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# Conservative Chick? Conservative Culture Warriors at War

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The American New Right that grew to prominence during the second half of the twentieth century consists of three major ideological strands – traditionalism, libertarianism, and anticommunism. The New Christian Right (NCR) that rose to prominence in the 1970s fell within the traditionalist camp. At the same time, not all theological conservatives or social traditionalists joined the NCR. The work of comic book artist Jack Chick demonstrates the phenomenon of opposition to the NCR among some theological and social conservatives. Beginning in the early 1960s, Chick published tracts and comic books that espoused extreme social conservatism while at the same time opposing government enforcement of social norms. He frequently criticized politically active or well-connected preachers such as Jerry Falwell and Billy Graham and opposed prayer in schools. Chick, along with many other fundamentalists, opposed the NCR because it involved cooperation with Roman Catholics. For Chick, doctrinal purity is more important than having a "Christian" nation. This essay concludes by noting how, as evangelicals lose ground in key battles of the culture wars, there are signs that Chick's antipolitics is gaining ground among conservative Protestants.

## INTRODUCTION

A twenty-four-page evangelistic comic book tract entitled "This Was Your Life" portrays a man's sudden death and subsequent judgment. An angel plays a film of the man's life, including all of his sins and his rejection of a Gospel presentation. The man ultimately goes to hell, but the tract's author and publisher, Jack T. Chick (1924–2016), wants the reader to know that the story did not have to end this way. The man could have placed his faith in Jesus Christ and consequently gone directly into heaven when the grim reaper sent him the fatal heart attack. According to the 2012 Chick Publications catalog, "This Was Your Life," originally published in 1964, has appeared in over one hundred languages. Chick claimed to have distributed a staggering 140 million copies of this tract alone. Furthermore, Chick advertised that since publishing the tract "Why No Revival?" in 1961, he has sold "over 800 million Chick tracts" in all. This figure includes over two hundred different tract titles. Chick also published twenty-three full-length comic books between 1974 and 2016. Almost all of these tracts and comic books,

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not to mention back issues of his bimonthly *Battle Cry* newsletter, are available for review on his website.[1]

Despite Chick's prolific output, few scholars have noticed his work. Aside from two peer-reviewed articles – one in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* from 1983 and another in *Religion and American Culture* in 2008 – the most extensive scholarly treatment of Chick appears as a chapter in the religious scholar Jason C. Bivins's book *Religion of Fear*. According to Bivins, Chick's intense paranoia and disturbing apocalyptic prophecies identify him as a prime exponent of the religion of fear. Bivins believes that the religion of fear constitutes one way in which the "political cultures" of the New Christian Right (NCR) "are narrated and taught." In another work, Bivins focusses on political organizations and personalities associated with the NCR, describing the movement as "politically connected to the New Right ascendancy of the Reagan era." Chick's theology – especially his belief in the inerrancy of Scripture and the coming of the Antichrist before Christ's triumphant Second Coming – certainly aligns with that held by most major personalities of the NCR, including Jerry Falwell and Tim LaHaye.[2]

[1] Jack Chick, "Biography of Jack Chic," Chick Publications, at http://chick.com/information/authors/chick.asp, accessed 12 March 2012; Jack Chick, "A Special Message from Jack T. Chick," Chick Publications, at www.chick.com/information/general/message.asp, accessed 12 March 2012; R. B. Fowler, *The World of Jack T. Chick* (San Francisco: Last Gasp, 2002), 1–5, 1–11. 2–13, 2–39. Much of the bibliographic information and historical facts on Chick comes from Chick fan Fowler's encyclopedia. Because Chick often reissues tracts with new publication dates, Fowler's reference book has been invaluable in dating Chick's material. For example, the Chick Publications website lists the publication date for "This Was Your Life" as 2002. My copy of the tract carries a 1972 publication date. Fowler notes that the tract originally appeared in 1964 and that Chick has made almost no changes in the tract since that date. When a tract has changed little or not at all over time, I site the earliest publication date in the footnotes and text so as to best place the tract within its historical context. When a tract has undergone substantial changes, I cite in the footnotes the date of the copy of the tract that I have personally examined but include both the original date of publication and the date of reissue in the text. With respect to pagination, tracts do not officially have page numbers, but all contain twenty-four pages. Full-length comic books contain thirty-two pages. In the body of the paper and in the footnotes, I place the titles of tracts in quotation marks and italicize the titles of full-length comic books.

[2] The two peer-reviewed articles that deal with Chick are Robert R. Hann, "*Sabotage* Indeed: The Alleged Plot against the Bible," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 20 (Spring 1983), 272–75, and Michael Ian Borer and Adam Murphree, "Jack Chick's Anti-Catholic Cartoons and the Flexible Boundaries of the Culture Wars," *Religion and American Culture*, 18, 1 (Winter 2008), 95–112. For a brief summary of Bivins's take on Chick see Jason C. Bivins, *Religion of Fear: The Politics of Horror in Conservative Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4–5. Scholarly treatments of the NCR that analyze it from within a political framework include Robert C. Liebman and Robert Wuthnow, "Introduction," in Liebman and Wuthnow, eds., *The New Christian Right: Mobilization and Legitimation* (New York: Aldine Publishing Co., 1983), 1–2; D. G.

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Conservative Christians have at times lived uneasily with their companions on the right. The historian George H. Nash describes the post-World War II conservative movement as consisting of three ideological strands – libertarianism, traditionalism, and anticommunism. While all conservatives since 1945 have held staunchly to anticommunism, the relationship between traditionalists and libertarians has been more fraught. The debate between theorists Russell Kirk and Frank Meyer highlights many of the issues involved. In his 1953 book *The Conservative Mind*, Kirk defined conservatism as a commitment to order based on tradition. He rejected the individualism inherent in such classically liberal ideas as limited government and individual property rights. Frank Meyer responded in the pages of a periodical called *The Freeman* as well as in the *National Review*. While Kirk believed that governments had an obligation to censor pornography and communist propaganda, Meyer believed such actions constituted an imposition on individual freedom and an unwarranted expansion of the state. Meyer's brand of conservatism therefore had little room for protests against advertisements for X-rated movies in the local newspaper and little concern over attacks on tradition in high-school history textbooks.[3]

At first glance, Chick would appear to be a traditionalist. His output increased dramatically at around the same time that the traditionalists in the NCR rose to prominence. Controversies over sex education in Anaheim in 1968 and textbooks in Kanawah County, West Virginia in 1974 signaled widespread unrest with changing norms in public education. The *Roe*

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Hart, *That Old-Time Religion in Modern America: Evangelical Protestantism in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 144–57; Walter Capps, *The New Religious Right: Piety, Patriotism, and Politics* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 1, 184–89; William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 371; Michael Lienesch, *Redeeming America: Piety and Politics in the New Christian Right* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 5–7; Jason C. Bivins, *The Fracture of Good Order: Christian Antiliberalism and the Challenge to American Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 82–87; Christian Smith, *Christian America? What Evangelicals Really Want* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 1–3; Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2011), xv; Matthew Sutton, "Was FDR the Antichrist? The Birth of Fundamentalist Antiliberalism in a Global Age," *Journal of American History*, 98 (Jan. 2012), 1052–74, 1053. Of these scholars, Capps, Lienesch, and Bivins describe the NCR as arising roughly in the mid- to late 1970s. Scholars who push the rise of the NCR back into the years surrounding World War II, or even the 1920s, include Martin, Hart, Dochuk, and Sutton.

[3] George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1996), xv; Donald Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the Republican Right Rose to Power in Modern America*, 2nd edn (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 19, 23–24.

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v. *Wade* decision in 1973 and the debate over the Equal Rights Amendment brought debates over family values into the political arena. Jerry Falwell's endorsement of Gerald Ford after Jimmy Carter granted an interview to *Playboy* were only the initial rumblings of a political movement that would lead, after an alliance with more libertarian-minded fiscal conservatives, to the landslide elections of Ronald Reagan in 1980 and 1984.[4]

Labeling Chick a traditionalist, though, obscures his open and outright disdain for fellow Protestant fundamentalists Jerry Falwell, Tim LaHaye, and Francis Schaeffer. Chick might have agreed with them theologically, but he could not countenance their association with the direct-mail pioneer Richard Viguerie, National Conservative Political Action Committee founder Terry Dolan, Heritage Foundation founder Paul Weyrich, and Eagle Forum founder Phyllis Schlafly. Through their tangle of overlapping political action committees, these four leaders helped engineer the Reagan ascendancy and convinced Falwell, through Schaeffer, to cooperate with their organizations. They were also all Roman Catholics.

