Introduction:

I have been studying and writing about the Religious Right for more than twenty five years. As an undergraduate political science major in 1980 I became interested in American political conflict and the values from which it derives; that interest shaped my scholarly agenda through graduate school, my teaching as an assistant professor, and several publications including my first book. I have studied the theology of the Religious Right and their repeated reincarnation as a social movement; I have studied their approaches to education, their conflicts over gender, abortion and gay rights, their influence in popular culture in terms of music and fiction, their battles over creationism, sex education, and civil disobedience. Only now, as I find myself mid career and working on new book, am I starting to see a way to understand this movement coherently and in the larger context of American political discourse.

Two issues have dogged me in my attempt to understand American political conflict: opponents (on both the Left and the Right) too often seem to be talking past one another and too often, it seems to me, partisan identity trumps reasoned argument (again, on both the Left and the Right). Explanations have typically come either from
progressive intellectuals who see the problem as some sort of false consciousness on the Right or from Conservatives who view the Left as paralyzed by “tolerance” and relativism to the point that all it can offer is handouts to various interests groups in exchange for power. To me, these explanations offered little more than additional examples of the problem: both sides putting forth theories that make no sense to the other and both sides so ensconced in their “team identity” that they can’t get out of their own language. My tentative conclusion had been that what matters is group identity—not ideas.

Over the past year or so I have begun to explore the field of cognitive science as it pertains to this question. In particular the work of cognitive linguist George Lakoff has proven helpful in developing an explanation for “how liberals and conservatives think,” doing justice to the observable reality while offering a more sophisticated way of understanding ideas such that they do matter—just not in the way that “common sense” might dictate. Yet Lakoff himself is a “progressive” and sees his work as a blueprint for reinvigoration of the Left. In fact, some of his critics have charged that his “solution” is too simple that “we” can’t just overhaul American political culture by simply changing the “frame” of the debate. I have no such agenda and the limitations of his political strategy are not my concern. I’m interested in a theoretical model that helps explain how our political culture works, and I think his model offers that. What I think needs to be developed, however, is the portrait of conservatives made possible by this model. Despite his efforts, Lakoff often details Conservatism through his own progressive worldview and, therefore, still ends up with a caricature. In discussing freedom, for example, Lakoff writes:
If you are a fundamentalist Christian and believe in a “purpose driven life” where God has a purpose for you and you have to achieve it to get into heaven and avoid the eternal torture of hell, the freedoms to achieve God’s purpose for you take on cosmic proportions.2

The reference here is to Rick Warren’s best selling book *The Purpose Driven Life,* which is more accurately labeled evangelical than fundamentalist.3 Warren, incidentally has be criticized recently by more conservative Christians for inviting Barak Obama to speak from the pulpit of his Saddleback Community Church. And, more importantly, most (maybe even all) Christians believe that God takes a purposeful interest in the lives of people. But even the most fundamentalist don’t think that has to do with earning salvation and/or avoiding hell.

The examples of the ways in which Lakoff doesn’t seem to “get” these folks are not all this blatant. In a later section on the concept of “harm” as an impediment to freedom he uses the debate over the minimum wage to explore how what counts as “harm” is different for Progressives and Conservatives.4 He writes: “Many Progressives believe that a low minimum wage harms workers, while conservatives tend to believe that raising the minimum wage harms business.”5 This is a distorted framing of the conservative view. Conservatives actually believe that raising the minimum wage hurts workers by eliminating jobs and by impeding the freedom of workers to choose whether to work for the amount of money offered. And since the conservatives think in terms of individuals, it’s not about business anyway but about the freedom of two individuals (a worker and an employer) to come to their own agreement without the interference of government.
If one wishes to read Lakoff’s book as a political manual for the Left, this
distinction makes little difference. And in fact, one might conclude that conservatives
“don’t really think this way, this is just what they argue.” But that circumvents Lakoff’s
stated interest (and my own interest) in constructing a theory about how political
language works.\(^6\)

Furthermore, Lakoff uses language that lends rhetorical legitimacy to his own
progressive worldview. For example, at the beginning of *Whose Freedom: the battle over
America’s most important idea*, Lakoff explains that conservatives have recently been
winning the battle over the meaning of freedom, wresting it from an older “more
traditional” meaning that is the progressive’s version. He writes that “The traditional
idea of freedom is progressive...America has been a nation of activists, consistently
expanding its most treasured freedoms.” \(^7\) While we can certainly see American history
this way (and I am sympathetic to this narrative) activists must be active in a context; if
they are *expanding* freedom, they are, by definition, challenging an older—more
“traditional” view of freedom. In fact, the whole category of “traditionalism” is
problematic. First, it presumes an authority by virtue of precedent. And second, we
know from the study of Comparative Religion, traditions are being imagined and
constructed all the time and one of the most effective tools for legitimating social order is
to hide its constructedness behind mythic “traditionalism.” Examples such as these could
be multiplied, seemingly without end—though it’s not necessary to do so here.

