximalism,” a term meant to convey the movement's ambition to conform every aspect of society to God. In contemporary

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America—from the Cold War to the Iraq War, the period of the current incarnation's ascendancy—that means a culture born again in the image of a Jesus strong but tender, a warrior who hates the carnage he must cause, a man-god ordinary men will follow. These are days of the sword, literally; affluent members of the movement gift one another with real blades crafted to medieval standards, a fad inspired by a best-selling book called *Wild at Heart*. As jargon, then, "maximalism" isn't bad, an unintended tribute to Maximus, the fighting hero of *Gladiator*, which is

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a film celebrated in Christian manhood guides as almost supplemental scripture. But I think "fundamentalism"—coined in 1920 as self-designation by those ready to do "battle royal for the fundamentals," hushed up now as too crude for today's chevaliers—still strikes closest to the movement's desire for a story that never changes, a story to redeem all that seems random, a rock upon which history can rise.

If the term "fundamentalism" endures, the classic means of explaining it away—class envy, sexual anxiety—do not. We cannot, like H. L. Mencken, writing from the Scopes "monkey" trial of 1925, dismiss the Christian right as a carnival of backward buffoons jealous of modernity's privileges. We cannot, like the *Washington Post*, in 1993, explain away the movement as "largely poor, uneducated and easy to command." We cannot, like the writer Theodor Adorno, a refugee from Nazi Germany who sat squinting in the white light of L.A., unhappily scribbling notes about angry radio preachers, attribute radical religion—nascent fascism?—to Freudian yearning for a father figure.

The old theories have failed. The new Christ, fifty years ago no more than a corollary to American power, twenty-five years ago at its vanguard, is now at the very center. His followers are not anxiously awaiting his return at the Rapture; he's here right now. They're not envious of the middle class; they are the middle class. They're not looking for a hero to lead them; they're building biblical households, every man endowed with "headship" over his own family. They don't silence sex; they promise sacred sex to those who couple properly—orgasms more intense for young Christians who wait than those experienced by secular lovers.

Intensity! That's what one finds within the ranks of the American believers. "This thing is

real!" declare our nation's pastors. It's all coming together: the sacred and the profane, God's time and straight time, what theologians and graduates of the new fundamentalist prep schools might call "kairos" and "chronos," the mystical and the mundane. American fundamentalism—not a political party, not a denomination, not a uniform ideology, but a manifold movement—is moving in every direction all at once, claiming the earth for God's kingdom, "in the world but not of it" and yet just loving it to death anyway.

The Christian nation of which the movement dreams, a government of those chosen by God but democratically elected by a people who freely accept His will as their own, is a far country. The nation they seek does not, at the moment, exist; perhaps it could in the future. More important to fundamentalism is the belief that it did exist in the American past, not in the history we learn in public school and from PBS and in newsmagazine cover stories on the Founders but in another story, one more biblical, one more mythic and more true. Secularism hides this story, killed the Christian nation, and tried to dispose of the body. Fundamentalism wants to resurrect it, and doing so requires revision: fundamentalists, looking backward, see a different history, remade in the image of the seductive but strict logic of a prime mover that sets things in motion. The cause behind every effect, says fundamentalist science, is God. Even the inexorable facts of math are subject to His decree, as explained in homeschooling texts such as *Mathematics: Is God Silent?* Two plus two is four because God says so. If He chose, it could just as easily be five.

It would be cliché to quote Orwell here were it not for the fact that fundamentalist intellectuals do so with even greater frequency than those of the left. At a rally to expose the "myth" of church/state separation I attended this spring, Orwell was quoted at me four times, most emphatically by William J. Federer, an encyclopedic compiler of quotations whose *America's God and Country*—a collection of apparently theocentric bons mots distilled from the Founders and other great men "for use in speeches, papers, [and] debates"—has sold half a million copies. "Those who control the past," Federer said, quoting Orwell's 1984, "control the future." History, the practical theology of the movement, reveals destiny.

Federer, a tall, lean, oaken-voiced man, loved talking about history as revelation, nodding along gently to his own lectures. He wore a gray suit, a red tie marred by a stain, and an American flag pin in his lapel. He looked like a congressman, which was what he'd wanted to be: he was a two-time G.O.P. candidate for for-

mer House minority leader Dick Gephardt's St. Louis seat. He lost both times, but the movement considers him a winner—in 2000, he faced Gephardt in one of the nation's most expensive congressional races, forcing him to spend down his war chest. Federer considered this a providential outcome.

Federer and I were riding together in a white school bus full of Christians from around the country to pray at the site on which the Danbury, Connecticut, First Baptist Church once stood. It was in an 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptists that Thomas Jefferson first used the phrase "wall of separation," three words upon which the battle over whether the United

He paused and stared at me to make sure I understood the equation. "Orson Welles wrote that," he said.

The first pillar of American fundamentalism is Jesus Christ; the second is history; and in the fundamentalist mind the two are converging. Fundamentalism considers itself a faith of basic truths unaltered (if not always acknowledged) since their transmission from Heaven, first through the Bible and second through what they see as American scripture, divinely inspired, devoutly intended—the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the often overlooked Northwest Ordinance of 1787,



States is to be a Christian nation or a cosmopolitan one turns. Federer, leaning over the back of his seat as several pastors bent their ears toward his story, wanted me to understand that what Jefferson—notorious deist and author of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom—had really meant to promote was a "one-way wall," designed to protect the church from the state, not the other way around. Jefferson, Federer told me, was a believer; like all the Founders, he knew that there could be no government without God. Why hadn't I been taught this? Because I was a victim of godless public schools.

