

THE *Final Straw*

A WEEKLY ANARCHIST SHOW

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Matthew Lyons on Christian Nationalism(s)

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we engage with them? Or how do we provide space for them to take a different path? I certainly think that's an important question. I don't know that I have any particular insights into that, except that, as with anyone, it's important to take seriously the experiences that people have had and let people tell their stories and engage with them in a way that's based on respect. And that doesn't necessarily mean that people who've just come out of a Quiverfull community have it all figured out. But, let's listen to what they have to say. And let's engage with them from the standpoint that people go into these movements for reasons that are human. It's not that they're simply brainwashed, or that it's based on madness or something like that. Right-wing movements attract people because they speak to the needs or desires or fears that people have. And those are very human things. And we have to find other ways to speak to people in human terms that don't talk down to them, that doesn't dismiss their realities, but offer a framework that respects all people and is about seeking human liberation, rather than a supremacist vision of the future.

TFSR: Yeah, thank you. It's a very big subject you've been talking about, I've had you on for a while. My questions have been a little scattered and trying to pick out a few different angles. But I'm wondering if there's anything that I didn't ask about that you want to touch on as we wrap this up?

ML: There probably is, but I'm drawing a blank right now. There probably is, but I'm drawing a blank.

TFSR: Matthew, thank you so much for taking the time to have this conversation and for all the research that you do. How can listeners follow and support your work?

ML: Thanks again for having me on. As you mentioned, I have a book that came out a few years ago, *Insurgent Supremacists: The US Far-Right Challenge to State and Empire* was published by PM Press and Kersplebedeb Publishing. I contribute regularly to the blog ThreeWayFight, which is threewayfight.blogspot.com. And I have a website, matthewnlyons.net, where people can find listings for my various writings. So thanks again, and I appreciate the good work that you're doing.

TFSR: Thank you very much.

This is a conversation with Matthew Lyons, antifascist researcher, contributor to Three Way Fight Blog and author of, among other books, *Insurgent Supremacists: The U.S. Far Right's Challenge to State and Empire* and contributor to the recent AK Press compilation, *No Pasarán: Antifascist Dispatches from a World in Crisis* (edited by Shane Burley). For the hour, Matthew talks about Christian Nationalist and theonomic tendencies and movements like New Apostolic Reformation, Dominionism, reactionary Catholicism and Christian Reconstructionism to learn more about how they interrelate or conflict with other far right tendencies in the so-called USA and the ongoing assault on bodily autonomy, abortion access and cis-hetero-patriarchy.

More of Matthews work can be found at [MatthewNLYons.Net](https://matthewnlyons.net)

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TFSR: I'm speaking with Matthew Lyons, Anti-Fascist researcher, activist, and author of multiple books including *Insurgent Supremacists: The US Far Right Challenge to State and Empire*. Matthew is also a contributor to the upcoming AK Press collection *No Pasaran* and is a longtime contributor to the blog *threewayfight.blogspot.com*. Thank you very much for joining. I really appreciate you having this conversation with me.

Matthew Lyons: Happy to be here. Thank you very much for the invitation.

TFSR: I've invited you on mostly to speak about the Christian far right, in particular, which is one of the focuses in your book, which has been behind increasing its sustained attacks around issues of gender, sexual equality, and liberation in the so-called USA, including these ramped up state by state erosion of abortion rights, education around sexuality, "CRT" and other topics, and also the recognition of non-cis-gender folks.

In May, you published an article on ThreeWayFight entitled *Abortion, the Christian right, and Anti-Fascism* that rehashes some of the content of your "Theocrats" chapter in *Insurgent Supremacists*. You began this blog entry with the line "It's time for anti-fascists to stop treating the Christian right as a secondary threat." I'd like to take this as a starting point. When you're talking about the Christian right, or the Christian far right, what tendencies are you talking about? What are some overlaps and distinctions in particular in how they understand patriarchy, gender, and sexuality? Broad brush.

ML: Well, the reason I lead with the comments about the need to stop treating the Christian right as a secondary threat is I think that, on the one hand, a Christian right represents a serious force for right-wing authoritarianism in the United States, but it doesn't fit into the standard categories that people think about when they talk about fascism or fascistic politics. And so it does tend to get less attention and less of a focus from people who see themselves as anti-fascist.