Using Lakoff’s model of how moral and political reasoning works, and drawing on
my own work on the Religious Right—especially the Christian Reconstructionists whom
I have argued laid the intellectual and theological foundation for the Religious Right\(^8\),
what follows is an effort to develop a more nuanced outline of the metaphorical backdrop
to the conservative Christian worldview. Lakoff, writes that

Conservatives have a deeper insight into their worldviews than liberals have into theirs...The family and morality are central to both worldviews. But where conservatives are relatively aware of how their politics relates to the views of family life and morality, liberals are less aware of the implicit view of morality and the family that organizes their own political beliefs.  

I will start with an outline of the most relevant parts of Lakoff’s work and then lay out some of the key components of the Religious Right’s worldview connecting it with what I see as its origins in the Reconstructionist movement—showing how an obscure theological movement made its way in to the popular American political culture of the Religious Right. As we shall see, Lakoff’s theory has an added benefit of addressing what has been a criticism of my position that the Reconstructionists are an important influence: the leaders of the Religious Right deny ties and rank and file activists have often not even heard of Reconstructionism.  It’s important to be clear about the limitations of my claim: First, I am not arguing that the influence of the Christian Reconstructionists takes the form of clearly identifiable leaders who embrace an organization known as Christian Reconstructionism. The influence I’m pointing to is much more subtle, implicit, and hidden than that. Second, I am not arguing that Rushdoony’s early formulation of Christian Reconstruction remains unchanged. In fact there have developed several important areas of disagreement especially over the centrality of the family but Rushdoony’s formulation has shaped the strict father family metaphor to which Lakoff points. Third, I am not arguing that the persistence of this
influence is consistent across the movement we know as the Religious Right. On the contrary, I have argued consistently that conservative American Protestantism is a diverse, complex movement having developed from a variety of sources. And in fact, the influence of the Christian Reconstructionists is far more explicitly present in some places (Patrick Henry College, Worldview Weekend and Summit Ministries, the work of Tim LaHaye, some parts of the right to life movement, as examples) than in others. Until now, I have held that Religious Right leaders deny the ties to Reconstructionists because the Reconstructionist writings are often so extreme that the leaders of the Religious Right don’t want to be identified with them. But I have held that the popular translation of the ideas is so consistent, and the evidence of ties between the Reconstructionists and the early leaders of the Religious Right common enough that the influence is undeniable. Also, I point to the important work of other scholars: Mark Juergensmeyer, Sara Diamond, Michelle Goldberg and Randall Balmer, who each discuss Reconstructionists and their influence on the contemporary Religious Right.10 Lakoff’s model, however, points to a better explanation for the influence of the Reconstructionists in the context of the Religious Right activists’ denial of the tie, but we’ll return to this. I also think that we can flesh out Lakoff’s conservative metaphor of the “strict Father Family” by looking more deeply into the Reconstructionist worldview.

Lakoff: How we think

Lakoff uses the notion of “folk theories” to articulate the distinction between what we think is going on in our everyday reality from what work in cognitive linguistics
suggests is really going on. Our folk theories about how language works are based in the assumption that words have single, clearly delineated meanings that are related to conditions “out there.” The structure of the ideas that make up political discourse explains how those ideas can, at the same time, seem straightforward in their meanings and also be profoundly contested. That is, since we all know what freedom is, those people who disagree with “us” must not believe in freedom. According to Lakoff, abstract notions, those most central to moral and political discourse, consist of simple uncontested “cores” surrounded by unspecified details. So “Simple Freedom,” is relatively uncontested while the “unspecified details” of freedom, such as what counts as illegitimate coercion, are disputed. And when someone asserts that “freedom is freedom is freedom,” he or she is in part right, as long as we’re talking about “simple freedom.” But when we’re talking about freedom as it bears on moral and political discourse (that is, filling in the unspecified details) the meaning is much less clear.

Much of our thinking, Lakoff says, is not conscious. “We think using conceptual systems not readily accessible to our consciousness and…conceptual metaphor is part of our normal thought process.” According to Lakoff, moral thinking is imaginative and depends fundamentally on metaphorical understanding. For example, one might argue that “justice is necessary for freedom.” In Lakoff’s model, the logical rational connection between these two ideas is dependent upon metaphors that precede them and give them content: “Justice” for some has to do with equal rights while for others it is centrally punishment for criminal behavior; “Freedom” might be the opportunity to flourish as a creative human being or, alternatively, the lack of outside constraints. The meanings we
bring to these words determine the possible logical connection between them.

