

ARISE & BUILD

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RUSHDOONY'S *REVOLT AGAINST MATURITY*

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The man who buried the talent earned his denunciation, but at least he didn't lose anything his Master committed to him. In an era where Christian

leaders are teaching that “Down here, we lose!” we're learning just how many things we've lost for our Master. Anthropology and psychology once were adjuncts of Christian theology, governed by scriptural truth. These connections were severed on the Church's watch, and we've seen the Lord's stake in these disciplines shrivel to irrelevance. Psychology was *forfeited* to the humanists, who were only too happy to drive the wedge deeper to widen the gap to secure humanism's hegemony.

The severing of psychology from Biblical theology can easily be documented. I have in front of me four editions of the *DSM*—the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. These volumes function as the bible of psychiatry: if you can't find it in the *DSM*, it doesn't exist as a psychiatric concern. The content evolves over time, and current disputes revolve around whether a condition warrants inclusion or not. For example, Complex PTSD was identified as early as 1992 by Dr. Judith Herman,¹ but has yet to make it into the 2022 issue of the *DSM*,² despite being accepted by the *DSM*'s European counterpart.³

My copies of the *DSM* were published in 1994,⁴ 2000,⁵ 2013,⁶ and 2022⁷ respectively. I tabulated their index entries for seven terms: God, Jesus, sin, theology, Christian, guilt, and alienation. There were *zero* entries for all seven up until the

2022 edition, when two entries for *guilt* finally appeared: guilt about binge-eating and guilt in relation to major depressive disorders.⁸ The gatekeepers have thoroughly sundered their discipline from *any* connection to Biblical truth, purging out past scholarship to replace it with a militantly secular substitute for Biblical psychology. While Complex PTSD will eventually appear in a future *DSM*, no input from man's Creator will ever be granted entrance.

RUSHDOONY IN THE GAP

There are some truly extraordinary books from the pen of Dr. R. J. Rushdoony, but the most important ones stake out territory left unaddressed by others. *Foundations of Social Order* is singular in this regard, while his inclusion of topics normally omitted from systematic theologies makes his own work in that genre a true landmark.

But a special place of honor must be accorded his 1977 work on psychology, *Revolt Against Maturity*.⁹ Because he starts in the right place—the revelation of God—he ends in the right place as well, painting a coherent and comprehensive picture. Every harmful trend he described nearly half a century ago has only intensified, making for grim evidence of our leaders' blindness. Dr. Rushdoony's faithfulness to the witness of Scripture brings light into the darkness. He not only exposes the flaws in humanistic psychology, he identifies weaknesses in various Christian approaches that have furthered the secular takeover of the discipline. In his hands, we arrive at the kind of strong medicine one would expect from a consistent application of the Biblical data.

IT'S ALWAYS A GREAT TIME TO SAVE ON GREAT BOOKS!

The concluding words of Rushdoony's study shed valuable light on the contrast between humanistic and Biblical approaches to psychology.

Humanistic psychologies are aspects of the revolt against maturity. Not surprisingly, they interpret man, not in terms of the doctrine of mature creation, but in terms of the essential infantilism of man, and they in part remake man in terms of their false image of him. The consequence of this disastrous course is not mental health but the aggravation of man's fall, and the development of his depravity to further degrees.

A Christian psychology must thus be theological, and systematically Biblical, or else it will be a facet of man's revolt against maturity.¹⁰

It is therefore worthwhile to walk through key aspects of this volume to see how well it fits the world we live in. The relevant page numbers will appear in parentheses to save space.

PROBLEMS WITH MODERN PSYCHOLOGY

The first problem is that "existing schools of psychology are implicit or explicit attacks upon Biblical faith." (328) More specifically, they "are governed by opinions which are anti-Biblical and grounded in principles which assume the autonomy of man from God." (328) As a consequence, "for pastors to borrow from contemporary humanistic psychologies means to introduce an alien doctrine of salvation to their congregations." (335-336) Regrettably, pastors continue to drink from this broken cistern.