In very broad terms, when I talk about the Christian right in the US, I'm talking about a constellation of movements or organizations or networks that came together starting in the 1970s and have really had very impressive staying power, and have done a lot of work to build a multi-di-

And it's not just numbers, but it's also the organization and the funding and the degree of commitment that people in these movements display. So these are serious opponents that we need to contend with.

The other broad point I want to make about anti-fascist strategy is: to me, it's important to use a two-pronged approach. On the one hand, we need to work with a variety of political forces, with people with a variety of political views to build broad anti-fascist alliances, broad alliances to combat the far right in different contexts, whether that's in terms of mass protests in the media, different contexts. And also, the other approach is that it is equally necessary to have radical initiatives that are confronting and seeking to change the systemic oppression and exploitation, and institutional violence that's at the heart of how our society is organized. And these two approaches are sometimes seen as in opposition to each other, or that we need to subordinate one to the other. I think that may be true in specific moments and specific contexts. But overall, they're both important, and we need to find ways to pursue both of them. The far right is an immediate danger in terms of it's something that presents an immediate threat to many of us, and to a number of different communities. So, there is that immediacy that's needed to push against that. But the far right is also rooted in systemic oppression and the social order that gives rise to supremacist ideologies of different kinds. And so, unless we attack that systemic reality, it's just going to keep coming back.

Another side of it is also, as I mentioned earlier that the far right has this combination of trying to intensify oppression but also rebelling against the status quo, rebelling against the established elites and established institutions. And that means that it's a political force that feeds on people's anger at elites, it feeds on people's sense of being beaten down and disenfranchised. And if the Left wants to present a serious alternative as an oppositional force, it needs to offer an alternative, it needs to offer radical visions that speak to people's sense of disempowerment and people's anger, rather than simply take a defensive posture. So I think, again, there are ways that it's important in specific moments or specific contexts to join together around just holding actions but it would be a real mistake to just put any notion of radical social change on the backburner or say, "Oh, that's something we can't really afford to address at this time of a resurgent right." It would be self-defeating to take that approach of pure defensiveness.

You made the point about refugees from far-right communities or people who've been raised in a Christian theocratic context, how do

TFSR: So you've advocated anti-fascists focusing on the battleground of gender and bodily autonomy as anti-fascists. Notably, Anti Racist Action took that stance from the 1990s onward in defending abortion clinics as another front of liberation struggles.

So in terms of strategy, in terms of anti-fascists approaching theocratic movements, Christian far-right movements, and trying to counter them, I wonder what you think we're missing in the approach or in these conversations that we're having about how we can combat the toxic spread of theocracy? Some of the strongest advocates that I've met just anecdotally in my life have been people that have escaped from homeschooling situations or from Quiverfull families or what have you. And I think that there's something there to work with. But I wonder what you have to say as far as the movement goes?

ML: Well, I guess there are a couple broad things I would say about anti-fascist strategy in this context. First off, one is that coming back to the point where we started this conversation, it's important for anti-fascists not just to treat the Christian Right as a secondary issue, which I think is tied in with this question of what's the role of race versus other points of issues of social oppression and what does fascism center on. To me, the white nationalist vision of creating an all-white homeland, whether that's through migration or mass expulsion or genocide, are all horrific visions that need to be combated, no question. At the same time, the political vision that Christian theocrats put forward of a society where everybody is subordinate to their version of Christian ideology, and that is something that comes down with particular severity on women, on queer folks, on trans folks. Even if it is not directly targeting People of Color, that in itself is a horrific vision. It's something that needs to be combated on its own terms. And not only if it is something that is seen as supporting a white nationalist vision.