Summarizing with regard to Freedom, he writes:

    Freedom is a frame based concept, defined within a mental structure and not just
    free floating. And even in its simple uncontested form, it is thoroughly
    metaphorical, which means that, though it is abstract it is grounded viscerally in
    bodily experience.\textsuperscript{15}

    Lakoff argues that family model metaphors provide the basis for contemporary
political worldviews and he specifies two versions: the Strict Father and the Nurturant
Parent. These two models are discussed at length in Lakoff’s work so I won’t detail them
further here, other than to say that the Strict Father Metaphor underlies the conservative
understanding of basic values and political discourse and that, while Lakoff’s articulation
of the dimensions of the Nurturant Parent Metaphor and the Progressive worldview is
clear and convincing, his explication of the Strict Father Metaphor and the Conservative
worldview is deeply flawed.

\textbf{Christian Reconstruction and the Religious Right’s Family Metaphor}

    Lakoff says that conservatives are much more clear, than liberals are, about their
views of family and the implications of those views for their political worldview. What
I’m arguing here is that Lakoff is correct: the Religious Right’s worldview is grounded in
a particular understanding of family. And furthermore, it is no accident that their
political agenda is clearly connected to this metaphor. As early as the 1960s and well
into the 1980s Christian Reconstructionists developed their version of this metaphor,
consciously woven into a “Biblical worldview,” and advocated that Christians should go
about transforming the world, by bringing it “under the Lordship of Christ.” This “transformation” was to have a decidedly political cast: Christians should run for office and elect other Christians, and Christians should remove their children from the influence of “the world” so as to raise them up to be a generation of leaders to complete the task.

In previously published work, I have argued that studies that date the origins of the Religious Right to 1980 have missed the groundwork laid through the 1960s and 1970s by a small group of fundamentalists known as the Christian Reconstructionists. I documented the ties between the published works of the Reconstructionists and the mid-to-late twentieth century leaders of the Religious Right, traced their ideas from their formulation in the Reconstructionist works to the popularized versions that made their way into contemporary Christian culture and then showed how they were disseminated in fundamentalist churches through study guides and Christian school (and home school) curricula.

In this essay I will tease out the “Strict Father metaphor” that underlies the discourse of the Religious Right as it is framed in the efforts of Rousas John Rushdoony, to develop a “biblical worldview.” This present work is part of a larger project in which I will explore further the popularization of this worldview and its implementation as a political strategy by looking at some of the work of Reconstructionist author and publisher Gary North and then examine some of the contemporary institutions that embody and promote this worldview: Generation Joshua, Worldview Weekends, Summit Ministries and Patrick Henry College.

**Christian Reconstruction**
Over the forty years that Christian Reconstructionists have been writing and promoting their views, there have been significant changes, developments variations and even divisions within the movement. Two figures: Rousas John Rushdoony and Gary North have been especially central and in the larger project I will draw significantly on their works, though this is not to say that the contributions of others are not also important. In looking at the early formulation of the Reconstructionist system I will draw primarily on the work of Rushdoony. His earliest works lay the epistemological foundation and argue that Theonomy (that is, God’s Law as it is revealed in the Old and New Testaments) is the necessary foundation for all knowledge. These include By What Standard (1958), Intellectual Schizophrenia (1961), The Messianic Character of American Education (1963), and The Mythology of Science (1967). Having developed his critique of all systems of thought not rooted in Biblical revelation, Rushdoony then moves to explicate the biblical worldview in his Institutes of Biblical Law (1973). In other words, the earliest works seek to explain what’s wrong with the world and then IBL lays out a vision for a world based in Biblical principles.

Rushdoony begins his project with a development of the presuppositionalist epistemology of Cornelius van Til. For Rushdoony, the fundamental question concerns authority: what is its source and how do we live appropriately in light of it. His answer is that there are only two possible sources for authority (and therefore law): God (leading to life) and Man (leading to death.) If we are looking at Lakoff’s metaphors for family (strict father and nurturing parent) we see readily the implications of this emphasis. But Rushdoony doesn’t leave us to see it by implication, in fact he very explicitly explores
what this means for family and by extension for all of society. It is to this explication that we now turn.

Rushdony’s *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (IBL) is a lengthy (890 pages in the first of two volumes alone) commentary on the 10 Commandments and the relevant “case law” from other parts of the Bible.¹⁷ It has often been called Rushdoony’s most important work and, written in the three year period before its publication in 1973, it represented something of a culmination of his previous work. In the Introduction, Rushdoony explains that the contemporary Christian notion that the New Testament replaced “the law” with “grace,” is heresy.