"Those who control the present," Federer continued his quotation of 1984, "control the past."

which declared "religion" necessary to "good government" and thus to be encouraged through schools. Well into the nineteenth century, most American schoolchildren learned their ABCs from *The New-England Primer*, which begins with "In Adam's Fall/We sinned all"—and continues on to "Spiritual Milk for American Babes, Drawn out of the Breasts of both Testaments." In 1836, McGuffey's *Eclectic Readers* began to displace the *Primer*, selling some 122 million copies of lessons such as "The Bible the Best of Classics" and "Religion the only Basis of Society" during the following century.

It wasn't until the 1930s, the most irreligious decade in American history, that public education veered away from biblical indoctrination so

thoroughly that within a few decades most Americans wrongly believed that the nationalism of manifest destiny—itsself thinly veiled Calvinism—rather than open piety was the American educational tradition. The movement now sees that to reclaim America for God, it must first reclaim that tradition for Him, and so it is producing a flood of educational texts with which to wash away the stains of secular history.

Such chronicles are written primarily for the homeschoolers and the fundamentalist academies that together account for at least 2 million of the nation's children, an expanding population that buys more than half a billion dollars of educational materials annually. "Who, knowing the facts of our history," asks the epigraph to the 2000 edition of *The American Republic for Christian Schools*, a junior-high textbook, "can doubt that the United States of America has been a thought in the mind of God from all eternity?" So that I would know the facts, I undertook my own course of homeschooling. In addition to *The American Republic*, I read the two-volume teacher's edition of *United States History for Christian Schools*, appropriate for eleventh graders, as well as *Economics for Christian Schools*, and I walked the streets of Brooklyn listening to an eighteen-tape lecture series on America up to 1865 created for Christian college students by Rousas John Rushdoony, the late theologian who helped launch Christian homeschooling and revived the idea of reading American history through a providential lens.¹ I was down by the waterfront, pausing to scribble a note on Alexis de Tocqueville—Rushdoony argues that de Tocqueville was really a fundamentalist Christian disguised as a Frenchman—when a white-and-blue police van rolled up behind me and squawked its siren. There were four officers inside.

"What are you writing?" the driver asked. The other three leaned toward the window.

"Notes," I said, tapping my headphones.

"Okay. Whatcha listening to?"

I said I didn't think I had to tell him.

"This is a high-security area," he said. On the other side of a barbed-wire fence, he said, was a Coast Guard storage facility for deadly chemicals. "Somebody blow that up and boom, bye-bye Brooklyn." Note-taking in the vicinity might be a problem. "So, I gotta ask again, whatcha listening to?"

How to explain—to the cop who had just clued me in on the ripest terrorist target in Brooklyn—that I was listening to a Christian jihadi lecture on how democracy as practiced in America was defiance of God's intentions,

¹ For instance, the "Protestant wind" with which, according to the eleventh-grade text, God helped the British defeat the Spanish Armada so that the New World would not be overly settled by agents of the Vatican.

how God gave to the United States the "irresistible blessings" of biblical capitalism unknown to Europe, and how we have vandalized this with vulgar regulations, how God loves the righteous who fight in His name?

Like this: "American history."

"Providence" would have been a better word. I was "unschooling" myself, Bill Apelian, director of Bob Jones University's BJU Press, explained. What seemed to me a self-directed course of study was, in fact, the replacement of my secular education with a curriculum guided by God. When BJU Press, one of the biggest Christian educational publishers, started out thirty years ago, science was their most popular subject, and it could be summed up in one word: "created." Now American history is on the rise. "We call it Heritage Studies," Apelian said, and explained its growing centrality: "History is God's working in man."

My unschooling continued. I read the works of Rushdoony's most influential student, the late Francis Schaeffer, an American whose Swiss mountain retreat, L'Abri ("The Shelter"), served as a Christian madrasah at which a generation of fundamentalist intellectuals studied an American past "Christian in memory." And I read Schaeffer's disciples: Tim LaHaye, who, besides coauthoring the hugely popular *Left Behind* series of novels, has published an equally fantastical work about history called *Mind Siege*. And David Barton, the president of a history ministry called WallBuilders (as in, to keep the heathen out). And Charles Colson, who, in titles such as *How Now Shall We Live?* (a play on Schaeffer's *How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture*) and *Against the Night: Living in the New Dark Ages*, searches from Plato to the American Founders to fellow Watergate felon G. Gordon Liddy for the essence of the Christian "worldview," a vision of an American future so entirely Christ-filtered that beside it "theocracy"—the clumsy governance of priestly bureaucrats—seems a modest ambition. "Theocentric" is the preferred term, Randall Terry, another Schaeffer disciple who went on to found Operation Rescue, told me: "That means you view the world in His terms. Theocentrists don't believe man can create law. Man can only embrace or reject law."