So, I think that in terms of just where people on the left and within anti-fascist circles, where people see the major sources of danger and a political threat coming from, it's important to pay attention to Christian theocratic forces, especially because some of these forces are enormous. I mentioned earlier that it was an estimate of the New Apostolic Reformation having something like 3 million supporters in the United States. Even if that's off by an order of magnitude, that's still enormous. And it's far, far greater than groups such as the Oathkeepers or Constitutional Sheriffs or the Proud Boys, let alone any smaller neo-Nazi groups that are out there.

mensional movement that includes everything from lobbying groups and thinktanks to, just, very grassroots prayer cells and neighborhood church networks. So it's very much of a full-scale social movement. In political terms, the Christian right is unified by a broad goal of making their interpretation of Christianity central and dominant to the US. But that certainly means several different things. And I would say that in broad terms, there's a division within the movement between what you could characterize as "reformist" versus "revolutionary" branches where there's a majority that wants to bring about certain changes within the existing political systems such as banning abortion, suppressing homosexuality and gender nonconformity, reintroducing prayer in the schools, bringing back Creationism as a supposedly legitimate field of study and things like this. And then, on the other hand, there is a minority faction or current that is very powerful and influential. It says that it's not possible to bring about our vision of an ethical Christian society within the existing framework so there is a need, they say, to replace the existing framework with what essentially amounts to a theocracy.

This, in contrast to, say, white nationalists who center their political vision on race, the Christian right vision of a theocratic future really puts gender and sexuality at the center, rather than race. And it is very much a patriarchal, heterosexist, and transphobic vision that is pretty scary. They have a romanticized image of the past, of how men and women's supposedly lived in a harmonious but hierarchical manner, with women very clearly limited to homemaking roles, wife and mother kinds of roles, and sex being defined as something that is for procreation, these standard traditionalist patriarchal ideas. So there are different versions of the theocratic model that they advocate. Some of them are very much based on a centralized big state, while others are actually based on a very decentralized model of state power, which nonetheless is extremely authoritarian and repressive. so it doesn't necessarily all fit together in terms of people's preconceptions about what far-right authoritarianism looks like.

TFSR: So it has quite a spectrum. But as you say, the central Crux around which a lot of the political organizing occurs counter-poses to ethno-nationalists who focus on nationalities. This idea that sexual reproduction, the expansion of the Christian population in the country, the pushing out of ideologies or belief systems that they view as standing in counter to that and imposition of the accuracy.

One of the umbrellas that come up throughout your book is Christian Reconstructionism. And at first, I was going to glibly compare this to a vision of *The Handmaid's Tale*, but maybe that's a bit flat. Can you talk about some of the roots of Christian Reconstructionism? Are there analogs with other theocratic or theonomic regimes around the world? And also, what's Dominionism and how does it relate to Christian Reconstructionism?

ML: Okay, Christian reconstructionism is a particular ideological current within the Christian right that was founded in the 1960s by R.J. Rushdoony, who was a Presbyterian. In theological terms, it's rooted in certain versions of Presbyterianism, which is originally a branch of Calvinism. But over the decades, it's certainly spread and it's not limited to Presbyterians, in terms of who its activists and leaders have been. In political terms, it is based on the idea that, as I said, we need to replace the existing political system with a full-on theocracy, or they call it theonomy, based on their interpretation of biblical law, and it is a pretty grim interpretation indeed. This would involve disenfranchising women, relegalizing slavery, and making the death penalty punishment for homosexuality or adultery, heresy, and many other crimes. And it is a current that has never been a very large movement in its own right, but it is very influential in terms of helping to shape and guide larger forces within the Christian right.

For example, Pat Robertson, who was a longtime televangelist and founded the Christian Coalition, which was a major force starting in the 1980s. His approach to politics was very much influenced by Christian Reconstructionism. Similarly, Randall Terry founded Operation Rescue, an organization that used civil disobedience tactics in the service of trying to suppress abortion providers and the availability of abortion. He was very much influenced by Christian Reconstructionism. It's a movement that has been particularly influential in the most violent and terroristic wing of the anti-abortion movement. A number of the leading figures in that movement have themselves been proponents of Christian Reconstructionism. Another person of note is Larry Pratt, who was the longtime head of Gun Owners of America, which has been described as a gun rights organization to the right of the NRA. And Larry Pratt also, somebody who played a significant role in helping to launch the Patriot militia movement in the 1990's. These are some examples of the ways that the movement has played a larger role.

You also asked about Dominionism. One of the things that Chris-

within the right, who have pretty odious politics around immigration, but it's just something that they would not necessarily promote themselves. So, there is this complicated dance that some of these groups have tried to follow, because there are essentially conflicting aims or conflicting demands on them, in terms of how they could build their base or reach out to more people.