In Jack Chick's world, Roman Catholicism embodies no less than the Beast, the False Prophet, and the Whore of Babylon of the Book of Revelation. Chick therefore objects to the NCR not because of libertarian tendencies, but because its traditionalism is tainted by Catholicism. For Chick, political involvement entails building coalitions with those of other theological persuasions, yet in his mind the only thing that will change a culture is a change of individual hearts. The false gospel of the Roman Catholic Church simply cannot accomplish this. Chick consequently refused to follow his fellow fundamentalists when they compromised doctrinal purity by making a pact with the Devil. Doctrinal compromise rendered the NCR at best ineffective and at worst satanic.[5]

Chick was not alone. The pastors of the some of the largest churches in the country – pastors like Jack Hyles at First Baptist Church Hammond, Indiana, Lee Roberson at Highland Park Baptist in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Dallas Billington of Akron Baptist Temple – steered clear of politics. The publishers John R. Rice and Archie Weniger likewise stayed away from the NCR, as did educational leaders like Bob Jones III, who claimed that Falwell's cooperation with Catholics held "more potential for hastening the church of Antichrist and building the ecumenical church than anything to come down the pike in a long time." All of these men, like Chick, were independent fundamental

[4] For a comprehensive account of these developments see Seth Dowland, *Family Values and the Rise of the Christian Right* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015). See also Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 171; Dochuk, 300.

[5] Williams, 169–73.

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Baptists. They held to the five fundamentals – the inerrancy of Scripture, the deity of Christ, the virgin birth of Christ, the substitutionary atonement, and the bodily return of Christ. They added to these doctrines, however, belief in a literal six-day divine creation event less than ten thousand years ago, the pre-tributional rapture of the saints, and the reign of Christ on Earth for a thousand years following a seven-year tribulation period and the battle of Armageddon. They also preached only from the King James Version. These doctrines were not peripheral. They were tests of fellowship. Independent fundamental Baptists like Chick could not in any way cooperate even with other Baptists who disagreed with any one of these positions. Roman Catholics were beyond the pale.[6]

As a conservative culture warrior at odds with the NCR, Chick may seem anomalous, but he was certainly not alone. Chick's example calls into question blanket analyses that equate conservative Protestantism with support for the Republican agenda, and also reveals that those affiliated with the NCR were not the only players on the conservative side of the culture wars. This paper explores several topics important to both Chick and the NCR – the media, public education, political involvement among the clergy, and the place of government in believers' lives. With respect to each topic, Chick shares other conservatives' concerns about morality and society but diverges sharply regarding the best way to address these concerns. Chick's statements on society and politics are ultimately not about political power, but about the bankruptcy of modern American culture and the necessity of looking to a heavenly kingdom. Staying on the narrow path to that kingdom is far more important than gaining temporal power.

## THE MEDIA

Censorship of popular media lies at the heart of the Kirk–Meyer debate. Like Kirk, Chick expresses revulsion towards what he sees as rampant immorality in American popular culture. Like Meyer, however, his paranoia about granting the government censorship powers wins out. This stance places him at odds with culture warriors that have picked Hollywood as their battleground. In

[6] Bob Jones III quoted in Williams, 173–74. The core beliefs fundamentalists espoused appear most clearly in the movement's namesake set of essays, *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*. *The Fundamentals* consisted of ninety essays published in twelve volumes between 1910 and 1915 edited by Amzi Dixon and Reuben Archer Torrey. *The Fundamentals* did not teach adherence to young-Earth Creationism or King James Only-ism as necessary to be considered "fundamental." These teachings appear later in the history of fundamentalism. Other representative publications include newspapers such as William Bell Riley's *The Christian Fundamentalist* and Curtis Lee Laws' *Watchman-Examiner*.

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1979, Moral Majority founder Jerry Falwell held a Clean Up America rally in Washington, DC. Falwell claimed that homosexual themes evident in television sitcoms *Soap* and *Three's Company* threatened the traditional American nuclear family. According to a spokesman, Falwell's statements over the years have "incensed [television producer] Norman Lear, in particular, and others in the television industry" because "[w]hat he says is threatening their livelihood." Falwell at times led organized efforts aimed at changing the content of television programs. In 1997 he called for advertisers to pull their dollars from ABC after actress Ellen DeGeneres came out as a lesbian. Pastor Don Wildmon's American Family Association has also regularly called upon Christians to boycott those who advertise on or support media that he believes Christians (should) find objectionable. With respect to television, Wildmon called for a letter-writing campaign targeting the sponsors of prime-time television drama *L. A. Law*, all because of one "lesbian" episode. Some of Wildmon's best-known campaigns include boycotts of Pepsi for its use of Madonna in its advertisements and Holiday Inn for its inclusion of pornographic movies on its pay-per-view menu. Wildmon has not ignored the movie industry, leading protests against Martin Scorsese's 1988 film *The Last Temptation of Christ* because it portrayed Jesus as contemplating sexual relations. When objectionable art has received tax dollars, as in the case of Andres Serrano's photograph *Piss Christ* or the homoerotic photography of Robert Mapplethorpe, Wildmon has enthusiastically joined with more overtly political groups such as the Christian Coalition in calls for defunding the National Endowment for the Arts. Whatever the source of satanic influence in the culture, the NCR has repeatedly demonstrated its organizational skill and its ability to garner publicity in its efforts to shape American popular entertainment and media.[7]

Chick agrees with Wildmon and Falwell that popular entertainment constitutes one of Satan's tools for the destruction of Christian youth, although Chick is much more specific in his descriptions of exactly how Satan uses these tools for his nefarious purposes. With respect to popular music, the full-length comic *Spellbound?* (1978) contains the chilling tale of how rock and roll enthralls the minds of teenagers, and, more importantly, how this

[7] For discussion of Falwell's activities see Matthew D. Lassiter, "Inventing Family Values," in Bruce J. Schulman and Julian Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound: Making American Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 24; Capps, 34; Frank Rich, "Has Jerry Falwell Seen the Light?", *New York Times*, 6 Nov. 1999, A17. For information on Wildmon see Don Winbush, "Bringing Satan to Heel," *Time*, 19 June 1989, 54–56; Tim Stafford, "Taking on TV's Bad Boys," *Christianity Today*, 19 Aug. 1991, 14, 18. For discussion of the NCR and the National Endowment for the Arts see Martin, 303.

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form of mind control has infiltrated churches. Citing the real-life evangelist "John Todd, ex-grand druid priest," as a primary source, Chick opens this adventure with Tim Clark and James Carter, his fictional interracial dynamic duo known as the Crusaders, running afoul of a group of Satanists after they share the Gospel with fictional rock star Bobby Dallas. The Satanists fear that Bobby will turn to Christ and ruin their plan to control the minds of America's teenagers. After murdering Bobby Dallas, the Satanists decide to go after the Crusaders. In the meantime, James and Tim meet Lance Collins, a lay preacher and former "Druid High Priest" who looks remarkably like John Todd. Lance teaches the Crusaders the secret history of rock music. He claims that the words to Druid hymns "were for casting spells" and that the "same beats the Druids used are in the rock music of today." Lance also tells the Crusaders how witches cast spells on records and that "every recording that has been cursed has a [demon] with it." With respect to Christian rock, even though the "words may appear to be God's … the beat belongs to Satan." In the tract "Angels?" (1986) Chick reiterates this message, with one former member of a Christian band telling a church group that even Christian rock music "is a powerful demonic force for Satan." Chick does not want to redeem the secular music industry, nor does he support the Christian rock that began to appear in the 1970s. Chick does not lobby for warning labels that indicate a recording has explicit lyrics, nor does he boycott those who sponsor popular-music artists. He instead calls for individuals to separate themselves entirely from a worldly music scene. In the face of an overarching and all-pervasive Druid conspiracy, an organized boycott or concerted political action would be ineffectual.[8]

Chick also views the television news media as part of a grand conspiracy to promote a satanic worldview. In *Spellbound?* Chick portrays a local television station as a front for the same satanic cult that wants to murder the Crusaders. This cult directs the station to film a church's destruction of rock records in a massive bonfire with the objective of making the church appear crazy. According to alleged former Jesuit Alberto Rivera, another real person who appears in Chick's fictional stories, the Roman Catholic Church and the national media had similar aims with respect to the Jonestown massacre, even though the People's Temple's teachings and practices bore little resemblance to fundamentalist Christianity. In the tract "Sin City" (2001), a local news crew intentionally stops filming a gay pride parade when the participants begin beating a Christian witness. Chick is, however, not an apologist

[8] Jack Chick, *Spellbound?* (Chino: Chick Publications, 1978), 17, 9, 11, 16, 25; Chick, "Angels?" (Chino: Chick Publications, 1986), 22; Hart, 192.