History matters not just for its progression of "fact, fact, fact," Michael McHugh, a pioneer of fundamentalist education, told me, but for "key personalities." In Francis Schaeffer's telling of U.S. history, for instance, John Witherspoon—the only pastor to have signed the Declaration of Independence—looms as large as Thomas Jefferson, because it was Witherspoon who infused the founding with the idea of "Lex Rex," "law is king" (divine law, that is), derived from the fiercest Protestant reformers of the seventeenth century,

men who considered John Calvin's Geneva too gentle for God. Key personalities are often soldiers, such as General Douglas MacArthur. After the war, McHugh explained, MacArthur ruled Japan "according to Christian principles" for five years. "To what end?" I asked. Japan is hardly any more Christian for this divine intervention. "The Japanese people did capture a vision," McHugh said. Not the whole Christian deal, but one of its essential foundations. "MacArthur set the stage for free enterprise," he explained. With Japan committed to capitalism, the United States was free to turn its attention toward the Soviet Union. The general's providential flanking maneuver, you might say, helped America win the Cold War.

But one needn't be a flag officer to be used by God. Another favorite of Christian history, said McHugh, was Sergeant Alvin York, a farmer from Pall Mall, Tennessee, who in World War I turned his trigger finger over to God and became perhaps the greatest Christian sniper of the twentieth century.

"God uses ordinary people," McHugh said. Anyone might be a key personality. The proper study of history, he explained, includes the student as a main character, an approach he described as "relational," a buzzword in contemporary fundamentalism that denotes a sort of pulsing circuit of energy between, say, pleasant Betty Johnson, your churchy neighbor, and the awesome realm of supernatural events in which her real life occurs. There, Jesus is as real to Betty as she is to you, and so is Sergeant York, General MacArthur, and even George Washington, who, as father of our nation, is almost a fourth member of the Holy Trinity, a mindbender made possible through God's math.

You may have seen his ghostly form, along with that of Abraham Lincoln, flanking an image of George W. Bush deep in prayer in a lithograph distributed by the Presidential Prayer Team, a five-year-old outfit that claims to have organized nearly 3 million prayer warriors on the president's behalf. To wit:



In a similar image pasted onto billboards by a group called American Destiny, a rouge-cheeked Washington kneels in prayer with an anonymous soldier in fatigues—just another everyday hero. That could be you, the key-man theory of fundamentalist history proposes. It's like the Rapture,

when the saved shall rise together, but it's happening right now: George Washington and Betty Johnson and you, floating up toward victory with arms intertwined, key personalities in Christian history.

One afternoon last year I found in my mail an unsolicited copy of "The Vision Forum Family Catalog," a glossy, handsomely produced, eighty-eight-page publication featuring an array of books, videos, and toys for "The Biblical Family Now and Forever." This catalogue, I think, is as perfect and polished a distillation as I've found of the romance of American fundamentalism, the almost sexual tension of its contradictions: its reverence for both rebellion and authority, democracy and theocracy, blood and innocence. The edition I received was titled "A Line in the Sand," in tribute to the Alamo. There, in 1836, faced with near-certain annihilation at the hands of the Mexican army, the Anglo rebel Lieutenant Colonel William Barret Travis rallied his doomed men by drawing said line with his sword and challenging them to cross it. All who did so, he said, would prove their preparedness "to give their lives in freedom's cause."

A boy of about eight enacts the scene on the catalogue's cover. He is dark-eyed, big-eared, and dimple-chinned, and he's dressed in an idyllic costume only a romantic could imagine Lieutenant Colonel Travis wearing so close to his apocalyptic end—a white planter's hat, a Confederate gray, double-breasted jacket, a bow tie of black ribbon, a red sash, and shiny black fetish boots, spread wide. The young rebel seems to have been Photoshopped in front of the Alamo at unlikely scale: he towers over a dark wooden door, as big as an eight-year-old boy's imagination.

Named one of "twenty reasons there is hope for America"² by *The Church Report* magazine and

² Although much of the catalogue is given over to educational materials for Christian homeschoolers, the back of the book is dedicated to equipping one's son with the sort of toys that will allow him to "rebuild a culture of courageous boyhood." Hats, for instance—leather Civil War kepis, coon-skin caps, and, for \$95, a life-size replica of a fifteenth-century knight's helmet among them. An \$18 video titled "Putting on the Whole Armor of God" asks, "Boys, are you ready for warfare?" Young Christian soldiers may choose from a variety of actual weapons, ranging from a scaled-down version of the blade wielded by William Wallace, of Braveheart fame (which, at 4 1/4 feet long, is still a lot of knife for a kid) to a 32 1/2-inch Confederate officer's saber. It is history at knifepoint—a theology of arms.

HISTORY MATTERS NOT JUST FOR ITS PROGRESSION OF "FACT, FACT, FACT," ONE FUNDAMENTALIST EDUCATOR TOLD ME, BUT FOR "KEY PERSONALITIES"

THE PASTOR WORE WINGTIPS,
 SYMBOLIZING PRE-1947 AMERICA—
 1947 BEING THE YEAR THE
 SUPREME COURT FIRST CODIFIED
 THE "WALL OF SEPARATION"

considered by the other fundamentalist publishers I spoke to as the intellectual vanguard of the movement, Vision Forum is nonetheless just one of any number of providers for the fundamentalist lifestyle, and hardly the biggest. But it is closer than any other to the ideas of Rousas John Rushdoony, whose eighteen-tape lecture series I had, in fact, ordered from Vision Forum. Rushdoony wrote two books in the early 1960s—*The Messianic Character of American Education* and *Intellectual Schizophrenia*—which laid the right cornerstone of modern homeschooling. With the

alternative educational universe of homeschooling and private evangelical academies came the formalization of Christianized American history, and thus the basis for the contemporary movement's broadest claims: that the

nation was conceived of as Christian, that separation of church and state is either a "myth" altogether (Christian historian David Barton's position, endorsed by a number of congressmen) or meant only to prevent a single denomination from prevailing, a perspective that fundamentalists consider a fair compromise with the anxieties of unbelievers.

