

THE NATURE
of the
AMERICAN SYSTEM

By
ROUSAS JOHN RUSHDOONY

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A PREFACE ON THE WRITING OF HISTORY

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Revisionism is long overdue in American history, and in historical studies generally, lest history as a discipline disappears into the abysses of the social sciences. Ostensibly having arrived to new maturity in the hands of some practitioners as a science, history is rather becoming a fertile area of myth-making and quackery because it lacks any awareness of epistemological self-consciousness. It is assumed, first, that an objective history is possible, and also a valid science of history, and, second, it is assumed that if no objective history is possible, then history as a discipline is destroyed or else is reduced to propaganda.

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Both assumptions must be rejected. Behind the writing of history is a philosophy of history, and behind that philosophy of history are certain pre-theoretical and essentially religious presuppositions. There is no such thing as brute factuality, but rather only interpreted factuality. The historian's report is always the report of a perspective, a context, a framework; man is not, like God, beyond time and circumstance, condition and place. Man is neither a prime mover nor a prime viewer, but, to deny to man the status of a first cause and a first view is by no means to deny the validity or function of secondary causes and secondary viewers. To recognize that man is neither a first cause nor a first viewer is thus to deny the possibility of an objective history, but it is not thereby a denial of the possibility of a valid history, unless we proceed on the assumption that the ordination and determination of first causes does violence to secondary causes and removes the liberty or contingency of second causes rather than establishing them. It is the insistence of orthodox Christian thought that the validity of history is pre-