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for conservative media outlets such as Fox News. In a *Battle Cry* article from 1999, Chick refers to Rupert Murdoch's "TV stations and movie productions as some of the sleaziest." Chick also calls Murdoch a "Papal Knight" and criticizes him for his gift of $10 million for the "construction of a new Catholic cathedral in Los Angeles." He also attacks Murdoch because, as owner of Zondervan publishers, he is ultimately behind the New International Version of the Bible, the chief rival of Chick's preferred King James Version. All major television news outlets, including those that might seem most closely allied to the NCR, are therefore suspect in Chick's eyes.[9]

Chick does not stop with the evening news. He warns believers that the theater, television sitcoms, and major motion pictures are "intentionally shaping the minds of viewers to accept profanity, fornication, and homosexuality as 'normal' behavior." Again citing John Todd as a source, Chick believes that an occult group carefully orchestrated the popularity of musicals such as *Godspell* and *Jesus Christ Superstar* in order "to discredit the Lord." Although *The Exorcist* portrays a Catholic priest in an extremely negative light, Chick understands that film as having similar goals. Chick views television as at best a distraction and at worst a tool for satanic infiltration of the home. In Chick's first tract, "Why No Revival?," he includes an illustration of the family Bible sitting neglected on a nightstand under a copy of *TV Guide*. He also presents an individual seeking divine assistance in procuring a new color television as an example of flawed prayer. In the 2011 update of "Why No Revival?" entitled "Still No Revival?," Chick claims that homosexual groups use seemingly innocuous television characters such as Stewie from the animated sitcom *Family Guy* to desensitize young viewers to homosexual influence in American culture.[10]

In addition to these few quotes and scenes, Chick devotes one full-length comic to Hollywood. The Crusaders story *Primal Man?* (1976) explains how evolutionists use film and television to dissuade young people from believing the biblical account of creation. Tim and James visit a friend starring in a television show set in prehistoric times. While talking with this friend they question the show's premise with respect to evolution and the age of the

[9] Jack Chick, "Sin City" (Chino: Chick Publications, 2001), 4; Chick, *Spellbound?*, 27, 29, 32; Chick, *Double-Cross* (Chino: Chick Publications, 1981), 30–31; Chick, "Rupert Murdoch, Papal Knight, Publisher of the NIV, Donates $10 Million for New LA Cathedral," *Battle Cry*, Nov./Dec. 1999, at www.chick.com/bc/1999/murdoch.asp, accessed 27 Feb. 2012.

[10] Jack Chick, "Media Executive Accuses TV Producers of Moral Subversion," *Battle Cry*, Jan./Feb. 1990, at www.chick.com/bc/1990/TVMoralSubversion.asp, accessed 27 Feb. 2012; Chick, *The Broken Cross* (Chino: Chick Publications, 1974), 19; Chick, "Why No Revival?" (Chino: Chick Publications, 1986), 4–5; Chick, "Bewitched?" (Chino: Chick Publications, 1972), 4; Chick, "Still No Revival?" (Chino: Chick Publications, 2011), 5.

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Earth, much to the chagrin of the show's director. Tim and James, with the help of their expert scientist friend Dr. Lind, gain an audience with the show's producer. The Crusaders convince the producer that many of the evidences for evolution are in fact "hoaxes of the scientific community." The producer continues with filming despite the Crusaders' warnings that movies like his are "brainwashing and damaging" young people, many of whom "will lose their souls because of these films." The producer responds that he is aware of this, but that his god is "money," and so he will serve his god no matter how many young people spend eternity in hell. Although the Crusaders do attempt to change this one small aspect of popular culture, their efforts are ultimately futile and no future comics feature the Crusaders taking on popular entertainment.[11]

The Crusaders' activities in *Primal Man?* constitute Chick's closest approach to advocating direct lobbying efforts to change the popular media. Even then, Tim and James visit the set not to protest the show's content, but to see a friend. Their witnessing efforts occur as a by-product of this mundane visit. Even on those occasions when Chick attacks the television industry for promoting homosexuality, he does not call for a boycott, nor does he support any media lobbying group. He concludes one 2008 article in *Battle Cry* with the simple charge "Parents beware!" In another article he writes that the best way for Christians to attack media influence is to hand out tracts, specifically the antihomosexual tracts "Sin City" and "Doom Town" (1989). Organized boycotts and political action are ineffective in Chick's world. Only the faithful witness of simple believers and the vigilance of parents within their own households can combat the anti-Christian conspiracy that is the film and television industry.[12]

Chick's belief in both the right and the ability of true believers to make wise decisions regarding media consumption distinguishes him in some respects from those such as Falwell and Wildmon. His primary differences with these activists, though, stem from his attribution of the sources of media evil. When Lew Siffer approaches the band in "Angels?" to entice them to join his music organization, he boasts that he controls "the throne of Rome." Jesuits influence local news coverage, most blatantly though Fox News. Working with Roman Catholics to sanctify American news and entertainment media would be counterproductive because Roman Catholics are responsible for the very evil that the NCR hoped to curtail. Right theology

[11] Jack Chick, *Primal Man?* (Chino: Chick Publications, 1976), 20, 32.

[12] Chick, "Media Executive"; Jack Chick, "Homosexual Journalist Admits, 'Gay Lifestyle Is a Sewer,'" *Battle Cry*, Nov./Dec. 2008, at www.chick.com/bc/2008/lifestyle.asp, accessed 27 Feb. 2012.

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and a knowledge of evil's true nature are the proper defense against the satanic onslaught of a godless (Catholic) media.[13]

## EDUCATION

From the earliest days of the NCR, scholars have noted the importance of schools to its program. In 1983, sociologists Robert C. Liebman and Robert Wuthnow recognized the leaders of the NCR as having "cut their political teeth defending Christian schools they had helped to organize." Christian right agitation has coalesced around the issues of prayer in schools, evolution as a component of science curricula, and the promotion of homosexuality. Falwell claimed that he founded Lynchburg Christian Academy largely because of the Supreme Court's declaration of school-sponsored prayer and Bible reading as unconstitutional, and NCR leaders were present in 1982 when Reagan announced his support for a constitutional amendment protecting individual and group prayer in schools. Mel and Norma Gabler of Texas began their campaign against what they perceived to be anti-Christian school textbooks in 1962. The so-called 1968 Battle of Anaheim, a key moment in the movement against sex education, started when a group of parents formed the California Citizens Committee and lobbied the local school board to discontinue the use of what they saw as a pro-homosexual sex education curriculum. Bivins calls the 1974 textbook censorship campaign of West Virginia housewife Alice Moore, an ally of the Gablers, "one of the NCR's most prominent political campaigns of the 1970s." Concerns over sexuality and evolution extend to post-secondary education as well, with NCR stalwarts Falwell and Pat Robertson founding their own universities in an effort to counter the liberalism of secular higher education.[14]

Just as Chick shares many of the concerns of the NCR regarding popular culture, he also shares their fears over curricula in the public schools and the nation's universities. In two straightforward gospel tracts, "You Have a Date" (2011) and "Your Big Moment" (2011), Chick rehashes the plot of "This Was Your Life" but casts a woman in the lead role. The female lead rejects the preacher's call to come to Jesus with one thought: "My professor would flunk me if I did that!" In Chick's world, nearly all professional educators denigrate Christian teachings and persecute believers for their faith. No less than for Falwell and other NCR activists, Chick views public schools as the domain of experts who use their positions to perpetuate false worldviews.

[13] Chick, "Angels?", 13.

[14] Liebman and Wuthnow, "Introduction," 2; Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 71,105–6, 114, 121, 233; Bivins, *The Fracture of Good Order*, 79; Hart, 164–65.