“It is modern heresy that holds that the law of God holds no meaning nor any binding force for man today. It is an aspect of the influence of humanistic and evolutionary thought on the church, and it posits and evolving, developing god. This “dispensational” god expressed himself in an earlier age, then expressed himself by grace alone, and is now perhaps to express himself in some other way. But this is not the God of scripture who grace and law remain the same in every age…”¹⁸

The purpose of Rushdoony’s IBL is to institute “consideration of that law which must govern society, and which shall govern society under God.”¹⁹ He explains that the Ten Commandments lay out general principles of law (which he says even the most “antinomian” of Christians accept) but that a true understanding of Biblical law requires the detailed examination of the application of the principles in specific cases found throughout the Bible. “The law, then, *first* asserts principles, *second*, it cites cases to
develop the implications of those principles, and, *third*, the law has as its purpose the direction and *the restitution of God’s order*” (italics in original).\(^{20}\)

“We must conclude that *authority is not only a religious concept but also a total one*. It involves the recognition at every point of our lives of God’s absolute law-order. The starting point of this recognition is the family: honor they father and thy mother,” Out of this commandment, with its requirement that children submit to and obey their parents under God, comes the basic and fundamental training in religious authority. If the authority of the home is denied, it means that man is in revolution against the fabric and structure of life, and against life itself.

Obedience thus carries the promise of life”\(^{21}\) (italics in the original).

According to Rushdoony, Biblical authority is God’s authority, delegated to humans who exercise dominion under God’s law. He argues that God has ordained that legitimate authority will function in three distinctly separate spheres: civil, ecclesiastical, and familial, but that familial authority is the most fundamental and, in many ways, the model for the others.\(^{22}\) He writes, “The meaning of the family is thus not to be sought in procreation but in a God-centered authority and responsibility in terms of man’s calling to subdue the earth and exercise dominion over it” (italics in the original).\(^{23}\)

Though he argues against making too much of the traditional division of the Ten commandments into the “two tablets” (one governing the relationship of humans to God with the other governing relations along humans), he does point out that there are as many commandments dealing with the family as there are in the first tablet:
“In the Ten Commandments, four laws deal with the family, three of them directly: “Honor they father and mother,” “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” “Thou shalt not steal,” and “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbors house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbors wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor’s. (Ex 20:12,14,15,17). The fact that property (and hence theft) were family oriented appears not only in all the law, but in the tenth commandment: to covet, whether property, wife or servants of another was a sin against the neighbor’s family. The family is clearly central to the Biblical way of life, and it is the family under God which has this centrality”

The centrality of family’s authority is evident, for Rushdoony, in the Creation account. Before there were gatherings of God’s faithful or civil societies, there was the family and its primary function: to exercise dominion over the earth and subdue it. The whole life purpose of humans is seen in the very the calling given Adam (and by implication Eve) in Genesis; and that calling rests on the God given authority to the family.

“Although originally only Adam was created (Gen 2:7), the creation mandate is spoken to Adam in the married estate, and with the creation of woman in mind. Thus, essential to the function of the family under God, and to the role of the man as the head of the household, is the call to subdue the earth and exercise dominion over it...Man must bring to all creation God’s law-order, exercising power over creation in the name of God. The earth was created ‘very good’ but it was as yet undeveloped in terms of subjugation and possession by man, God’s appointed
governor. This *government* is particularly the calling of the man as husband and father, and of the family as an institution”

It might seem obvious that from these views of family flow certain notions about the relationships between men and women and the relationships between parents and their children, both of which would be characterized by submission and obedience. Rushdoony is very explicit about this and he finds in the Fifth Commandment much more than one might expect. When men fail to exercise their Godly authority (in both the family and in civil society) social chaos ensues. Rushdoony points to Isaiah 3:16-26 as an illustration of what happens when men fail to exercise their God-given prerogative of dominion in the family, “Women rule over men; children then gain undue freedom and power and become oppressors of their parents; the emasculated rules in such a social order lead the people astray and destroy the fabric of society.”

His analysis is based in essentialized views of male and female in which males, by nature, fight for territory and status while females instincts are “personal and anarchistic.” He writes “the woman becomes absorbed with problems of law and order in a personal way, i.e. when her family and her family’s safety are endangered by its decay. The man will be concerned with the problems of society apart from the condition of crisis…” In what could be lifted from a Promise Keepers tract more than thirty years later, Rushdoony writes

Today men have abdicated extensively their masculinity, are less concerned with order and more with gratification. As a result, women, because their security and that of their children is at stake, become involved with the problem of social decay and law and order. Social and political action thus becomes a pressing
feminine concern. Their concern underscores the decay of society and the failure of men.”