Rushdoony took the vague sentiments of early twentieth-century fundamentalism and found sources for them in American history, creating an intellectual foundation for the movement's political ambitions.³ He derived from the past not just a quaint hero worship but also a deep knowledge of history's losers, forgotten Americans—minor political figures such as John Winthrop and Timothy Dwight and all the soldiers who fought first for God, then country, the rugged men of the past who carried the theocratic strand through from the beginning. The Christian conservatives

³ Rushdoony is best known as the founder of Christian Reconstructionism, a politically defunct school of thought that drifted so far to the right that it dropped off the edge of the world. Most notably, Rushdoony proposed the death penalty for an ever-expanding subset of sinners, starting with gay men and growing to include blasphemers and badly behaved children. Such sentiments have since made him a bogeyman of the left, but also a convenient scapegoat for fundamentalist apologists. Recently, *First Things*, a journal for academically pedigreed religious conservatives, published an essay titled "Theocracy! Theocracy! Theocracy!" in which journalist Ross Douthat, eyes rolling, dismisses the fears of the "anti-theocrat" left by propping up Rushdoony as a fringe lunatic, only to knock him down along with leftist critiques that focus on his angriest notions. That reading of Rushdoony—by liberal critics and conservative apologists—misses what matters about his revival of providential history.

of his day, Rushdoony believed, had let themselves be bound by secularism. They railed against its tyranny, but addressed themselves only to issues set aside by secularism as "moral"—the best minds of a fundamentalist generation burned themselves to furious cinders battling nothing more than naughty movies and heavy petting. Rushdoony did not believe in such skirmishes. He wanted a war, and he summoned the spirits of history to the struggle at hand.

A strict Calvinist influenced by his upbringing in the Armenian Presbyterian Church, Rushdoony's own mentor had been a Dutch theologian named Cornelius Van Til. Van Til borrowed from a turn-of-the-century theologian turned Dutch prime minister named Abraham Kuyper the idea of "presuppositionalism," which maintains that everybody approaches the world with set assumptions, thus ruling out the possibility of neutrality and a classically liberal state; and that since Christian presuppositions acknowledge themselves as such (unlike liberalism's, which are deliberately ahistorical), every aspect of governance should be conducted in the light of revealed truths. "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human experience," declared Kuyper, "over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry 'Mine!'"

Rushdoony saw in the theologian's European project of health care and schools and even a market conformed to biblical law a foreshadowing of the "city upon a hill" prophesied for America by John Winthrop in 1630. He thought most modern Americans would see this as well, if only they understood that Scripture was the source of the nation's idealism and that capitalism, rather than Kuyper's socialism, was the means of attaining the mythical city. He spoke of his fondness for John F. Kennedy's rhetoric, for instance, in which he heard echoes of America as a "redeemer nation," invoking Christian nationalism as a high-minded justification for the Cold War. "God's work must truly be our own," declared Kennedy, and Rushdoony must have smiled sadly. "They've lost the theology," Rushdoony would lecture ten years after Kennedy's death, "but they haven't lost the faith."

When Federer and I reached the overgrown foundation stones of Danbury Baptist, which sit on a grassy hill sprinkled with pale violets, we gathered in a circle with a crowd of pastors and activists from around the country. The event's organizer was Dave Daubemire, head of a fundamentalist "history" ministry called Minutemen United and a former high school football coach from Ohio who'd done battle with the ACLU over his insistence on praying with his players. Still a regional outfit, the Minutemen had managed to

wrangle some respectable B-list activists.⁴ In attendance were the Reverend Rob Schenck, a Jewish convert to evangelicalism who runs a Capitol Hill ministry for politicians called Faith and Action, and the Reverend Flip Benham, head of Operation Save America, also known as Operation Rescue. He was the man who baptized Norma McCorvey—Jane Roe—into fundamentalism. For the rally, he'd worn vintage white-and-brown wingtips, symbols of his commitment to pre-1947 America—1947 being the year when the Supreme Court first codified Jefferson's "wall of separation," in a case involving government funds for parochial schools.

Providential historians are divided on the question of whether it was this decision, *Everson v. Board of Education*, or FDR's socialistic New Deal that led God to remove His protection from the nation. Operation Save America's number two, Pastor Rusty Thomas of Waco, Texas, favors the less controversial New Deal school of thought. God, Rusty told me, "always gave us a left hook of judgment, then He gave us a right cross of revival." But when the left hook of the Great Depression came, goes the economic theory of fundamentalism, Americans turned to government as their savior instead of God. "So we got another left hook." Kennedy's assassination, he explained. Then another left hook: Vietnam. Still we didn't learn. So God kept throwing punches, said Rusty: crack, AIDS, global warming, September 11, 2,500 flag-draped coffins shipped home from Iraq and more on the way.