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Chick most explicitly presents his understanding of what actually takes place in a public school in the tract "War Zone" (1999). Fictional Westmont High School serves as the setting, and the story opens with a student slashing a teacher's tire as he exclaims, "Nobody gives me homework!" A transfer student tells her new friend that Westmont High School "is just as bad as the school I left!" Her new friend replies that "it's getting worse every day. No wonder we're not learning anything." The principal receives a call from the superintendent informing him of an emergency parents' meeting that night. The parents vent their anger at poor Principal Ward, telling him, "Teachers and students alike are fearing for their lives." Principal Ward responds, "we have tried every program the state has offered," to no avail. When he then says, "The only thing I can think of is to … uh, pray for a miracle," the crowd boos him off the stage. Principal Ward receives his miracle when the most troublesome student in the school encounters Chick tracts and finds salvation. Principal Ward keeps his job, and the superintendent informs him that "teachers from around the district want to transfer to your school." Although Westmont High School becomes an enjoyable place for Christians to work and learn, neither the experts at the state department of education nor Principal Ward have any clue how to fix the school. A meek student with a handful of Chick tracts saves the day.[15]

Although Chick believes that public schools left to themselves descend into chaos, he also presents the situation as redeemable. God, with the help of Chick tracts, can save Westmont High School. Chick views this fix as only temporary, however. Public schools ultimately and inevitably become the tools of the Antichrist. In the "The Last Generation" (1972; revised 1992), a tract set in the near future, young Bobby returns home from school and greets his devoutly Christian parents by yelling that his classmates "call me slime because my parents are ***straight*** and ***still*** married!" Next, Bobby holds up a picture of a dog and a cat, explaining that his "teacher said these would be great for a Halloween sacrifice." Bobby then reports that "a Healer's gonna tell us about the Mother Goddess being spotted everywhere and he's gonna teach us how to find and turn in heretics!" Bobby's father exclaims that his "teachers have ruined him." The next day at school the "New Age Healer" does in fact come to Bobby's class to tell the students how important it is that they turn in "sickos" who "believe Jesus Christ created the universe." Bobby turns in his parents and grandfather. Although the authorities eventually locate and torture his grandfather, the Rapture snatches his parents away just in time. Bobby later dies and goes to hell. Although public schools like Westmont High might become oases of faith

[15] Jack Chick, *War Zone* (Chino: Chick Publications, 1999), 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10–18, 21.

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during the present, they hold a central place in the Antichrist's plans for the future.[16]

Chick is especially worried because he believes public schools actively promote homosexuality. In his 1972 comic "The Gay Blade," a tract that Chick describes as his "first really controversial tract," he makes a point of mentioning that "[h]omosexuals are regularly invited to speak at … school classrooms." He also claims that "[t]hey occupy all kinds of jobs and professions in business, education, and government." The tract "Birds and the Bees" (2004) presents a more complete picture of Chick's fears. The tract begins with the teacher, Ms. Henn, telling her elementary-school class that she has "a big surprise." She then introduces "two [male] dentists" who "are highly respected in our community." One introduces himself as Larry before introducing the other one as "Charles … my wife!" Ms. Henn tells the class that "God has blessed" Larry and Charles. When one student tells Ms. Henn that his father says homosexuality is wrong, Ms. Henn forces him to apologize. Larry tells the class that "lots of great and famous people are gay. But some people are evil and intolerant. They hate us and call us all kinds of nasty names. But if we get our way, they'll all be in prison." Unlike in "The Last Generation," the public schools' attack on faith occurs in the here and now. The two tracts bear important similarities, however, in that they both identify public-school teachers as propagators of dangerous anti-Christian views.[17]

In another tract that features Ms. Henn, "Apes, Lies, and Ms. Henn" (2004), the dangerous subject matter shifts from homosexuality to evolution. When Ms. Henn teaches the class that they evolved from "monkeys," the tract's hero, Susy, tells a classmate that Ms. Henn's statement is a lie. Ms. Henn then forces Susy to apologize in front of the class. Susy complies and remains quiet for the rest of the lesson. After class, young Timmy asks Susy why she called Ms. Henn's statement a lie, and Susy responds with a Gospel presentation. Timmy then prays to receive Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. The tract concludes with Susy telling Timmy that, even though Ms. Henn is wrong on evolution, "she's our teacher and we have to respect her." Susy does not leave the public school, nor do her guardians mount a public campaign to change the curriculum. This decision to respect Ms. Henn and not openly challenge her is not Susy's alone, but one to which God has led her after she sought guidance through prayer. As much as

[16] Jack Chick, "The Last Generation" (Chino: Chick Publications, 1992), 7–9, 11, 13, 17, 20, 22, original emphasis.

[17] Jack Chick, "The Gay Blade" (Chino: Chick Publications, 2000), 6–7; Chick, "A Message from Jack Chick," *Battle Cry*, May/June 2011, at www.chick.com/bc/2011jtcletterm_j.asp, accessed 23 Feb. 2012; Chick, "Birds and the Bees" (Chino: Chick Publications, 2004), 2–5, 7.

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Chick disagrees with the agenda of public schools, he nevertheless sees them as valuable mission fields that Christians should not abandon. They present no danger for those with a strong faith.[18]

The assault on traditional Protestant beliefs does not stop when students graduate from high school. Chick believes that, for the scientific community, evolution is an article of faith to which all university professors must adhere if they wish to retain their academic positions. In Chick's 1972 tract "Big Daddy?" a science professor begins his lecture by asking how many of his students believe in evolution. All except one respond in the affirmative. The professor becomes unhinged at this sign of dissent, yelling for the student to "get out of my class! After you've apologized to everyone for your rudeness and ignorance, we might let you back in!" The professor then calms down and changes his mind, asking the student to remain so that he can "tear [his] little beliefs to shreds in front of the entire class." The student, who apparently has no scientific training, bests the professor on every point during the ensuing debate. The professor changes his mind on evolution. As he walks down the hall to the science department meeting, he tells himself, "They'll understand why I'm quitting. They're intelligent, logical compassionate scholars." In the next panel, the professor's optimism meets reality as his erstwhile colleagues tell him to "get out of our university! After you've apologized to everyone for your rudeness and ignorance, we might let you back in!" Chick turns the tables on the scientific community, charging them with accepting theories without any empirical evidence. In their case, specialized training has resulted in blindness to true facts, facts that a mere undergraduate must bring to light.[19]

Protestant Bible colleges and seminaries actually endure heavier fire than any other educational institution featured in Chick's writings. Chick relates many of his ideas regarding Protestant higher education in the series of comics focussing on his real-life friend, and alleged former Jesuit, Alberto Rivera. Although a 1981 article in the evangelical periodical *Christianity Today* exposed Alberto as a fraud, Chick stood by him and continued to cite his story as compelling evidence for a grand Catholic plot to eradicate true believers. In one comic book, Alberto explains to the Crusaders how he once posed as an evangelical student at an interdenominational seminary in Costa Rica. Alberto and his companions Carmen and Marie "introduce sex among the students," and, with the help of some Jesuit journalists, manage to have the seminary "branded as a place of corruption." Alberto then directed his helpers to seduce and blackmail the professors and local pastors. Threatening to reveal their sins, Alberto told the pastors that they must

[18] Jack Chick, "Apes, Lies, and Ms. Henn" (Chino: Chick Publications, 2004), 5–6, 9, 21–22.
[19] Jack Chick, "Big Daddy?" (Chino: Chick Publications, 1992), 2–5, 20–21.

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"never say again that the Roman Catholics were going to hell." Chick notes, "Today, that Bible College is totally ecumenical, working very closely with the Roman Catholic priests." Although Chick does not condemn the seminary as it existed prior to Alberto's arrival, he does hint that it was perhaps not the best place to study. First, the seminary is "interdenominational," a term that Chick defines as "the Roman Catholic institution gather[ing] all the protestant churches together under her control." Second, the college seems to be on the verge of falling into sexual sin at the time Alberto arrives. Chick seems to disapprove of the single women who teach there, and one pastor involved with the school led "a huggy, kissy Christian church" and "would often touch Marie and watch the way she walked." Even though the seminary was not friendly to Catholics before Alberto arrived, it nevertheless does not seem like the kind of school that Chick would endorse.[20]

Chick's most vitriolic attack on Christian colleges appears in the full-length comic *Sabotage?* (1979). The Crusaders receive a call asking them to pick up a young man named Gary who has just completed his prison sentence. Gary's life took a terrible turn when in seminary his Greek professor told the class, "When you graduate, of course you will preach from the King James Version of the Bible because so many of the laymen believe it is the Word of God … heh … heh." The professor instructs his students to agree with them, but then says, "we know better, only the original manuscripts are the Word of God … You see the lay people wouldn't understand." Gary explodes with rage and yells that the professor has "shattered [his] foundations." Gary then force-feeds the professor the Bible, assaults the dean of the college, and attempts to burn down the administration building. The Crusaders tell Gary that he has fallen prey to the lies of the "Alexandrian Cult." This cult has attempted to adulterate the Bible since the first century. Furthermore, this Alexandrian Cult answers to the Roman Catholic Church. The Crusaders tell Gary that the Roman Catholic Church is attempting to create "an ecumenical Bible (one common Bible for all religions) preparing the way for the Anti-Christ." Moreover, Bible colleges are crawling with "professors who are in the Alexandrian Cult." These professors are "constantly altering the King James Bible with the Greek and English versions of the Roman Catholic Latin Vulgate Bible." Gary wonders how he could ever have believed such lies. Tim and James tell him that if he "put[s] some Christian leader on a pedestal," then "sooner or later they will let you

[20] C. Metz, "Jack Chick's Anti-Catholic Alberto Comic Book Is Exposed as a Fraud," *Christianity Today*, 13 March 1981, 50; Jack Chick, *Alberto* (Chino: Chick Publications, 1979), 23–24.