TFSR: You did use the term "Christian Fascism" when talking about Coughlin and the movement that he was involved with, and I've been hearing that term coming up a lot recently, or Christofascism. One figure that I can think of that would fall into that tendency that I want to mention is the former Asheville William Dudley Pelley and his Silver Shirt Movement in the 1930's-40's. Is Christian Fascism an apt term to describe any of the groups that you've been talking about today in this conversation?

ML: Well, it depends on what we mean by fascism. There's no general agreement about what Fascism is within the left, let alone more broadly in society. There's a common-sense notion of fascism that many people have in which white supremacist ideology is a major piece of the picture. So, if that is part of your definition of fascism, then a lot of the Christian right is not going to fit that.

It's more useful to use the term fascism somewhat more broadly. To me, fascism is an approach to politics that is about mobilizing or trying to mobilize masses of people to bolster or intensify systems of oppression and social hierarchy, but also to challenge the established political order and the established political elites. It has both an oppressive and a rebellious aspect. But to me, it does not necessarily have to center on race, on intensifying racial oppression and racist ideology directly. I would argue that the section of the Christian right that advocates not just specific changes, such as outlawing abortion or bringing back school prayer but [that] advocates a more comprehensive transformation of society based on an authoritarian political vision: I think it's appropriate to call that fascist. But we need to be clear about what we mean when we use the term, otherwise, it just becomes this epithet that gets thrown around. So if that concept of fascism makes sense to you, then I would say, use it that way. But if your concept of fascism is more specific to a white nationalist division, then it doesn't fit most of the Christian Right, except for that limited section of the Christian Right that directly supports white nationalism.

ligion over race as a central crux within it, which distinguishes them from other elements in the US far right. You've mentioned also that the New Apostolic Reformation is a much less blanket white movement.

I wonder if you could talk a little bit more about your understanding of how this tendency or how the far-right Christian movements in general, broad brush, deal with immigration in the US. I know that a lot of the anti-Catholic perspectives on the West Coast have been formulated around fears of immigrants from Latin America bringing in Catholicism, for instance, and the social values that they believe are carried with that. Do you see a shift in the way that the Christian far right has been thinking about immigration? And how it relates to the ethno-nationalist tendencies in other parts of the US far right.

ML: Yeah, that's a good question. It's been a complicated story. My sense is that for much of its earlier history, the Christian right didn't really focus on issues of immigration and was not particularly aligned with anti-immigrant scapegoating. So I'm talking about the 1970's through maybe the 1990's or so. Certainly, during that time, you did start to see significant anti-immigrant organizing coming back into the fore. It's been, a recurrent theme in US history. But that was a period when it was starting to be on the upsurge again. Initially, the Christian right was really not playing to that theme. But after some time, I'm not sure exactly when, but sometime in the early 2000's, that started to shift, and you started to see much more use of anti-immigrant scapegoating by sections of the Christian right because they saw it as something popular with their base or potential support base that they were trying to appeal to. So they saw it as something that would help win support.

At the same time, they've also been interested in reaching out to immigrants themselves, in many cases, whether we're talking about Catholics or evangelicals coming from Latin America, coming from other parts of the world. There are significant groups there that the Christian right has seen as people that they could hope to attract. And in the case of the New Apostolic Reformation, they've been pretty successful to a degree at doing that. So that's the particular section of the Christian right that, as far as I can tell, has really steered clear of anti-immigrant scapegoating themselves. There may be exceptions, but I think that's generally been the case, which is not to say that their politics have been good around immigrant rights. They've been perfectly amenable to working with others

tian Reconstructionism in particular has advocated is the notion that Christians have a duty to God to "take dominion" over society at large and to basically take control over all of the leading institutions of society, from the government to the educational system, the media, and so on. You started to see, in the 70's and later, this notion of taking Dominion spreading to other forces within the Christian right. That's where the term Dominionism comes from. There are different versions of that: some people make a distinction between so-called Soft Dominionism and Hard Dominionism, depending on how intensive and how comprehensive your notion of imposing theocratic rule would be. But these are all notions that have become central and defining for the Christian right as a whole in one form or another in Christian Reconstructionism. Certainly, it's not the only place that they come from, but it's been one of the major influencing pieces of that picture.

TFSR: Another main wing of the Christian far right that you spend some time on and Insurgent Supremacists is the New Apostolic Reformation. Could you talk a little bit about this tendency, and how it relates to other branches of Christianity?