Rusty began the day's preaching, pacing back and forth between Danbury Baptist's foundation stones. He looked like an exclamation point—tiny feet in thin-soled black leather shoes, almost dwarfish legs, and a powerful torso barely contained by a jacket of double-breasted gray houndstooth. But he had one of the most nuanced preaching voices I've ever heard, a soft rasp that seemed to come straight from a broken heart. "We are here to start a gentle revolution," he whispered. "To reclaim the godly heritage." He sounded sad, for his sin and mine—we were all guilty of turning our backs on the lessons of history. But then he growled up to a full fury that made even the flaxen-haired pastor beside me literally blink before leaning forward into Rusty's thunder.

"And when you go to war in your land"—Rusty recited from the Book of Numbers—"and make no mistake about it, we are in a war—"

⁴ *Minutemen United* should not be confused with the anti-immigrant *Minutemen militias*. Coach Dave's outfit is every bit as militaristic in its rhetoric—one *Minutemen* project is called "Polished Shaft"—but it is educational in its operations, offering, for instance, instruction in America's "godly heritage" for schoolteachers.

"Amen!" hollered Reverend Flip.

"And when you go to war in your land," continued Rusty, "against an adversary who oppresses you"—and here he interrupted himself. "How many besides me are vexed by what is happening in the United States of America today?"

The crowd, shedding jackets and coats beneath a wan but warm spring sun, murmured *amens*.

"Your soul is vexed," Rusty moaned. Then he cried out: "We are under oppression!"

"AMEN!" responded the crowd, rising up to match Rusty's increased volume. The bill of grievances was hard: "Are we not in mourning?" Rusty asked, repeating the question and drawing it out as the women among us closed their eyes and said, plain and simple, Yes. "Are we not in mourning?" he moaned. "As terrorism strikes us from without, corruptions from within?" Yes, said the women, the men seemingly shamed into silence. "How many know we're losing our children?" Yes. "Our marriages are failing!" YES.

Pastor Rusty, in fact, was a single father—of ten, the youngest of whom is named Torah. Liz, his wife of twenty years, died last year from lymphoma, on the verge of what seemed like recovery. Reverend Flip had chronicled online her long fight, a roller coaster of remission and relapse, so that the family's prayer partners—activists and Christian radio listeners across the country—could help fight for her survival. "Goodnight for now, sweet sister," Flip wrote when they failed. "We'll see you in the morning."

"There's going to have to be a great fundamental shift," Rusty preached near the end of his sermon. Not just in society but among the believers. There is a "mothering" church, he said, and a "fatherhood" church, separate but equal aspects of God. The mother church nurtures and holds a child when he's done wrong; the father church is the church of discipline. The mother church feeds the poor, comforts the dying, attempting to remind nations of righteous behavior. But to Rusty the lesson of American history—the lesson of Valley Forge and Shiloh; Khe Sanh and Baghdad; Dallas, 1963; *Roe v. Wade*, 1973; Manhattan, 2001—is clear: this nation is too far gone to be redeemed by mercy alone.

It is the father church's time.

The father church, to Rusty, was the Old Testament church, and he had begun the day's rally with a command from the Hebrew Bible. "Then shall you sound an alarm with a trumpet that you may be remembered before the Lord your God," he had recited, "and you SHOUT"—he replaced the future tense of the biblical "shall" with his own present-tense below—"to be saved from your enemy!" He had turned to the man standing behind him, a wiry,

goateed musician in a brown bomber jacket. "So brother," Rusty had called, his voice now joyful, "let it rip, potato chip!" At which the slender man had blown his horn.

The day's appointed born-again *Ba'al Tokea*, the "Master of the Blast," was named Lane Medcalf, and his instrument was a three-foot-long spiral hewn from the head of ram: a shofar, a Jewish trumpet, generally reserved—since the destruction of the Temple 1,936 years ago—for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. But once upon a time its blast signaled Joshua's assault on Jericho, the first battle for the Promised Land.

Medcalf had borrowed his shofar from his boss's wife, also a Christian. Medcalf was an artificial-flavor compounder, less than a chemist but more than a factory worker. He had been saved since he was a teenager, but lately he had become engrossed in Jewish history. Fifty-three, he was slender and slight in the shoulders, cautious but earnest about his words. "The shofar was for warfare," he explained. "It's still a weapon of warfare, but for fighting demonic influence." Medcalf's shofar blasts that day, for instance, were intended to slay the invisible demons that had once surrounded Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black, author of the *Everson v. Board of Education* decision, in 1947.

"Hugo got a little skewed," he told me. Black himself had not been evil, Medcalf explained, just overwhelmed by Satan, who whispered in his ear. "I was told"—here Medcalf's voice dropped a note—"that he was a former Ku Klux Klan member." (This is true. He was also a Protestant, and his decision was in keeping with that period's fundamentalist animus toward Catholic schools.) Medcalf had also been told, he continued, that in the mid-1950s there had been another Supreme Court decision, he couldn't remember the name, that forced children to go to school where they didn't want to go. This also is technically true—Medcalf may have been referring to *Brown v. Board of Education*, the 1954 decision that overturned official school segregation, leading to busing and the formation of private, all-white evangelical academies.