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down." With his characteristic lack of subtlety, Chick again denigrates institutional hierarchies and upholds the power of the layman.[21]

Chick's hatred of educational institutions does not simply arise from his disagreement with their opinions or beliefs. His fear and criticisms of Bible colleges reveal a deep mistrust of educated experts who enjoy special influence over young people or who possess a body of knowledge to which the general public does not have access. Chick does not, however, join the NCR in their calls for educational reform. When Ms. Henn attempts to persuade her students of the acceptability of homosexuality, their parents do not form a protest group or lobby the school board. Susy waits to witness to her unsaved friends after school, dutifully obeying her grandfather's wishes that she respect the law by not "saying anything until I'm off school grounds." In "Big Daddy?" (1972), the professor leaves the secular university and the Christian student remains, apparently having no problem holding to his faith in such a hostile setting. In Chick's world, seminaries and Bible colleges are the only institutions in which Christian students fall into sin or abandon their faith. Chick believes that creating Christian organizations in order to fight secular institutions amounts to compromise. The individual Christian is fully equipped to stand against the forces of Satan without the help of lobbying groups or denominational bodies.

Chick's anti-Catholicism is at the root of his opposition to NCR educational protests. In a 1987 article in *Battle Cry*, Chick warned that those who want to return teacher-led prayer to the public schools "are likely to disapprove of the result." He argues that any government-sponsored prayer in schools would be Catholic, and not Protestant. At the same time, Chick does not call for believers to abandon public education. He writes that "parents who both work or don't have the money for private tuition" must send their children to public schools. The best course of action for these parents is to make "sure their children can resist these lies." Parents must teach their children "the truth at home so they can sort out what they are being taught at school." Chick's unswerving faith in the ability of the individual lay Christian to win converts, not to mention his unswerving faith in the power of his own tracts, will not allow him to call for a wholesale retreat from a potentially fruitful mission field.[22]

[21] Jack Chick, *Sabotage?* (Chino: Chick Publications, 1979), 6, 8–10, 29–30, 32. The Douay–Rhiems Version and the New American Bible are both English translations of the Vulgate, which is a Latin translation. It is, however, unclear what Chick means by "Greek … versions of the Roman Catholic Latin Vulgate Bible."

[22] Chick, "Birds and the Bees," 8; Chick, "Big Daddy?" 22; Jack Chick, "Prayer in Schools: Would It Work?", *Battle Cry*, Nov./Dec. 1987, at www.chick.com/bc/1987/schoolprayer.asp, accessed 23 Feb. 2012; Chick, "Leaders Urge Abandoning Public Schools," *Battle*

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The historical circumstances leading to NCR lobbying for the rights of private education perhaps constitute another reason for Chick's aloofness from organized education reform. The historian Joseph Crespino explains how the fight to maintain tax-exempt status for conservative Christian private schools galvanized the NCR during the 1970s. The IRS threatened to revoke these schools' tax-exempt status because the Nixon administration determined that many of the southern schools existed to circumvent desegregation. The Nixon administration's charge seems correct in many cases, including that of Jerry Falwell's Lynchburg Christian Academy. Although the views of Chick and the Bob Jones family have often coincided on many issues, Bob Jones III drifted toward the NCR when Reagan reinstated Bob Jones University's tax-exempt status only for the Supreme Court revoke it again due to the school's ban on interracial dating. Chick, on the other hand, is staunchly antiracist. In addition to featuring an African American, James Carter, as a hero in his comics, in *"Operation Bucharest"* (1974) Chick makes a special point to defend interracial dating. In "Soul Sisters" (2006), he takes the provocative step of portraying Adam and Eve as black. Although Chick agrees with the NCR on the dangers of the public schools, he does not hold the same racial attitudes that led many of those who share his theological positions to push for private schools over state-funded education.[23]

## THE CLERGY

The anti-Catholicism that Chick propounds in his writings on education becomes even more prominent in his portrayals of the professional clergy. Chick has authored at least nine tracts and eight full-length comic books purporting to expose the lies of the Roman Catholic Church. The Alberto series of Crusader comics sparked a firestorm in the evangelical world. The Christian Booksellers Association threatened to expel Chick over his anti-Catholic views before he resigned voluntarily. According to Chick, a Roman Catholic conspiracy lurks behind the rise of Islam, Communism, and Nazism. In Chick's world, Roman Catholics do not have the same goals as conservative

*Cry*, March/April 2008, at www.chick.com/bc/2008/publicschools.asp, accessed 23 Feb. 2012.

[23] For discussion of private Christian schools, race, and the IRS see Joseph Crespino, "Civil Rights and the Religious Right," in Schulman and Zelizer, *Rightward Bound*, 90–105. For information on Falwell specifically see Martin, 70–71. For Chick's views on race see Jack Chick, *"Operation Bucharest"* (Chino: Chick Publications, 1974), 29; Chick, "Soul Sisters" (Chino: Chick Publications, 2006), 7.

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Christians, and they participate in conservative causes only to the extent that they can further their totalitarian goals.[24]

Much of Chick's animosity towards Roman Catholicism centers around the power of the priests. In "Death Cookie" (1988) Chick calls priests "Holy Helpers" who perform the Mass in order to enslave parishioners. In "The Awful Truth" (2011) Chick claims that Jesuits "create wars, revolutions, topple governments, blackmail and control dictators, all 'for the greater glory of God.'" The comic books focussing on Alberto highlight the sins of the clergy, including hypocrisy regarding homosexuality, infanticide, and the assassination of evangelical pastors. Page after page of Chick's anti-Catholic writings contain condemnations of the Roman Catholic clergy's conspiratorial behavior.[25]

Chick focusses a great deal of attention on Catholic priests, to be sure, but he displays contempt for socially respectable and politically engaged Protestant clergy as well. In his writings, Protestant pastors often serve as foils for lay evangelists, and pastors rarely play the role of the hero. In the full-length comic *The Broken Cross* (1974), the Crusaders investigate the ritual sacrifice of a virgin. They stop by a local church to talk with the pastor who turns out to be unsympathetic to their views on spiritual warfare. The pastor states that he does not "believe, in this enlightened age, that witches exist." When the Crusaders mention the Church of Satan, the pastor gets angry and calls their beliefs "utter nonsense." The pastor then yells that he does not "believe the Bible is the Word of God! Nor do I believe that Jesus is Jehovah, and I don't believe in the virgin birth!" After he also denounces those who believe in the Second Coming, he throws the Crusaders out of his church. At the end of the story Tim and James encounter this same pastor as a member of the virgin-sacrificing satanist group that they have been hunting.[26]

Chick usually contents himself with revealing pastors to be compromisers or hypocrites as opposed to murdering satanists. In the tract "Sin City," homosexual Pastor Ray attempts to convince an African American Christian that his antihomosexual views constitute a hate crime. Both the African American Christian and the white believer who converts Pastor Ray to fundamentalist Protestantism are laymen. In "Going Down?" (2001), Rev. Brinks tells a parishioner that the doctrine of hell "came out of the Dark Ages" and that

[24] "Booksellers' Group May Expel Chick," *Christianity Today*, 23 Oct. 1981, 62; "Jack Chick Has Resigned from the Christian Booksellers Association (CBA)," *Christianity Today*, 1 Jan. 1982, 41. On the prevalence of Roman Catholicism among traditionalists see Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement*, 70–71.

[25] Jack Chick, "Death Cookie" (Chino: Chick Publications, 1988), 10; Chick, "The Awful Truth" (Chino: Chick Publications, 2011), 20; Chick, *Alberto*, 12, 22.

[26] Chick, *The Broken Cross*, 9–10, 32.