Rushdoony didn't rule out the study of modern psychology, but there was always a caveat. "To recognize an enemy as an enemy does not mean we cannot learn from him, but we must at all times be aware of the framework of his ideas and discoveries." (328) When we lose sight of that framework, we uncritically adopt alien principles at war with Biblical truth, undercutting the faith, so that *reality itself* becomes subject to the warping influence of humanism.

As Van Til has pointed out, the premise of modern psychologies is that, by elim-

inating God as the governing premise, and by reducing Him to at best a supposedly open question, these men claim, "that they by this method are for the *first time really getting in touch with reality.*" Reality is thus defined as the autonomy of man from God and the right of man to evaluate God and all things else in terms of his own, self-generated principles of ultimacy, meaning, and factuality (Gen. 3:5). (330)

[For humanism, reality] is not to be determined by Scripture, and it is either to be determined by research which presupposes anything except God, or assumes the malleability of man by man. The "evidence" studied by psychology thus is a culled evidence; God is removed from the picture, and nothing is allowed to intrude which can alter the picture of autonomy from God. (329)

The bending of reality to suit man's autonomous will doesn't merely constitute an attack on God and His prerogatives, but an attack on His creation as well. "Our enmity with God made us at war with ourselves, with other men, and with the world itself, since it is God's handiwork, so that we were, towards all things, would-be destroyers." (160) Man's descent into statist tyranny chokes off moral interference, as in Marxism:

Marxist theory refuses to recognize any right of conscience in independence of the Marxist state, because the dictatorship of the proletariat is reason and therefore conscience incarnate ... dissent is by definition treason and sin. (270)

Man's conscience is muzzled, so he needs to offload the guilt that God bakes into each mind that rebels against Him. "The guilt which man feels intensely and consciously before God he ascribes to ancient and primitive forces in his unconscious mind." (37) Because this explanation for guilt is false, man makes himself unknowable even to himself. "Guilt led to a flight from self-knowledge." (28) Man then operates blindly under burdens his psychological models are helpless to mitigate.

Small wonder, then, that "Van Til says of the psychology of religion, 'We throw its method overboard completely.'" (332)

IT'S ALWAYS A GREAT TIME TO SAVE ON GREAT BOOKS!

UNREGENERATE MAN'S INTERNAL PROBLEMS BECOME EXTERNAL PROBLEMS

The humanist's self-absorption never stays contained inside his interior thought life, but finds outward expression. His usurpation of God's throne starts in his heart.

"The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Ps. 14:1). But first he has said, "I shall be as God" (Gen. 3:5). (334)

As Rushdoony puts it, "in his religious quest, the humanist refuses to look beyond himself for his god." (138) This redirects his focus negatively. "Today, man is more interested in himself than in God or society." (335) Since he defines himself as good, his next step is to explain the evil that exists, and to define it as being external to himself.

The sinner or reprobate, however, not only insists that the root of corruption is outside himself, but he also places the blame on whatever class of people he finds himself in opposition to. (214)

The resulting warfare has multiple fronts, as Rushdoony points out.

To define man in terms of Jesus Christ means that the ungodly are deformed men, in that they are at war with their own definition. (144)

Man, to be the god he aims at being, can only exercise his divinity in two directions: against his environment, and against other men. (73)

If man is good by nature, evil must come from "the system" or the environment; if man is a sinner, then evil must come from the heart of man. (137)

The internal war's outward component is against the Creator, so that man may take His place on the throne. The ejection of God is the primary goal absorbing man's mental energy.

The world was to have a new beginning with Cain, and this claim is still made by every Cainite who offers a new beginning to mankind, conditional upon a barring of the gates to God. (94)

This revolution, in Ellul's words, "is much more than taking over God's power. It is the desire to exclude God from His creation." (132)

All of man's resources come into play to create the new reality to crowd out the Creator.