ML: Sure, New Apostolic Reformation is a movement that has different names. It's been called Kingdom Now, Seven Mountains Theology, and other names. Again, in theological terms, it's actually rooted in the Pentecostal and charismatic tradition. So, this is a whole subset of Christianity that, among other things, believes in the current-day practice of miracles, such as faith healing and the availability of prophecy to leaders within the movement, who claim to be able to basically give voice to what God has foretold about the future.

So within this broad theological current, there are different political currents, but there have been various right-wing tendencies, among others. And they came together most clearly starting in the 1990s around this concept of an apostolic reformation. And part of what they did is they took some of the Dominionist ideas that came partly from Christian Reconstructionism and combined them with some of the theological and organizational principles from the Pentecostal and charismatic traditions. So the result is something that resembles Christian Reconstructionism in the sense that it is a theocratic movement. It's a movement that advocates comprehensive control of society and imposition of their version of Christianity on society as a whole. But it's also quite different in certain

ways. One thing, whereas the Christian Reconstructionists advocate a decentralized model of theocracy, the New Apostolic Reformation is very much based on a centralized version. And it's also been much more effective in galvanizing a mass movement. The numbers are- I haven't seen what I would call reliable numbers - but one estimate from 2013 places the number of people involved in New Apostolic-associated churches in the United States alone at 3 million people, with millions more in other countries.

It's also very different in terms of its racial and ethnic composition. Christian Reconstructionism has always been pretty much all-white. But the New Apostolic Movement has a genuinely multiracial and multi-ethnic character, and is also quite international, as I said, with significant branches in Latin America and Asia, Africa. So that's quite different. And the positions that they've taken on issues of race, and also actually issues of gender, have been more sophisticated in a sense. When you look at Christian Reconstructionism, it has tended to either be silent on issues of race, or, in some cases, some of the leaders have embraced, more or less, overtly white supremacist positions, for example, supporting neo-Confederate politics. New Apostolic Reformation has actually taken a very different approach. There are some leaders within the movement who advocate a "colorblind" ideology of basically claiming to just treat everybody as an individual. But others actually advocate confronting and opposing racial injustice, at least, within some context, or at least in words. So, that in itself is very different.

And while Christian Reconstructionism has always been very male-dominated in terms of who is actually seen as having the capacity to be in leadership roles, New Apostolic Reformation from the beginning included women in prominent roles and important leadership roles, and to some degree has been a space where women have been able to speak out against male domination and to challenge misogynistic interpretations of Christianity. And I think it's important to be careful about this because, to my view, it's not that these characteristics make New Apostolic Reformation more progressive or somehow less dangerous. Rather, it's an example of a far-right movement taking elements of progressive or even radical politics and distorting them and harnessing them for goals and purposes that are fundamentally reactionary or right-wing or fascistic. And thereby deflecting a lot of criticism and also channeling some of the frustrations and rebelliousness that people may have... Channeling that into initiatives that end up bolstering hierarchy and bolstering oppression. The New Ap-

came earlier. And that's an important part of it. But the Christian Right forces, and specifically Christian Reconstructionists, were also there right from the beginning. Larry Pratt who I mentioned earlier was the leader of Gun Owners of America and an advocate of Reconstructionist ideas about politics. He was advocating the formation of citizen militias in the 1980's. Well before anybody was talking about, them in the national media. Matthew Trehwella, another Reconstructionist leader, advocated forming citizen militias in the context of the anti-abortion rights movement in early 1990's. So these were very much present from the beginning as part of the mix that created the patriot movement as a hybrid, a blending of a number of different right-wing currents.