It was *Brown*, along with two decisions in the early 1960s striking down school prayer, that led to fundamentalism's embrace of history as a redeeming creed. Catholics already had a system for educating their children religiously. Fundamentalists began to build one, and the bricks of its construction were the proof-texts of an alternate Christian nation: a letter by John Jay, the first chief justice of the Supreme Court, on the biblical justifications for America's wars; President James Garfield's Gilded Age pleas for more pious men in high office; even, eventually, the speeches of Martin Luther King Jr., claimed now from

megachurch pulpits across the country as a martyr of fundamentalism.

Medcalf was part of the generation for whom King was a hero rather than a villain. When he was a kid, his older brother joined a Christian youth band, and when he played his guitar kids prayed out loud, free-form, with their hands in the air and their whole bodies swaying, while girls flocked to him. "I had never seen Christianity like that before," Medcalf remembered. He wanted to join the band. He learned keyboards and the drums. "Suddenly, I could understand the Bible. The Holy Spirit got up on me. Man!"

When he was fifteen, he accepted Jesus. When he was sixteen the girl he was in love with accepted his invitation to a Bible study meeting, and later he married her. "Church" was no longer a place you went to; it was an experience you consumed, and you wanted as much as you could get. You wore your jeans to worship and grew your hair long. You called yourself a Jesus Freak and you called Jesus a revolutionary. You listened to groups like The Way and Love Song and the All Saved Freak Band, and you read rags like *Right On!* and *The Fish* and *The Hollywood Free Paper*. "Truckin' for Jesus," Medcalf remembered. "Solid stuff, man."

Medcalf suddenly looked sad. He blinked, as if holding back tears. What had gone wrong?

"We sold ourselves," he said, his voice nearly a whisper. He meant it literally: albums and T-shirts, "bumper stickers." Commercialism killed Christian rock and roll. "We lost our teeth." In 1973, the Supreme Court handed down *Roe v. Wade*. "It happened on our watch, man," Medcalf said. The Jesus Freaks had failed. They had lived for today and forgotten tomorrow, and then it had slipped away from them.

To get it back, Medcalf said, the movement must go backward. Not to the 1960s but to "before." It needs a foundation, he explained, eternal truths. These were to be found in two places: the Bible and the Constitution.

While we were talking, Reverend Flip had begun to preach. He told the crowd about a recent victory he'd scored in North Carolina, where he'd led 700 prayer warriors to a school-board meeting to protest the formation of a Gay-Straight Alliance club in a local high school. "The preachers preached, the singers sang, the prayers prayed, and the theology of the church became biography in the streets!" Flip said. The school board shut down the club. Flip said this was what Jesus wanted. He even did an impression: "Cry to me," he said in his best bass God voice; "the prayers of the righteous will be answered."

Medcalf smiled and applauded gently. He told me how his prayers had changed when he started studying history and blowing the shofar. "I

was praying for God to restore America back to its roots one day when I had what I guess you would call a supernatural experience. The Holy Spirit caused me to weep and cry, enabling me to have a broken heart. 'Please come back,' I prayed. It was just so intense." It worked: "Things have started changing." He said the appointments of Samuel Alito and John Roberts to the Supreme Court were probably the result of God's intervention. They may be the men God was waiting for, the right tools for the job of restoration. They may be under an anointing.

This is the secret of Christian history. It doesn't require great men—Medcalf considered Bush's 2000 election an "answer to prayer," but he was under no delusions about the president's natural abilities—only willing men, ready to be anointed. Bush was one; Medcalf was another. Medcalf submitted to Bush's authority according to Romans 13:1, a key verse of American fundamentalism—"the powers that be are ordained of God"—but both submitted equally to God's guiding hand. To Medcalf this results in a democracy more radical than any dreamed of in the 1960s. In the flow of secular time, Medcalf is a nebbish from Connecticut, mixing beakers full of artificial flavors. But in Christian time, he is a herald, blowing his shofar back to 1947, calling the key men of our Christian nation's history to battle.

In the pantheon of fundamentalist history, the man revered above all others is General Stonewall Jackson of the Confederacy, perhaps the most brilliant military commander in American history and certainly the most pious. *United States History for Christian Schools* devotes more space to Jackson, "Soldier of the Cross," and the revivals he led among his troops in the midst of the Civil War, than to either Robert E. Lee or Ulysses S. Grant; *Practical Homeschooling* magazine offers instructions for making Stonewall costumes out of gray sweatsuits with which one can celebrate his birthday, a homeschooling "fun day." The Vision Forum catalogue offers for men a military biography and for the ladies a collection of Jackson's letters to his wife; both books extol his strategic and romantic achievements as corollaries to his unparalleled love of God.

Fundamentalists even celebrate the Confederate hero as an early civil rights visionary, dedicated to teaching slaves to read so that they could learn their Bible lessons. For fundamentalist admirers, that is enough; this fall saw the publication of *Stonewall Jackson: The Black Man's Friend*, by Richard G. Williams, a regular contributor to the conservative *Washington Times*. Jackson fought not to defend slavery, argues another biographer, but for religious freedom; he be-

lieved the North had usurped the moral jurisdiction of God. "The North seemed to be striving to alter basic American structures," writes James I. Robertson Jr. "Such activity flew in the face of God's preordained notion of what America should be."