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"God's too loving to put anyone in a place like that." When this same parishioner has a near-death experience and sees hell for himself, he angrily charges Rev. Brinks with deceiving him. The personal experiences of a layman, and not theological training, ultimately lead Rev. Brinks himself to convert to more orthodox evangelicalism. In "Why No Revival?," a pastor sitting in his study thinks, "I didn't have time to prepare a sermon this week. Oh well, I'll give them the same one I gave them this time last year. No one will know the difference!" In the latter tract's 2011 update, "Still No Revival?," a conference leader asks a group of pastors how many of them "believe in the virgin birth, hell, and the Second Coming of Jesus." Only four out of the hundreds of pastors in attendance raise their hands. Pastors play the part of shepherds for their congregations, but in Chick's world they are more often wolves in sheep's clothing.[27]

Chick particularly dislikes pastors who seek publicity and political influence. The tract "Reverend Wonderful" (1982) directly attacks a stereotypical famous pastor. The first panel features a crowd commenting on the "magnificent sermon" from a pastor who will also be "speaking at the presidential prayer breakfast." This pastor, Dr. Westhall, welcomes a group of reporters, informing them that he "was honored to be in [the Pope's] presence" and that the two of them "will be working to bring all Christians into unity." At a dinner held in Dr. Westhall's honor, the emcee states that Dr. Westhall was voted "the most loved man in America." When Dr. Westhall rises to speak, he proclaims that God wants "Protestants, Jews, and Catholics," to stop "bickering on incidentals" and "pull together to usher in a great New Age." Later, a layman approaches Dr. Westhall with a Chick tract and asks him if he sure he is going to heaven. Dr. Westhall listens to the evangelist, but later tells his friends, "People like that are sick" and that he will "talk to the governor about passing a law to keep people like him off the streets." Shortly after this encounter, Dr. Westhall dies in a plane crash and goes to hell. At the moment of his damnation, Dr. Westhall laments that he "was ashamed of the gospel" and that he "wanted power and fame" instead of a real relationship with Jesus Christ. Believers cannot trust pastors who seek fame by talking to reporters and appearing on television. Believers should also avoid pastors who demonstrate a desire for political influence by sharing a platform with the President or seeking an audience with the governor. Finally, they should avoid church leaders who stress ecumenism over a bold stand for the distinctive doctrines of the faith.[28]

[27] Chick, "Sin City," 5, 21; Jack Chick, "Going Down?" (Chino: Chick Publications, 2010), 8, 10, 20; Chick, "Why No Revival?" 9; Chick, "Still No Revival?" 6.

[28] Jack Chick, "Reverend Wonderful" (Chino: Chick Publications, 1982), 2–3, 5–6, 13–14, 21.

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This thinly veiled attack on Billy Graham helps place Chick within the wider stream of postwar fundamentalism. Graham's popularity grew during the 1950s, and he made a concerted effort to reach out to liberal Protestants and Catholics. Many of his fundamentalist supporters balked. In 1958, prolific pamphleteer John R. Rice and university president Bob Jones Sr. signaled their break with Graham by signing a pledge not to cooperate in evangelistic efforts with those who deny certain fundamentals of the faith such as the inerrancy of Scripture or the resurrection of Christ. Graham had the same polarizing effect among conservative Protestants when he came to Chick's home area of Los Angeles to lead a revival in 1963. Although fundamentalists such as Carl McIntire opposed the visit, Chick's one-time pastor J. Vernon McGee worked enthusiastically with Graham. Chick cast his lot with Rice, Jones, and McIntire, as evinced by the numerous *Battle Cry* articles critical of Graham. Since the early 1960s, the primary difference between fundamentalists like Chick and evangelicals such as McGee has consisted in the former's emphasis on separation from worldly compromisers, especially Roman Catholics. Evangelicals such as Graham and those associated with the periodical *Christianity Today* instead emphasized cooperation for the sake of evangelism and social reform.[29]

Chick also names other living individuals who share in Dr. Westhall's and Billy Graham's hypocrisy. Most of these figures were, like Graham, active in the ecumenical movement. According to Alberto, the popular faith healer Kathryn Kuhlman "pushed for unity" and called "for priests, rabbis, and pastors to be one." Alberto points to the Pope's blessing of Kuhlman as proof positive of her Catholicism. Alberto claims that the Pope has used those like Kuhlman to infiltrate not only "Pentecostals, Charismatics, [and] the Ecumenical Movement," but even some "Fundamentalists and new Evangelicals." Alberto charges Jim Jones with being "a powerful warlock and a well trained Jesuit." He also cites Jones's visits with Rosalyn Carter, San Francisco mayor George Moscone, and California governor Jerry Brown as proof of a wider conspiracy. Alberto claims that the Jonestown massacre was a Jesuit-orchestrated plot to discredit Bible-believing fundamentalists. The Jesuits specifically wanted governments to "pass laws forbidding groups from setting up retreats" so that "Bible believers would have no place to hide when the great wave of persecution from Rome begins." Chick points to the examples of Kuhlman and Jones as object lessons for the individual

[29] Perhaps the most comprehensive dissertation on Rice is Howard Edgar Moore, "The Emergence of Moderate Fundamentalism: John R. Rice and *The Sword of the Lord*," PhD dissertation, George Washington University, 1990), 273–76. For a sampling of Chick's views on Graham see Jack Chick, "What Would You Do If …?", *Battle Cry*, March/April 2003, at www.chick.com/bc/2003/whatif.asp, accessed 10 March 2012.

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believer. In a sidebar, Chick warns his readers against "putting pastors and leaders up on pedestals" because it "only brings us disappointments and bitterness when they fall." Alberto also wonders when "Christians [will] stop putting their leaders on pedestals" before citing Jesus' warning in Matthew 24:23 against false prophets. Individual believers are responsible for their own relationship with God. Visible and powerful pastors are almost always "hypocrites" who can "cause you to go to hell."[30]

The occupations of the heroes of Chick's comics and tracts make his disdain for the professional clergy even more evident. Bob Williams, a recurring character whose occupation is a mystery but who is almost certainly not a pastor, serves as the protagonist in approximately twenty-five of Chick's tracts. As for the Crusaders, Tim Clark is a former Green Beret and James Carter is a former gang member. They currently work in a factory, but this job serves more as a cover for their top-secret evangelistic missions than as an actual job. Missionaries, such as those featured in the comics *Scarface* (1974) and *Exorcists* (1975), receive high praise from Chick, most likely because they have fewer temptations or opportunities to seek fame and power. Two local church pastors do appear in a positive light in the comics, but they have only supporting roles. The real heroes are Tim and James. As for the tracts, a wealthy uncle, an antiques store owner, a praying grandmother, a Sunday school teacher, a concerned friend, a policeman, a doctor, and a grade school student share the Gospel with their friends. Chick portrays individual lay believers as the agents of change, all through their humble witness and the simple message of the Gospel. The liberal distribution of comic book tracts does not hurt, either.[31]

Chick fundamentally disagrees with the NCR concerning the role of the pastor in public life. Liebman and Wuthnow recognize personal charisma and ingenuity as a key force in the rise of the NCR, and political scientist Michael Lienesch identifies the presence of "popular preachers" as one of the three common denominators found in NCR campaigns. Chick, on the other hand, champions the "[t]rue pastors, who desperately desire to lead their people to God." In Chick's eyes, "those religious leaders who seek political power and recognition" are in fact guilty of introducing "the leaven of the Pharisees" into the true church. Chick specifically indicts the Moral Majority and Jerry Falwell as beholden to Roman Catholics. He also chides Pat Robertson for failing to understand that "he can never win a national election without the help of the Catholic Church." Chick sees Falwell and Robertson

[30] Chick, *Double-Cross*, 28–32.
[31] Chick, *"Operation Bucharest"*, 6–11; Jack Chick, *Scarface* (Chino: Chick Publications, 1974), 12–15; Chick, *Exorcists* (Chino: Chick Publications, 1975), 3–10.

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as following in the footsteps of Billy Graham. This can only result in compromise with the forces of darkness, so Chick chooses separation. Although the respective theologies of Chick, Falwell, Robertson, Graham, Rice, and the Bob Joneses differ little, their beliefs regarding the proper role of the pastor in the political realm vary markedly.[32]

## GOVERNMENT

Chick's opposition to the NCR is most evident when he discusses politics and the role of government. A close relationship with conservative politicians, especially those in the Republican Party, has also characterized the NCR. Those who self-identify as evangelical Christians tend to vote for Republicans, and NCR organizations such as Ralph Reed's Christian Coalition have been heavily involved in Republican presidential and Congressional campaigns. This association with the Republican Party is, however, not inevitable, as evangelical support for Jimmy Carter in 1976 and NCR support for southern Democrats demonstrates. The campaign and election of Ronald Reagan ultimately consummated the relationship between the NCR and the GOP, resulting in a marriage that is entering its fourth decade.[33]

Chick diverges sharply from the NCR in that he does not believe Christians should seek political power, nor should they campaign on behalf of particular candidates. His pessimism regarding the ability of government to accomplish anything of lasting importance for believers stems arguably more from a thoroughgoing adherence to premillennial dispensationalism than from his evangelical adversaries. Dispensationalism has evolved since John Nelson Darby first articulated its major tenets in the mid-nineteenth century, but many of its most recognizable teachings have endured. Darby broke from the postmillennialists of his day in that he did not believe Christians should strive to usher in the Kingdom of God on Earth. They should instead wait expectantly for their translation into the heavenly realms, an event known as the Rapture. Dispensationalists believe that after true Christians experience the Rapture, which could happen at any moment, the Antichrist and an Apostate Church will rule the earth for a seven-year period known as the Tribulation. Christ will return at the end of the Tribulation to fight the Battle of Armageddon and defeat the forces of Satan before beginning his literal millennial reign on Earth. The rule of the Antichrist entails the ultimate

[32] Liebman and Wuthnow, "Introduction," 2; Lienesch, *Redeeming America*, 5; Chick, "Prayer in Schools."