Man being a sinner, when he substitutes a do-it-yourself religion and a man-made morality for God's word, his substitute becomes sin made into a system. (137-138)

The resulting system must erase God as Lawgiver as well, for if man is god, he must also be the only lawgiver. "Because law is a central manifestation of God's being, a central activity of revolutionary man will be against law." (132) This lawlessness then spawns both internal and external tyranny. Rushdoony argues that "the greatest tyranny men face is often the tyranny from within, the unrelenting whiplash of a guilty conscience and an unforgiven heart." (282) But the external aspect is also evident:

As capitalism ceases to be Christian, it ceases to be a capitalization and becomes an exploitation, in part also an exploitation by use of the state to gain subsidies and advantages. (302)

The activism of the West will also decline as humanism penetrates more deeply. The only social activism which survives is thus the delight in exercising totalitarian powers. (150)

Men then invest the political domain with power and significance beyond its ability to sustain and direct society. Man's expectations are shattered because they are dislocated:

Imagination thus leads to over-expectation in one realm after another because it denies God; having denied God, it expects the world to deliver what only God can deliver. Politics is over-valued and is made into a vehicle of salvation, with the result that political order is destroyed because too much is expected from it. (81)

Man instinctively knows he needs to jettison the burden of his past, but he seeks this liberation outside of Christ, which dooms his efforts. There is a way forward, but because it is not man's way, man rejects it.

When men, in self-justification, "put

away the past” in order to deny their sins or to bypass them, they also put away their future, because they have ensured that their same sins, unacknowledged, will continue to govern their tomorrows as they did their yesterdays. . . . Only the atoning blood of Jesus Christ can “put away the past” and give a new future. (193-194)

Like the prodigal son, modern man ends up consuming the husks, and modern psychology convinces him how good the husks taste now that he is “authentic.” It is significant that Freud felt obligated to explain away the better mental health of believers versus unbelievers by implicitly invoking the concept of authenticity. “Freud explained away the mental health of believers by declaring that such people avoided personal neurosis only by accepting the ‘cosmic neurosis,’ God.” (297) Humanism rejects Christ’s atonement, smearing it as a neurotic fiction, thereby insuring its adherents perpetual guilt and mutual oppression. “Authentic humanity becomes defined as a God-free humanity.” (56)

MAN’S MEASURES ONLY CREATE MORE EVIL

Man not only creates evil proactively but also definitionally, ascribing ever greater evil to the past to claim moral superiority over previous generations. Rushdoony capsulized this in observing that “yesterday’s paradise is today’s hell.” (241) Man’s instinct to destroy evil (once he’s defined it to suit him) is a distorted vestige of his creation in the image of God. Rushdoony quotes Van Til concerning the Biblical program of the destruction of evil.

No other system of ethics ever demands the complete destruction of evil. . . .

No other system of ethics promises the fulfillment of their ideals in the future, as none of them come from above, so none of them look above. (244)

Because man looks to himself rather than to God, “instead of destroying evil, he increases it.” (244) Rushdoony repeatedly cites Isaiah 57:20-21 asserting that “there is no peace, saith the Lord, to the wicked”—no peace, no rest, and most pointedly, no true Sabbath—a concept

that Rushdoony unpacks better than almost anyone:

The world of the fall is an *anti-sabbath world*; its goal is a man-made rest, an impossibility, because man cannot be a god, nor can he be a creator of a new earth and a new cosmic peace and rest. God’s sabbath is thus a hated reminder of another rest and peace, one which man seeks to suppress in order to realize his own peace. (325)

False faiths are attempts to arrive at such artificial sabbaths and a static utopia. Rushdoony exposes the bitter fruit of these man-centered religions and their cultural implications: “the history of the ancient world is the wreckage of these faiths.” (239)

GROWTH VERSUS STATIC UTOPIA

Growth is central to a Biblical psychology, for the entire creation is implicated in this process, as is the Kingdom of God itself. Growth is the earmark of the creature, but man seeks deliverance from his creaturely status and seeks godhood. His views of a good, healthy society are therefore warped, being hostile to growth.

