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Blueprint for Theocracy: The Christian Right's Vision for America

James C. Sanford
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An exposé on the American religious right, this intelligent unveiling is a powerful call to action for secularists.

The latest book from historian James C. Sanford, *Blueprint for Theocracy*, traces the vocal religious right to its roots, arguing its strong historical ties to Calvinism and a level of ideological devotion which liberals would be imprudent to underestimate. The result is a chilling look at the power of determined discourse to modify whole cultural and political landscapes.

Sanford notes that the religious right had little political influence, or want for it, prior to the Reagan years. But the founding of the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition indicated fresh efforts to bring conservative Christian ideals to Washington, and Sanford argues that fundamentalist principles have been creeping into national discourse ever since.

Late chapters focus on recent trends toward the ensconcing of conservative Christian beliefs, toward “transforming culture and delegitimizing existing institutions.” The increased acceptability of declaring the United States a foundationally Christian nation and pushes away from scientific education are shown to be key amongst the successes of Christian worldview proponents.

Much of Sanford’s work is devoted to a fascinating and erudite historical and theological survey of the origins of such efforts. Such chapters act as an exposé, highlighting significant but understudied American religious thinkers, including Francis Schaeffer and Rousas John Rushdoony. Sanford shows that their worldviews arose out of an orthodox and reconstructionist form of Calvinism which lamented the brokenness of the modern world and the necessity of transforming it in order to ready it for Christ. (Sanford admits to favoring a more secular and welcoming national vision than that of the Christian right.) Their absolutism often results in downright theocratic aims, with Rushdoony chief amongst those advocating a turn toward theonomy in American law.

A late chapter controversially contends that the creeping influence of Rushdoony’s disciples can be compared to radical Islamic fundamentalists, with those not on the side of the religious right couched as enemies of the nation’s divinely ordained purposes: “on its short list [are] secularists, homosexuals, feminists, Muslims, liberals, environmentalists, and ‘activist’ judges, all targets whose actions are magnified and vilified.” The religious right will not be charmed by the comparison, though it reads as apt.

Sanford implores his readership to examine and confront the alien phenomenon of “an organized political movement driven by an absolute ideology”; his knowledgeable and thorough unveiling of that movement may be an effective clarion call for igniting such concerns.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (Summer 2014)

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