But, because this commandment is directed to children, most of Rushdoony’s focus in this chapter is on discussing the implications of the place of children in the family and the mutual relationship and responsibilities between them and parents. While there are many dimensions to this, at the center of children’s responsibilities is the responsibility to be obedient and chief among the parents’ responsibilities is to provide an education “in the broadest sense of the word” by which he means chastisement and schooling. Lakoff’s “strict father” model could have no clearer expression: in a hearty endorsement of corporal punishment Rushdoony writes: “parents then (in biblical times) were as inclined to be tenderhearted as now, but the necessity for chastening cannot be set aside by a foolish pity. Chastisement can be a lifesaver to the child…” But its in his discussion of schooling that Rushdoony lays out what has for many in the Religious Right, become the basic framework for understanding education:

“It needs more than ever to be stressed that the best and truest educators are parents under God. The greatest school is the family. In learning, no act of teaching in any school or university compares to the routine task of mothers in teaching a babe who speaks no language the mother tongue in so short a time. No other task in education is equal to this. The moral training of the child, the discipline of good habits, is an inheritance from the parents to the child which surpasses all other. The family is the first and most basic school of man.”

Rushdoony argues that, not only is the family the most influential school, but it is to the family that God has given the authority to train children: not to the church and not
to the state. Public schools, according to Rushdoony, usurp the authority of the family and in the process destroy the family. Furthermore, they contribute to the destruction of society: “The statist school, moreover, basically trains women to be men; it is not surprising that so many are unhappy to be women. Nor are men any happier, in that dominion in modern education is transferred to the state, and man is progressively emasculated.” And in a quote that could have come from conservative commentator and author Christina Hoff Somers, “The major casualty in modern education is the male student, since any education which diminishes man’s calling to exercise dominion also diminishes man to the same degree.”

To this point Reconstructionists largely agree. Somewhat more contentious, however, is Rushdoony’s view that church-run schools also usurp the authority of the family.

And just what does this family centered education look like? Remember Rushdoony’s presuppositionalism asserts that all truth is rooted in Biblical Christianity. Education is to be Bible centered, efforts at critical thinking, concerns over freedom of inquiry are humanistic—rooted in a false religion. And students are to learn in obedience; teaching the value of questioning, let alone the value of challenging authority, is not part of the curriculum. Even student government would seem to violate the biblically mandated structure. “The child has no right to govern his parents, the student their school, nor the employees their employer”

Rushdoony’s Biblical law seems to have contemporary expression in the spate of recent articles about Patrick Henry College in Purcellville Virginia. According to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, a controversy arose after a student complained about the
weight to be given to non-Biblical sources in the “liberal arts” curriculum. One faculty member was fired over the issue and others resigned in support of him.\textsuperscript{35}

But not only does this quote from Rushdoony illustrate the epistemological basis for education and the relationship between the family and education, it also shows the use of this family metaphor for filling out the contested areas of what Lakoff calls “economic freedom.” Lakoff develops a general notion of economic freedom and lays out his understanding of the conservative framing of economic freedom.\textsuperscript{36} Lakoff sees clearly that conservative views of economic freedom are individualistic and private, that they are fundamental to other freedoms and that they are based in nature. What Lakoff misses (though it is actually evidence for his larger theory) is that these views are grounded in very specific notions of family. The commission given to Adam and Eve in the garden is, in essence, an economic mission: be fruitful and multiply; fill up the earth and subdue it. Rushdoony finds this in the Fifth Commandment: Honor thy father and mother that thy days may be long upon the land,\textsuperscript{37} about which he says, the “first general principle inherent in this law…is the law of inheritance.”\textsuperscript{38}

What we inherit from our parents is life itself, and also the wisdom of their faith and experience that they transmit to us…we do not enter an empty world. The houses, orchards, fields and flocks are all the handwork of the past, and we are richer for this past and must honor it…The basic and central inheritance of culture and all that it includes, faith, training, wisdom, wealth, love, common ties and traditions are severed and denied where parents and elders are not honored.\textsuperscript{39}

In a section entitled “the Economics of the Family,” Rushdoony explores the relationship between family, property and liberty: with family members having “property
rights” in each other. “It can be said that a man holds his wife as his property and his children also. But because his wife and children have certain, individual, particular, special, and continuing claims on him, they have a property right in him.⁴⁰

For Rushdoony, western metaphors of progress (and even postmillennialism itself) are “the second general principle” derived from the family metaphor rooted in the Fifth Commandment.⁴¹

In Biblical faith, the family inherits from the past in order to grow firmly into the future…Scripture declares, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). Marriage calls for a move forward by the man and his wife; they break with the old families to create a new one. They remain tied to the old families in that both represent a cultural inheritance from two specific families. They remain tied further by their religious duty to honor their parents. The growth is real, and the dependence is real: the new clearly and plainly grows out of and realizes the potentiality of the old.⁴²