Growth . . . means that a child cannot expect the privileges of maturity but must grow into them. It means that a mature person recognizes that many goals require years of work, and that many if not virtually all social objectives cannot be realized in a man’s lifetime. (226)

Fallen man’s . . . hope is a static order, in brief, the *graveyard society* to which freedom is a “threat” and growth has no place. [B. F. Skinner] sees only disaster ahead unless controls replace freedom. (183)

The reality of growth is derided as an excuse against progressive social action and instant results. *Utopia now* is demanded, and anything less is viciously denounced.

If men are revolutionists, they then seek to destroy the present order only to create a more static and unchanging order. The dream-states of socialists and communists is a rigid and inflexible order which has no room for growth or disagreement. (172)

Coercive measures to impose the

desired utopia are deployed, suppressing hindrances to the instant transformation of human society.

For these humanists, whose faith makes them their own gods, the freedom of other men is a threat to their plans. As a result, our freedom is for them “the real problem,” and, as problem-solvers, they plan to eliminate it. (180)

Rushdoony astutely points out that it’s not mere control per se that is needed, but control exerted *by them*. “The controls they deem beneficial are ones which *they* command.” (180)

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE AS OUR ROADMAP

This has been a grim survey so far. We will consider more positive aspects in this section and the next before resuming with a contemporary application (transgenderism) that cries out for a return to a Biblical psychology of man. We need to build properly to confront the distortions wracking our society. Only then can peace prevail, the kind of peace signified by the sabbath, as Rushdoony (quoting Klaas Schilder) points out: “Our task is to hew a path by which that sabbath of God will come.” (325) That is the mission, based on hope anchored in truth.

The task of reconstruction falls to us because “the Christian man can see the relationships of things, because he is not blinded by sin.” (237) This clarity of vision has implications for the required transformations we are to facilitate.

The old man cannot cope with crisis, and history is one crisis after another. ... The transformed man, transformed by God, transforms the world and resolves the crisis. ... In brief, man is transformed, and, under God, he transforms the world. The transformation begun in man is then developed in terms of the whole life of man, his family, vocation, society, state, and all things else. (201-202)

This transformation begins at conversion, and Rushdoony quotes Thomas Boston to explain the state of grace as being “the state of *begun recovery* of human nature.” (171-172) It is an earnest of things to come, the basis of hope.

Hope, unfortunately, has been hijacked by the humanists. “The momentum of socialism has been its offer of hope; its growing crisis and coming collapse rests in the fact that it is a false hope.” (249) Because men operate in terms of hope, our view of the future is important, impacting our sense of duty and responsibility. “Hope is not only man in the present affirming a conviction about the future, it is also the future acting on the present.” (248) “A hope concerning the future becomes the cause of that future.” (249) No surprise then that tyrants seek to destroy hope, whereby the only future is the one they preside over.

Hope not only energizes, it amplifies truth as a liberating motive force in man. The Christian man has a true hope guiding his steps and moving him forward. The implications can hardly be overstated.

The Christian man is the only free man [who] alone can undertake and sustain a true reconstruction of society, because he alone has both the freedom and the power to accomplish that task. Because the Christian man recognizes himself as a sinner before God, he alone can fulfill the ancient commandment of the humanists to “Know thyself.” He can cope with crime, because he knows the roots of it in himself, and he knows its cause. (237)

We can condense that down to one thought: we are to be the salt of the earth. The result is His people seeking His Kingdom first.

A society in which godly justification prevails will thus be marked by social energy and vitality. Instead of dissipating its strength on inner warfare and futile self-justifications, it will move forward to re-order all things in terms of God’s law-word. Instead of being group-directed, inner-directed, or past-oriented, it will be future oriented and God directed. (192)

The inheritance we have in Christ drives us to take every thought captive. “The heirs, as citizens of the new creation, make of time itself an outskirts of heaven.” (212)

THE POWER OF WORK

For many today, work is a four-letter word, an aspect of the curse. Rushdoony dismantles this fallacy decisively. The truth is that “in an ungodly era, men want to escape from work, because they find it so frustrating; in a godly age, men thrive in work. ... According to Keuhnelt-Leddihn, work is despised in much of the world ... and hence the lack of progress in those areas.” (300)

The reality is that “work is the expression of man’s energy, man’s mind and power at work” (299) and all meaningful work is future-directed. Rushdoony quotes Rosenstock-Huessy to the effect that “to live in the future is to be indifferent to present hardships.” (231) The relationship of work to the future is critical: once this linkage is severed, meaning itself disappears.