[33] Lienesch, 7; Smith, *Christian America?*, 1, 55; Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 303, 343; Steve Bruce, *The Rise and Fall of the New Christian Right: Conservative Protestant Politics in America, 1978–1988* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 149–50.

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collapse of even the most benevolent national governments. Although the logic of this eschatology might lead to political ambivalence on the part of its adherents, the historian Matthew Sutton argues throughout his work *American Apocalypse* that most well-known dispensationalists have been politically engaged at least to some degree. Chick prefers to follow the logic of his position to its end, and in so doing once again takes the position of outlier.[34]

Chick holds to this common dispensationalist understanding of earthly governments. In the comic book *Chaos* (1975), the Crusaders Tim and James serve as bodyguards to Dr. Morse, a dispensationalist theologian who has survived two assassination attempts by an unnamed cult. Dr. Morse and the Crusaders travel to Israel, where he presents a conference on Bible prophecy. Along the way he explains to Tim and James what those who miss the Rapture and remain on Earth during the Tribulation will experience. One scene portrays politicians in "capitals around the world" desperately seeking solutions to their food shortage and inflation problems. Dr. Morse believes that governments will look "for a great leader to save them from this mess." Once the "ruler of Europe" saves Israel from a Russian invasion, churches and governments willingly allow him to become their dictator. This dictator, who is the Antichrist, leads the world into "a time of great prosperity" before revealing his true nature as a bloodthirsty tyrant. Speaking through Dr. Morse, Chick reveals that satanists already fill key government positions. Chick does not mention the United States, but his scenes depicting the Tribulation clearly portray the Antichrist's control of that country. Because these developments are inevitable, Chick sees little point in mobilizing believers to control helpless, corrupt, and ultimately doomed governments.[35]

A few of Chick's tracts explicitly deal with the end times. Even in tracts that primarily consist in quotations from Scripture, such as "The Only Hope" (1985), Chick manages to tell his readers that the Catholic Church "is now secretly negotiating treaties (concordats) with every major nation on earth,

[34] Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 86–88, 244–47. Dispensationalism is as much a way of interpreting Scripture as it is a brand of eschatology. This hermeneutic gained widespread popularity at the beginning of the twentieth century through *The Scofield Reference Bible*. Lewis Sperry Chafer presented the first systematic dispensational theology in 1947. Charles Caldwell Ryrie in *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965) summarized important developments in dispensational thought since Chafer. Theologians Darrell Bock and Craig Blaising in *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, IL: Bridgepoint, 1993) have presented further revisions to the system. With each successive revision, dispensationalists have toned down the more sensationalistic aspects of the system. Chick's brand of dispensationalism falls more in line with the Chafer–Ryrie types than it does later formulations.

[35] Jack Chick, *Chaos* (Chino: Chick Publications, 1975), 18–19, 27, 29.

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to pull them under its control." In a 1966 tract entitled "The Beast" (reissued in 1988 with alterations), a character exults over the "peace" that will come with "a one world government." In a later scene during the Tribulation, Chick depicts the authorities as using guillotines attached to golf carts so that they can immediately execute those who have refused to take the Mark of the Beast. Chick sets the action of "The Last Generation" just before the Rapture, but a one-world government has already taken over, proclaiming, "Anyone who claims that Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father in Heaven shall be committed to a mental camp for treatment and or be executed." Again, the heroes of the story, who face persecution at the hands of their own son, appear to live in the United States.[36]

Chick's suspicion of the authorities extends to all levels of government. In *The Broken Cross*, Chick portrays the local sheriff as a racist who insists on referring to James Carter as "boy." Later, the same sheriff, along with the mayor, appears as a member of a human-sacrificing satanic cult. In *Spellbound?*, a policeman guards the room where satanists curse rock records before they enter stores. In the same comic a patrolman refuses to arrest two satanists who attempt to murder anti-rock lecturer Lance Collins. In the antihomosexual tract "Sin City," a policeman arrests an anti-gay rights protestor, calling him a "stinking straight." Later in that same tract, a policeman with a thick black moustache and a large jewel earring leads homosexual Pastor Ray into the protestor's hospital room in an attempt to persuade him to abandon his views. In "Here Comes the Judge" (2012), a crooked judge and several police officers, not to mention the governor, operate an organized-crime ring. The governor of an unnamed state also receives criticism in "The Bull" (1986) when the worst prisoner in the state becomes a Christian, thwarting the governor's plans to ruin the career of an idealistic warden. Just as Chick includes a few good pastors in his stories, he at times presents police officers in a positive light. In *The Broken Cross*, a highway patrolman helps the Crusaders locate the satanic cult. In "Kidnapped!" (2004) and "The Peace Maker" (2004), two titles in Chick's Black Tract series, the hero is one Officer Carter, who appears to be unrelated to James Carter of the Crusaders. Nevertheless, Chick believes that corruption is endemic within all levels of government. Much like Bible-believing pastors, God-fearing authorities stand out as the exception rather than the rule.[37]

[36] Jack Chick, "The Only Hope" (Chino: Chick Publications, 1985), 16; Chick, "The Beast" (Chino: Chick Publications, 1988), 5, 12; Chick, "The Last Generation," 3.

[37] Chick, *The Broken Cross*, 6, 15–16; Chick, *Spellbound?*, 21, 31; Chick, "Sin City," 3, 7; Jack Chick, "Boo!" (Chino: Chick Publications, 1991), 7–8; Chick, "Here Comes the Judge!" (Chino: Chick Publications, 2012), 6–10; Chick, "The Bull" (Chino: Chick Publications, 1988), 14–22; Chick, "Trust Me!" (Chino: Chick Publications, 1994), 14;

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Chick also differs from the NCR in that he refuses to glorify the military. In an early tract, "Holy Joe" from 1970, an unbelieving captain and drill sergeant continuously insult a Christian soldier, ultimately sending him on a suicide mission simply because they do not want to hear him talk about Jesus anymore. In a tract from 1975, Chick decries the "massive arms race" and depicts an American general as stating that he wants "peace at any price … even if it means going to war to get it!" Chick served in the Pacific during World War II, but there are no indications that his personal experience turned him against the armed forces. His apparent disbelief in the effectiveness of defense spending instead stems from his opinions regarding the futility of government effort alone in solving the world's problems.[38]

Chick believes that satanic corruption becomes more evident at higher levels of government. His antiabortion tract "Who Murdered Clarice?" (2000) depicts "senators, congressmen, lobbyists, supreme court justices, and finally the presidents" standing before God's throne to give an account for their refusal to outlaw abortion. Chick does not specify the political affiliations of those facing judgment, probably because he does not think it matters. According to the Crusaders in the comic *Angel of Light* (1978), the Illuminati, a secret society that supposedly orchestrates geopolitics, controls both political parties. Almost no one "goes into high office without [the Illuminati's] approval." In fact, the Illuminati "control and direct the fighting of the right and left wings in politics." Chick rarely mentions specific Presidents, but when he does mention them, he tends to criticize Republicans more than Democrats. In the anti-Catholic tract "Is There Another Christ?" (2009), Chick criticizes George W. Bush for praising Pope Benedict XVI. Bush also receives criticism for calling Islam "a religion based upon love, and not hate," and for stating that "[t]he face of terror is not the face of Islam." Chick denounces evangelical Jimmy Carter because he let "the pope bless the nation" when he visited the United States in 1979. The only President for whom Chick has kind words is, somewhat surprisingly, Catholic John F. Kennedy. Chick's friend Alberto even claims that, while still a Jesuit, he snuck Lee Harvey Oswald into Texas to assassinate Kennedy because "he put the U. S. Constitution above Catholic dogma."[39]

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Chick, "Kidnapped!" (Chino: Chick Publications, 2004), 2–3; Chick, "The Peace Maker" (Chino: Chick Publications, 2004), 2–23.