Jackson's popularity with fundamentalists represents the triumph of the Christian history that Rousas John Rushdoony dreamed of when he discovered, during the early 1960s, the forgotten works of the theologian Robert Lewis Dabney, including *Life and Campaigns of Lieut.-Gen. Thomas J. Jackson (Stonewall Jackson)*. Dabney had served under Jackson, but, more important, he was a theologian in the tradition of John Calvin—that is, he believed deeply in a God who worked through chosen individuals—and he wrote the general's life in biblical terms. Rushdoony imagined the story as transcending its Confederate origins, and so helped make it a founding text of the nascent homeschooling movement.⁵

In 2003, Vision Forum sponsored a national essay contest and awarded first prize to a pretty, freckle-faced young woman named Amanda Freeborn for her essay, "How Stonewall Jackson Demonstrated a Biblical Vision of Manhood." "There is a name," writes Freeborn,

that casts upon the screen of our imaginations the image of the personification of godly manhood. That name is Stonewall Jackson. . . . His life was a testimony to the world of what God can do through a man consecrated to his purposes.

Freeborn goes on to admire Jackson's reverence for authority and his commitment to prayer—in battle, wrote a fighting pastor who knew him, Jackson would give up the reins of his horse "to lift up his hands towards heaven." And she admires his Job-like acceptance of suffering—in civilian life he was shy, inept, and so physically fragile that he spent much his time investigating ascetic diets and taking the waters at miracle spas around the country. With his

⁵ Although Rushdoony was a bigot and a partisan of the South, his commitment to states' rights was not racial but religious: he recognized that the Constitution fully separates church and state only at the federal level. Thus a Christian nation could be built state legislature by state legislature, an approach that has since become the main strategy of Christian conservative organizations, which replicate themselves state by state to do battle with better-known but more cumbersome liberal organizations.

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wife, Anna, he loved to dance secret polkas when no one else was watching, but he felt so out of place in "society" that he was deathly afraid of public speaking. Absent enemy fire, he did not know how to take a stand. He watched John Brown hang with his own eyes and marveled at the strength of the man's Christian conviction. And yet when his own time to fight came, he proved just as devoted. "Draw the sword," he told his students at the Virginia Military Institute, "and throw away the scabbard." In *All Things for Good: The Steadfast Fidelity of Stonewall Jackson*, fundamentalist historian J. Steven Wilkins opens a chapter on Jackson's belief in the "black flag" of no quarter for the enemy with a quotation: "Shoot them all, I do not wish them to be brave." The only path to peace, he believed, was total war. "Today," writes Freeborn,

Mr. Jackson's life stands as a witness to a new generation of what God can and desires to do in each of His children. Let us rise up and follow the shining example of this stern soldier, loving husband, devoted church officer, and Christ-like man.

Civil War buffs study his military maneuvers and wonder whether, had he not been mistaken for a Yankee and shot by his own men in 1863, he might have outflanked the Union Army and fought the North to a standstill. But Freeborn chooses as case study not a Civil War battle but his first victory as a lowly lieutenant out of West Point. Sent to the Mexican War, he defied an order to retreat, fought the Mexican cavalry alone with one artillery piece, won, and was promoted, later commended by General Winfield Scott, commander of the U.S. forces, for "the way in which [he] slaughtered those poor Mexicans."

Many of the poor Mexicans Jackson slaughtered were civilians. After his small victory had helped clear the way for the American advance, Jackson received orders to turn his guns on Mexico City residents attempting to flee the oncoming U.S. army. He did so without hesitation—mowing them down as they sought to surrender.

What are we to make of this murder? Secular historians attribute this atrocity to Jackson's military discipline—he simply obeyed orders. But fundamentalists see in that discipline, that willingness to kill innocents, confirmation of Romans 13:1: "For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." Obeying one's superiors, according to this logic, is an act of devotion to the God above them.

But wait—fundamentalists also praise the heroism that resulted from his defiance of orders to retreat, his rout of the Mexican cavalry so miraculous—it's said that a cannonball bounced between his legs as he stood fast—that it seems to fundamentalist biographers proof that he was anointed by God. Is this

hypocrisy on the part of his fans? Not exactly.

Key men always obey orders, but they follow the command of the highest authority. Jackson's amazing victory is taken as evidence that God was with him—that God overrode the orders of his earthly commanders. And yet the civilian dead that resulted from Jackson's subsequent obedience of those very same earthly commanders are also signs of God's guiding hand. The providential God sees everything; that such a tragedy was allowed to occur must be evidence of a greater plan. One of fundamentalist history's favorite proofs comes not from Scripture itself but from Ben Franklin's paraphrase at the Constitutional Convention: "And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?"

To put it in political terms, the contradictory legend of Stonewall Jackson—rebellion and reverence, rage and order—results in the synthesis of self-destructive patriotism embraced by contemporary fundamentalism. The most striking example is a short video on faith and diplomacy made in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, by Christian Embassy, a behind-the-scenes ministry for government and military elites. It almost seems to endorse deliberate negligence of duty. Dan Cooper, an undersecretary of veterans' affairs, announces that his weekly prayer sessions are "more important than doing the job." Major General Jack Catton says that he sees his position as an adviser to the Joint Chiefs of Staff as a "wonderful opportunity" to evangelize men and women setting defense policy. "My first priority is my faith," he says. "I think it's a huge impact. . . . You have many men and women who are seeking God's counsel and wisdom as they advise the Chairman [of the Joint Chiefs] and the Secretary of Defense." Brigadier General Bob Caslen puts it in sensual terms: "We're the aroma of Jesus Christ." There's a joyous disregard for democracy in these sentiments, for its demands and its compromises, that in its darkest manifestation becomes the overlooked piety at the heart of the old logic of Vietnam, lately applied to Iraq: In order to

save the village, we must destroy it.