Opposition to abortion also is rooted in the family as understood by Rushdoony, but not only in the way you might expect. In the discussion of biblical law which, perhaps, has most often been cited by Reconstructionist opponents, Rushdoony discusses the law in Deuteronomy pertaining to incorrigible youth. The rebellious youth is to be chastened and, if he will not reform, he is to be brought before the elders of the city who are to put him to death.⁴³ Now Rushdoony carefully explains this in detail—though the explanation is not likely to make the solution seem more reasonable to modern ears, following it closely however, is necessary to illustrate the relationship to abortion. In fact, he says, the passage actually limits parental authority (to chastisement—only the
representatives of the community as a whole had the right to execute the death penalty) in a legal-cultural context (Roman law) in which fathers had an absolute right over the life and death of their children. Rushdoony argues against the legalization of abortion (remember this is before Roe v. Wade) as a return to Roman Pagan law in which Fathers were the life givers and had, therefore, the right to take life.

Rushdoony grounds his conservative notions of “limited government” in this aspect of the law.

Life is created by God, governed by His law, and to be lived only in terms of His law-word. All transgression faces ultimate judgment; capital offenses require the death penalty here and now, by civil authorities. *Neither the parents nor the state are the creators of life, and therefore cannot fix the terms of life.* In this fact is man’s greatest safeguard for freedom; the godly state does indeed deal severely with offenders, but it strictly limits the power of the state…the power of the parents is similarly limited. (emphasis in original)

And in a section that couldn’t more clearly fit Lakoff’s model Rushdoony argues that freedom itself, is found most fully in “obedience” as understood in the familial relationship described in the Fifth Commandment. He says, “It is commonly held, by the humanistic mind, that the unquestioning and faithful obedience required by law of children is destructive of the mind …But the best functioning mind is the obedient and disciplined mind. The child who is disciplined into obedience is not the servile youth but the free man.”
Early Influence

As early as the 1960s, Rushdoony and other Reconstructionists framed the relationship between what they see as a “Biblical Worldview,” in terms of the family. They wrote about it extensively, and made their writings on these topics popularly available, actively promoting what they called epistemological self-consciousness and a blueprint for transforming society along those lines. While many scholars have dated the origins of the Religious Right to the 1980 election, Reconstructionists were publishing and disseminating books in churches and Christian schools through much of the 1960s and all of the 1970s. The two key aspects of Reconstruction, expressed theologically as postmillennialism and presuppositionalism and politically as dominionism and theonomy, were cast in accessible popular terms as the effort to restore America as a Christian Nation and the critique of secular humanism.

Strategically, the effort to bring the nation “under the Lordship of Christ,” was two-pronged. The most immediate effort was to organize politically in electoral politics and then bring pressure on elected officials. The more long-term strategy was to “raise up a generation of leaders,” who had the skills and the worldview to “usher in the Kingdom of God,” specifically through homeschooling and Christian Schooling. Reconstructionsits provided other fundamentalists with how-to materials for political campaigns and, more importantly because early on they were the primary ones doing it, they provided materials to help churches start Christian schools and to help parents home school their children. Materials included why-to and how-to as well as ready made curricula. The first of the organizations founded to promote the Religious Right’s agenda through the courts was the Rutherford Society, founded by Reconstructionist John
Whitehead to defend Christian homeschoolers and church-run Christian schools who ran afoul of truancy and certification laws.

In a recent essay “Religion and Politics: the impact of the Religious Right,” I developed this argument for the early influence of the Reconstructionists so I won’t elaborate further here. I would like, however, to reiterate that I am not arguing that there is a powerful Reconstructionist organization with a list of members, neither am I arguing that there is a conspiracy “behind the scenes.” My point is that very early on these folks developed a critique of contemporary culture and a strategy for addressing the problems they saw through political engagement and education. Over the next decades conservative Christians returned to the political process and homes schooling and Christian schooling exploded—and underneath both of those developments was Reconstructionists’ framing of the problems and the solutions.