And that is something that has carried through to the current-day version. The Patriot movement has had its ups and downs and had a big upsurge in the 1990's. It collapsed for a number of years and had another upsurge starting, at least partly in response to the election of Barack Obama as the first black president of the United States. And it's continued to be a significant force, since then. But currents within the patriot movement, such as the Sovereign Citizens, which is a particular branch of Patriot ideology that claims that each person can in legal terms be a country unto themselves, and they can declare that they are no longer subject to United States authority. This is very much rooted in the mix of white nationalist and Christian theocratic ideas, along with other right-wing ideas that came out of the gun rights movement, the anti-environmental movement, and the John Birch Society as a Cold War era champion of conspiracist ideology. All these different currents coming together to Sovereign Citizens is one offshoot of that. The Constitutional Sheriffs organization, which was founded about 10 or 12 years ago, has become an important Patriot movement organization. The founder of the constitutional sheriffs, Richard Mack, is actually somebody who worked for Gun Owners of America along with Larry Pratt, so that doesn't necessarily mean that he had exactly the same views, but I'm sure that they would have had some pretty interesting political discussions there in which Christian Reconstructionist idea has certainly been in the mix. So these are all examples of the interplay that we've had between Christian theocratic political currents and other far-right political forces within the patriot movement and in other contexts.

TFSR: You've made the point that many of the far-right Christian movements we've been talking about often center patriarchy and re-

were involved in Libertarian organizations early in their careers and in conjunction with the development of Reconstructionist ideology. And I think that the connection there is basically the idea of limited government. The Reconstructionists have been dubbed “Libertarian theocrats,” because they want to impose their theocratic rule through small-scale governmental institutions, as well as non-governmental institutions, such as the family and the church. But at the same time, their notion of liberty is based on the idea that humans must submit themselves to God’s authority in any attempt to develop ideas or lines of thinking that are outside of that... That any such effort is sinful, wrong, and satanic. And so it just really calls into question what are we even talking about when we talk about liberty. But, I’m sure they would argue that it is a liberty, but it’s not a concept of liberty that seems meaningful to me. I’m sure others within the Christian right who would stop short of this very hardline notion of submission to God’s will, but that is a concept that you do see in watered-down versions in other places, too.

TFSR: Another point in *Insurgent Supremacists* – I really enjoy the construction, the way you put chapters leading one into another to show the relationships between far-right movements – you point out how the patriot movement grew, in part, out of the racial supremacist right and groups such as Posse Comitatus, and later gaining an infusion of Christian fundamentalist perspectives in a uniquely American manner. Can you talk about how the Christian far right relates to current tendencies such as Sovereign Citizens or, more importantly, things like Constitutional Sheriffs? And how does this devolution of civil authority relate to the concept of democracy?

ML: Well, I want to just correct a little bit of what you said there. To me, the Christian Right influence was there from the very beginning in the formation of the Patriot movement. It wasn’t something that came later. The Patriot movement came to prominence in the early to mid-1990’s, with the formation of hundreds of so-called “citizen militias” and related groups around the country that were spurred on by fears that there was a plot by globalist elites who were trying to impose a dictatorship on the United States. And so people needed to rise up and defend themselves against it. And a lot of critics of this movement have emphasized the ways that it carried forward ideas and currents rooted in white nationalism and rooted in neo-Nazi and white supremacist movements of the years that

ostolic Reformation leaders may, in some cases, speak out against racial injustice, but they’re also speaking out against abortion rights, they’re speaking out in favor of transphobic laws and suppression of any gender nonconformity. And they’ve been very outspoken in supporting Donald Trump’s politics and just the whole Make America Great Again approach to politics. So it’s not in any sense a progressive movement but rather something that uses elements of progressive politics in a very dangerous way.

TFSR: Yeah, it, in fact, sounds quite regressive. Jumping back to what you were saying about the occasional cording of racial supremacist perspectives by Christian Reconstructionism. Just to put a point on the position of them working with neo-Confederates at times. Can you talk a little bit about the historical vision that they in particular, but either of the groups, has of not only what the United States or iterations within the United States, such as the Antebellum South? Or what the vision of America was to be as a “City on a Hill” or as an example of a puritanical institution? Because it seems like they’re trying to make what their vision of America being great again is theonomy.

ML: The phrase puritanical is a good one. In the sense that the Puritans, some of the founders of American settler colonialism back in the 17th century, the Puritans were Calvinists, who were theological relatives of the founders of Christian Reconstructionism in the sense of their vision of society being something that was based on certain notions of obedience to God’s law and so on.