On the Danbury village green Pastor Rusty gripped my arm and pulled me close, tears streaming from hazel eyes as he confessed that he had betrayed God. The rally had migrated from the hilltop to the town's center, an historic patch of grass next to a redbrick parking garage. A stage had been erected, and on it a series of preachers sermonized about God and American history for a small crowd of parents and children sitting on blankets and in lawn chairs. Rusty and I talked back by the literature tables. He had something he wanted to explain. He had neglected the twin sins, he said, the two wicked

acts that fundamentalists believe to be the collective responsibility of the entire society in which they occur. "Child sacrifice"—by which he meant abortion—"and sodomy. Any nation that condoned those behaviors? That did not challenge them, that did not prevent them from happening? It will be reduced to rubble."

He shook his head, eyes squeezed shut. The church had allowed women to murder their children and men through sodomy to damn themselves and all their brothers. It was his fault more than theirs because he knew the "blueprint of God's Word." He had pored over the Bible and the Constitution and the Mayflower Compact, had memorized choice words from John Adams and John Witherspoon and Patrick Henry, Jeremiah and Nehemiah and John the Revelator. Scripture and American history are in agreement, he had found: beneath God, family, and church is the state, with only one simple responsibility: "The symbol of the state is a sword. Not a spoon, feeding the poor, not a teaching instrument to educate our young." Rusty stepped back, fists clenched. "And the sword is an instrument of death!" he yelled. He twitched his Italian loafers in a preacher two-step. He shook out his neck like a boxer. Then sorrow slumped his shoulders. He had failed to wield the sword. He had failed the widows and orphans. He had failed his brothers lost to sodomy. "There's nobody clean in this," he whispered.

Grief, not arrogance, translates the promise of salvation—"whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it"—into a battle cry. Guilt, not pride, builds the most zealous discipline. "Obedience is my greatest weapon," the rally's organizer, Coach Dave, told me at the end of the day. He took off his Minutemen United baseball cap, navy blue with a red cross, and ran his hand through his gray hair. In obedience, he said, he found strength. I imagined him lecturing his former football team. Obedience, he continued, was a gift from God; but you needed the Holy Spirit to open it. "The Holy Spirit of God is like the software," he said.

He tried to explain. "We may need another 9/11," he declared slowly, a teacher reciting a lesson, "to bring about a full spiritual revival." He must have seen my surprise. "Now, you don't get that, do you?" I admitted that I did not. Well, he continued, history's horrors are just like God spanking a child. "That's a perfect example of where you need the software to understand what I just said, or else you're gonna say, 'Coach, you mean He spans us by killing people?' You need the software. What's the software? Well, it's history. You gotta understand what history is. It's collective. Are you getting the software? *Collective. History.*"

I got it. Fundamentalism embraces its mythic

past; our more comfortable, liberal histories declare their own myths simply a matter of record. The imagination with which we, the levelheaded masses, view the demigod Founders and the Civil War, the "Good Fight" against Hitler and the American tragedy of Vietnam (the tragedy is always ours alone), is almost as deeply mystical as that of fundamentalism's, thickened by destiny, blind to all that does not square with the story we tell ourselves about who we are as a nation. There are occasional attempts at recovering these near-invisible pieces, "people's history" and national apologies and HBO specials about embarrassing missteps in the march of progress, usually related to race and inevitably restored to forward motion by the courage of some key man of liberalism: Jackie Robinson at first base, 1947; Rosa Parks on the bus, 1955; Muhammad Ali refusing to fight in Vietnam. But such interventions are not much different than fundamentalism's addition of Martin Luther King to its pantheon; they are attempts to persuade ourselves that the big "We" of nationalism was better than the little people of history actually were.

The actual past no more serves the imagination of secularism than that of fundamentalism. Liberals like to point out that many of the Founders were not, in fact, Christian but rather deists or downright unbelievers. Fundamentalists respond by trotting out the Founders' most pious words, of which there are many (Franklin proposing prayer at the Constitutional Convention; Washington thanking God for His direct hand in revolutionary victories; etc., etc.). Liberals shoot back with the Founders' Enlightenment writings, and note their dependence on John Locke; fundamentalists respond that Locke helped the Carolinas write a theocentric constitution. But fundamentalist historians can also point, accurately, to the subsequent instances of overlooked religious influence in American history—not just Sergeant York's Christian trigger finger and Stonewall Jackson's tragic example but also the religious roots of abolitionism, the divine justification used to convert or kill Native Americans, the violent piety of presidents—not just Bush and Reagan but also Lincoln and McKinley and Wilson and even sweet Jimmy Carter, the first born-again president, led by God and Zbigniew Brzezinski to funnel anti-Communist dollars to the bloodthirsty Salvadoran regime.

The dupes, the saps, and the fools—the believers—prefer their re-enchanted past, alive to the dark magic with which all histories are constructed. For them America's past merely charts God's love, its meanings revealed to His key men, presidents and generals, preachers and a goy with a shofar. The rest of us are simply not part of the dream. Fundamentalism is writing us out of history. ■