[38] Jack Chick, "Holy Joe" (Chino: Chick Publications, 1970), 2–23; Chick, "The Mad Machine" (Chino: Chick Publications, 1975), 9; Chick, "A Message from Jack Chick – May 2000" *Battle Cry*, May/June 2000, at www.chick.com/bc/2000/jacksmessage.asp, accessed 12 March 2012.

[39] Jack Chick, "Who Murdered Clarice?" (Chino: Chick Publications, 2000), 10; Chick, *Angel of Light* (Chino: Chick Publications, 1978), 29; Chick, "Is There Another

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Chick has also spoken against the major players of the NCR. He indicts Ronald Reagan because he "systematically populated the halls of government, including the Supreme Court, with Catholics." Reagan figures prominently in Chick's comics from the early 1980s. In the full-length comic *The Godfathers* (1982), Alberto explains to the Crusaders that all Jesuits were to look for "a secret sign" that would indicate "when the ecumenical movement had successfully wiped out protestantism." This sign occurred at Reagan's first inauguration, when for the first time in history the President "took his oath of office facing an obelisk," allegedly in tribute to the Freemasons who got Reagan elected. Chick also warns that those "Catholic organizations and government leaders," including Reagan's "outspoken Secretary of Education William Bennett," who "so wholeheartedly support prayer in schools" really aim to grant Roman Catholics greater influence in public life. Chick wants Christians to eschew political activity, charging that "the religious groups that best know how to exercise political power will dominate." The religious group that has had the most practice in exercising political power is, not surprisingly, the Catholic Church. Chick concludes that "keeping the government out of religion, even though that has led to some obvious excesses, might be the only way to protect our religious freedom." Chick therefore finds common cause with the ACLU and American Atheists. When Alberto criticizes President Carter and the "great evangelists" for fawning over the Pope during his 1979 trip to the United States, he makes a point of praising Madalyn Murray O'Hair for opposing the visit.[40]

Chick's example demonstrates the extent to which evangelical politics have been defined by their stance toward Catholicism. During the early years of the fundamentalist J. Frank Norris's ministry, he preached a virulent anti-Catholicism. In 1928, he campaigned tirelessly against Democratic presidential nominee Al Smith because he feared a secret Catholic plot to take over the government. After assuming the pulpit of Detroit's Temple Baptist Church in 1935, Norris became an opponent of the New Deal and a friend of Father Coughlin. He even visited Pope Pius XII in 1947. His switch came about not through a change in his theology, but rather because the Great Depression and World War II caused him to rethink his opinions on the identity of the Antichrist. Stalin seemed a more likely candidate than the Pope. The Pope assumed the role of bulwark against communism. This shift allowed conservatives to form political alliances across denominational lines,

Christ?" (Chino: Chick Publications, 2009), 12; Chick, *Double-Cross*, 26; Chick, "The Awful Truth," 21.

[40] Chick, "Prayer in Schools"; Jack Chick, *The Godfathers* (Chino: Chick Publications, 1982), 26; Chick, *Double-Cross*, 26.

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alliances that could not have formed had Protestants continued to suspect the Pope of being the Antichrist. Those who still harbored such suspicions formed no such alliances. In 1985, Bob Jones Jr., president of Bob Jones University from 1947 until 1971, said that he was "inclined to blame every evil on Romanism" and that "the so-called 'Society of Jesus' is the most vicious creation of that religion of darkness and dead bones." Chick demonstrates his disdain for communism in comics such as *"Operation Bucharest"* and *The Ark* (1976). Like Bob Jones Jr., however, Chick sees Roman Catholics as the ultimate enemy and so has never remonstrated with them as did Norris and those in the NCR. In any event, Alberto told Chick that the Catholic Church orchestrated the rise of communism. For Chick, anticommunism is simply another form of anti-Catholicism.[41]

Thus, even as Reagan built his reputation as a strong anticommunist, his friendliness towards Roman Catholics provided fodder for conspiratorially minded conservative Protestants. Some prominent leaders in the NCR have held views similar to Chick's but have not publicized them for fear of losing political influence. According to historian Michael Kazin, Pat Robertson "had the good sense to confine [his] views" on Freemasonry and one-world government "between the covers of a book few people read." Tim LaHaye, who at one time was on the board of directors of the Moral Majority and directed the Council for National Policy, for the most part left politics behind after a falling-out with some portions of the NCR in the late 1980s when his anti-Catholic views came to light. He moved on to a career as a wildly successful fiction writer, openly affirming his belief that the Illuminati and the Trilateral Commission, among other groups, are secretly preparing the world for the arrival of the Antichrist. Even if they do not go to Chick's extremes, many prominent figures of the NCR hold views similar to his, views that could lead evangelicals to despair of ever using the government to enforce their socially conservative views.

## CONCLUSION

Drawing simple connections between conservative theology and conservative politics conceals the reality that, according to the historian Benjamin T. Lynerd, NCR ideology "is a bundle of contradictions waiting to unravel at any moment." To some extent, these tensions pre-date the emergence of

[41] Barry Hankins, *God's Rascal: J. Frank Norris and the Beginnings of Southern Fundamentalism* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996), 51–57, 150–51; Bob Jones Jr., *Cornbread and Caviar* (Greenville: Bob Jones University Press, 1985), 43; Chick, *The Godfathers*, 12–15.

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the post-World War II New Right. George Marsden writes that "the development of hyper-American patriotic anti-communism is a puzzle and an irony in the history of fundamentalism." Marsden asks how "premillennialists, whose attention was supposed to be directed away from politics while waiting for the coming King," could "embrace this highly politicized gospel." Chick does not seem capable of living with the paradox. Doctrinal purity and the coming Kingdom are his sole concerns. The traditionalists in the NCR who ostensibly share his theology are in his mind simply hypocrites.[42]

During what appears to be the twilight of the NCR, social observers began to discern in which political directions evangelicals might turn. In the first decade of the twentieth century, former George W. Bush speechwriter Michael Gerson has pointed to an emerging left-leaning evangelical movement. Lynerd is, however, skeptical that evangelicals will ever wholeheartedly support environmental protection or the welfare state. Although discussions of a potential evangelical leftward turn are fairly common, few have confronted the question whether Chick's antipolitics might be gaining influence. The debate over gay marriage has, however, served as a catalyst for the reformulation of conservative Protestant political engagement. The Catholic philosopher Francis Beckwith chides evangelicals who want the government out of "the marriage business" entirely. These evangelicals still hold homosexuality to be a violation of God's law. They argue, however, that the state's involvement unnecessarily entangles personal, political, and theological questions. The church would be safer if the state did not involve itself in a spiritual matter and the church did not attempt to win the state to its viewpoint. Beckwith believes that evangelicals want the state to step back from licensing marriages because this option allows them to take "a permanent vacation from the most contentious battle in the culture wars."[43]

In the wake of the *Obergefell* decision, New Right conservative Rod Dreher has recently put forth what he calls the "Benedict option." As Christian conservatives face utter defeat in the culture wars, he calls believers to draw back from political engagement and instead focus on raising children and keeping their faith and communities alive for future generations. Dreher believes

[42] Benjamin T. Lynerd, *Republican Theology: The Civil Religion of American Evangelicals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 206; George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1875–1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 210.

[43] Lynerd, *Republican Theology*, 206; Francis J. Beckwith, "Why Privatizing Marriage Cant' Work," *The Catholic Thing* (blog), 14 Feb. 2014, at www.thecatholicthing.org/columns/2014/why-privatizing-marriage-cant-work.html, accessed 30 April 2014; Andrew Walker, "Should the Church Get Out of the Marriage Business," *The Gospel Coalition* (blog), 25 Nov. 2013, at http://the gospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2013/11/25/should-the-church-get-out-of-the-marriage-business, accessed 30 April 2014.

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that this is perhaps the only way for Christians to maintain their prophetic voice. Just as Benedict of Nursia left behind a fallen and decadent Rome, Christians should separate themselves from the political process and an essentially postmodern culture that, according to Dreher, has left Western civilization in tatters. Dreher has received some support from conservative Calvinist bloggers. As for Jack Chick, he advocated for and lived within the Benedict option for the last half-century. The chance that he would join a Catholic like Dreher in celebrating a Catholic monk is, however, as small as him suddenly deciding that Pope Francis I is on the right track after all.[44]

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Nathan Saunders received his PhD in history from the University of South Carolina and is currently Head of Collections at South Caroliniana Library. He wishes to thank Larry Glickman for reading early drafts of this essay and for his continued interest, and Clint Page for the hours of conversation over the nuances of Chick's work.

[44] Rob Dreher, "Benedict Option FAQ," *American Conservatives*, 6 Oct. 2015, at www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/benedict-option-faq, accessed 30 April 2014.

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