As I said, there are different versions of the divisions that these groups have with the Reconstructionists having a very decentralized approach. Basically, their notion is that the theocracy would be exercised through the family, through the church, and through local institutions, primarily, with central governmental institutions, playing much more of a secondary role. Whereas the New Apostolic Reformation, and I think some of the other forces within the Christian right, take much more of a big State approach. And I should mention that the New Apostolic Reformation has also cultivated some pretty active ties with prominent politicians: folks, such as Sarah Palin, former vice presidential candidate; Rick Perry, who was governor of Texas and then was in Trump’s cabinet; Sam Brownback, who was a senator and governor from Kansas; and other folks. So even though they have this comprehensive vision of basically get-

ting rid of the system of government that the US has, they also have done a lot to work with politicians who are involved in the system.

TFSR: So in *Insurgent Supremacists*, you decided not to cover reactionary Roman Catholicism because it's not a distinctly US-based movement. But as an ex-Catholic myself, despite a sense of falling numbers of membership in the Church, it seems like there is a rise in right-wing strains, such as those which produce people like Steve Bannon or Amy Coney Barrett, or historically, the trajectory of Father Charles Coughlin and his National Union of Social Justice back in the 1930's. Do you see any ascendant reactionary Roman Catholicism as one of these other groups that are posing a threat? And do you see in that an influence from a renewed Christian Charismatic Movement? Or does it seem like it's just the same monster coming back, the same reactionary Catholicism?

ML: Certainly, reactionary Catholicism has played a significant role within the broader Christian right in its current form, all along. And, as you say, there are much older roots. Charles Coughlin, in the 1930s, was one of the most, if not the most influential leaders of what was really a fascist movement at that time in the US. And it was striking that as a Catholic priest, at a time when anti-Catholicism was still a major force within the US and certainly within sectors of the far right. So carrying that forward, during the period of the Cold War, there were many right-wing, Catholic leaders who, in some cases, had ties with right-wing Catholic forces within or in exile from Eastern Europe under the Soviet bloc. So, there is a distinct tradition of right-wing Catholicism, that is being invoked or being built upon by right-wing Catholics today.

One of the things that have been distinctive about the modern Christian right has been its ability to build bridges and alliances between right-wing Protestants and Catholics, in contrast to earlier movements that were often separated and where, as I said, anti-Catholicism was often a major force and was interconnected with anti-immigrant sentiment targeting first Irish Catholics, but then later Italians and other immigrant groups. But the Christian Right has really been successful at setting those and other sectarian divisions aside for political purposes. So you have seen several organizations such as Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition, for example, which might be majority Protestant but with a significant Catholic presence within it. And then you've also had other organizations

which are specifically Catholic, taking, for example, the Human Life International, which has been a leading Catholic anti-abortion group for a number of decades, and others. And it's interesting, there have been a number of prominent right-wing evangelical Protestants who have actually converted to Catholicism, such as Sam Brownback, who I mentioned earlier, the political leader from Kansas.

I'm interested to learn more about Amy Coney Barrett. I confess that I haven't really delved into her political history that much, but I know that she comes out of an organization called People of Praise, which is a Catholic charismatic group. Charismatic being a movement within Christianity that cuts across the division between Protestants and Catholics. But People of Praise being specifically a Catholic group within that, and one that I believe has had significant ties with leaders within the New Apostolic Reformation movement. So, I don't know that it would be accurate to say that Amy Coney Barrett herself is affiliated with New Apostolic Reformation, I've never heard that claim made. But there are certainly some at least indirect connections and, I'm sure, some significant resonances between her politics in there. I think there are definitely a number of threads that will be important to explore further.

TFSR: I'd be interested in hearing how you think the concept of liberty is espoused by many of these tendencies that also simultaneously are trying to lead a coordinated movement towards theocracy. For instance, I recall adherence to the right-wing Libertarian Party used to make stances of being socially liberal. This is at least when I was growing up in the 90's and early 2000's, around drug use, around sexuality in a way that seemed to set them apart from others on the right. That was something they touted, and they were really proud of that. But it seems like a lot of people in the Libertarian movement have embraced this theocratic vision. If you could talk a little bit about how does the concept – to your understanding – of liberty coincide with implementing God's will?

ML: Libertarianism is a term that covers a number of different political approaches or different philosophies. But there's a long-standing, certainly, the several-decades-old relationship between libertarianism and Christian Reconstructionism. Specifically, there were a number of important founding leaders of Christian Reconstructionism, such as R.J. Rushdoony, who I mentioned earlier, and Gary North, another important leader, who