**Contemporary Influence**

As we move into the 21st Century, that early work is bearing fruit. Organizations like Joshua Generation reach out to those students who have been trained in home schools and Christian Schools, institutions of higher education such as Patrick Henry College seek to provide an alternative to secular education seen to be permeated with liberalism and humanism. And Summit Ministries and Christian Worldview Network train parents, teachers, pastors and activists in developing Biblical Worldviews at conferences around the country some of which are called “Worldview Weekend.” Each of these organizations illustrates the contemporary expression of the influence of Reconstructionists. Tracing out that influence is the next step, for me, in the larger
project of which this essay is a part. To illustrate the point briefly, though, I’d like to look at the gateway to the Worldview Weekend conferences that is an on-line “worldview test” developed by Brannon Howse, President and Founder of Worldview Weekend. 48 First some context, the test is on a website sponsored by worldview Weekend, Summit Ministries and The American Family Association. Its purpose seems to be to rate test-takers’ worldview in relationship to what the organizations see as a “biblical worldview” and then encourage test-takers to attend conferences and buy books that will help them develop more “biblical” worldviews. There are 85 questions that cover issues relating to civil government, economics, education, family, law, religion, and science. The questions are phrased as statements with which test-takers are to agree or disagree. Sometimes the “right” answer is “strongly agree,” and sometimes its “strongly disagree.” I took the test, answering “as a Reconstructionist,” and scored a 98 49 Many of the questions, indeed, presume answers that would be common among most evangelical and fundamentalist Christians: abortion, homosexuality, science and creation, the nature of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and the reliability of the Bible. Other questions move closer to promoting political views of Reconstructionists on issues less likely to be recognized by evangelicals and fundamentalists in general: concern over the United Nations, opposition to control of education at the federal level. Still other questions, especially when taken together represent, rather distinct perspectives that tie directly to Reconstructionist views (this is a sampling rather than an exhaustive list):

“The Bible, rightly divided, should be the foundation for all our beliefs, actions, and conduct.” 50
“Since God is not the author of law, the author of law is man. In other words, the law is the law simply because the highest human authority, which is the state, has said it’s the law and is able to back it up by force.”

“Both secular Humanism and Marxism are religious worldviews.”

“Legislating morality is a violation of the separation of church and state.”

“The Bible is a consistent revelation from beginning to end.”

“A Christian can develop a biblical worldview for every major area of life by studying the Bible from beginning to end in context.”

“Ultimately every individual will bow their knee and confess with their mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord.”

“Biblically minded Christians should look at the issues of the world as falling into two categories, the secular and the sacred.”

“The more a government resembles a pure democracy the more disorder and confusion occur.”

And perhaps, the most clear example:

“Family, church and state are institutions ordained by God.”

The point is not that only a Reconstructionist could hold these views, but that these views are central tenets of Reconstruction and they are promoted here in exactly the same phrasing as they have been by Reconstructionists for forty years.

Conclusions

This particular session is charged with the daunting task of thinking about the relationship between the Religious Right and “the Future of Democracy.” For whatever
small contribution I can make on that point, I draw on conversations with my students in my honors course, *Freedom*, at the University of North Florida. Together, we have plodded some of through Lakoff’s work in detail. In an effort to pull his theoretical model apart from his politics so as to assess its validity on its own, we have had to reframe, clarify, and redescribe constantly. The consistent inadequacy of Lakoff’s description of conservative views left students struggling to understand why I thought the book was worth reading. This, in turn, pushed me to articulate what I see as his potential contribution to the “future of democracy.”

I used to think that the modernist, mainstream worldview and the worldview of fundamentalist Christians were so at odds with each other that they were ultimately mutually exclusive. At the risk of swinging from profound cynicism to naïve idealism, I propose that Lakoff’s model, were it more adequately applied, presents a way in which each side could come to see the world in terms of the metaphors of the other. There are at least two reasons I believe this to be the case:

Firstly, while I believe conservative Christians operate with a metaphor developed, articulated and promoted by the Christian Reconstructionists, I believe they do not know this to be true and neither do they realize that those with whom they disagree hold radically different understandings of basic concepts—also rooted in metaphor. But the metaphors may not be beyond change.

Secondly, Lakoff writes about “biconceptuals,” people who use both strict father and nurturant parent metaphors, as a group in the middle over whom the two sides are fighting. It seems to me—and to my students—that most, maybe almost all, people are biconceptuals—including fundamentalist Christians. This being the case, both
metaphors are already there to be developed. Conservative Protestantism in America is a varied movement, drawing on many—often contradictory— influences. This is true about millennialism (both premillennialism and postmillennialism are present); it is true about the roles of women (the holiness movement and some parts of pentecostalism are quite egalitarian while other streams enforce a gender hierarchy); it is true about polity (both high church and low church versions are to be found as are a number of other variations in forms of governance); and any number of other examples can be cited.\textsuperscript{57}

Without a doubt, a strict father metaphor permeates much of the conservative Christian subculture but I contend that there is a “nurturing parent” metaphor operating as well. Examples that come to mind include, discussions about the various names for God emphasizing “Abba Father,” as Daddy, and the variety of Greek terms for Love, and the well documented influence of the “therapeutic culture” in evangelicalism and fundamentalism.\textsuperscript{58} In fact, the best of the scholarship on the Promise Keepers movement finds this same ambiguity and paradox to be at the core of what makes the movement successful.\textsuperscript{59} And even studies focused specifically on evangelical and fundamentalist families show a complex blending of the two metaphors.\textsuperscript{60}

Understanding how political discourse works and developing an honest picture of the interests of the various parties involved, can’t help but contribute to civility and—perhaps—compromise. Lakoff’s model offers a constructive way to make sense of political division; to explain why partisans so often talk past each other and to explain why reasoned argument so rarely makes a difference. He says that conservatives have been more successful at framing issues in terms of their own values; he shows clearly the limitations and linguistic manipulations of conservatives but instead of using the model to
try to resolve conflict and division, he uses it to win. Instead of using the model to take political engagement to a different level, he just wants to turn the tables replacing the conservative frames and metaphors with his own.

So like so many other ideas, Democracy has an uncontested core but at least two distinct forms when we flesh out the details. There is “the majority rules” kind of democracy where the goal is to get more people to see the world the way we do so that we can win. This kind of democracy leads to the interest group politics we have today. The second kind of Democracy is rooted in the idea that the “collective wisdom” of the people is the best “check” on tyranny. This kind of Democracy, it seems to me, depends on intellectually honest engagement. A nuanced and complex understanding of how we think, and what we mean by the language we invoke in political discourse, lends itself to the realization that there is usually more than one way to see things. That realization is necessary for the fundamental democratic value in which we recognize our own limitations and value the balance brought by difference.

---
1 This is the subtitle to Lakoff’s book Moral Freedom.
2 Whose Freedom?, 32.
3 Later in the book Lakoff criticizes the Left and the Right for the way in which they “like to parody each other in terms of the other’s real, but extreme, anti rational movements” Whose Freedom 37.
4 His choice of terms alone bears out the bias about which I’m writing but I am using his own words for clarity.
5 Whose Freedom?, 42.
6 Frank Luntz’ recent book Words that Work (New York: Hyperion, 2007) is in some ways a similar manual for the Right. Examining how the strategic use of language (and Luntz’ advice) has played a role in recent debates over issues such as inheritance/death taxes. The Luntz book, however, is not rooted in a potentially politically neutral theory of scholarly use.
7 Whose Freedom, 3.
9 Moral Politics, 31
10 Mark Juergensmeyer Terror in the Mind of God, Sara Diamond Not by Politics Alone and Roads to Dominion, Michelle Goldberg Kingdom Coming and Randall Balmer Thy Kingdom Come. While each of these scholars points to the influence of the Reconstructionists, none develops an analysis of them at length. In fact, it has been Juergensmeyer’s constant encouragement that led me to work on the larger project of which this paper is a part.

It’s a quaint bit of lore in Reconstructonist circles that Rushdoony, though the end of his life, wrote in longhand. In the Preface he thanks his wife for typing the manuscript.

It is on exactly this point that the most significant division exists within Reconstruction. Later thinkers, North and Jordan especially, have argued that the Church, with its ecclesiastical authority is preeminent. This disagreement has implications for education (are church related Christian schools permissible?) See for example, James B. Jordan, *The Sociology of the Church: Essays in Reconstruction*. Tyler, Tx: Geneva Ministries, 1986.)


The one question I “missed,” had to do with whether the notion “God helps those who help themselves” is in the Bible. Apparently it is not, but I had in mind such texts as I Cor. 15:58 “Labor is not in vain in the Lord,” Proverbs 13:11 “He that gathereth by labor shall increase, and 2 Thessalonians 3:10 “For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.”

The “correct” answer seems challengeable from inside the worldview they are espousing; in other words I out-proof-texted them; I think I got 100%.

Not only is this an example of presuppositionalism and theonomy, it also uses an exact phrase commonly found in Reconstructionist discourse: the Bible “rightly divided.”
While many Christians see secular humanism as a religion, I content that it was Rushdoony who made that a popular view and my claim is bolstered by the extent to which he also wrote about Marxism in this context as well.

This is a challenge to Dispensationalism that holds that God reveals himself differently in different “ages.”

Reconstructionists call this “making every thought captive” to Christ.

This is a favorite text to support postmillennialism.

This is presuppoistionalism that Reconstructionists popularized as the “myth of neutrality.”

While Reconstructionists disagree on this point, Rushdoony has been quite public about his critique of Democracy as a political system.

This is extraordinarily well documents in the literature but was perhaps first argued by George Marsden in “Preachers of Paradox,” in Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism in America.

See R. Marie Griffith’s God’s Daughters as but one example.

See John P. Bartkowski’s The Promise Keepers New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004 as an example.