When man adopts a Biblical view of himself, of work, and of the future, his relationship to time also shifts. “Time thus is neither a burden nor a nature cycle but a potential wealth, a pearl of great price whose value is concealed from the ungodly.” (230) It may be concealed from the ungodly, but the “doctrine of time” gets its own section in Rushdoony’s two-volume *Systematic Theology* ... as does “the doctrine of work.”

Our labor is never in vain in the Lord. We can rest assured that “the stronger the old order seems to become, the nearer to self-destruction it is.” (318) Rushdoony quotes J. A. Alexander’s comments on Psalm 115 concerning the fate of the humanists, that “however formidable now, they shall hereafter be as powerless and senseless as the gods they worship.” (135) This is why Rushdoony warns us that “compromise is a form of surrender; the word *compromise* is not to be found in Scripture.” (254)

THE DRIVE TOWARD TRANSGENDERISM

Rushdoony sets the scene for today’s conflict over gender definitions against the backdrop of the Fall and man’s deflection into a claimed autonomy. We quote at length from *Revolt* where Rushdoony contrasts Christian and non-Christian viewpoints on the doctrine of rebirth.

The need is seen by both as *rebirth*. But because the humanist sees it as his problem to solve, it becomes his duty to remake man. This necessitates playing god over other men by governing, controlling, predestinating, and remaking them. ... Moreover, since the humanist’s claim to be able to solve man’s “problem” means denying that God is the problem solver, it means also denying any sensitivity to God’s claims on the part of man. On the other hand, a total sensitivity to man’s claims must be asserted. Insensitivity to God, and to moral absolutes, is coupled to a total sensitivity to man without God. Rebirth, or starting afresh, thus means starting without God, or dying to God in order to be alive as a man. (149)

This descent begins by promoting an erroneous concept of man, denying that he is a creation of God. “Modern psychologies ... not only fail to understand man but they also give man a false picture of himself.” (10)

Man, in seeking to be free from God, is seeking freedom from responsibility, and the consequence is a growing immaturity. ... This is in terms of the new gospel: “Good News! 2 and 2 no longer makes 4” These would-be gods, believing they have abolished God, think that reality will now conform to their imagination. Instead, they will be conformed to God’s judgment. ... The intellectual believes that his rationality gives him an autonomy from God and from the herd-like emotions and appetites of the masses. As a result, he feels that he can determine what is good and evil for mankind. (127)

2 plus 2 no longer equaling 4 is back on the front burner in recent social media posts by “experts.” When all of reality is up for grabs, it is no surprise that gender reality is treated as fluid.

The denial of man’s created nature distorts his sexual nature as well. “The equalitarianism of humanistic psychologies works towards a basic castration of the sexual nature of man and woman and is a major inhibiting force in modern society.” (10) We’d expect Christians to defend the ancient landmarks, but Rushdoony cites

damning evidence to the contrary: “Not surprisingly, the antinomian *Christianity Today* is ready to believe that “Motherhood—at least as we now think of it, may be on the way out.” (66) That magazine issue from 1971 shows how far back such open apostasy extends.

The problem ensues when men and women live, not in terms of necessary circumstances, but in terms of a denial of an aspect of their being, a refusal to accept a creaturely fact. It is then that serious psychological problems ensue. (46)

Why the rush to perform “gender-affirming surgeries”? “In the war against God, revolutionary man treats man as his most expendable commodity and weapon. ... Tyranny thus begins as rule without God and ends as death without God.” (133) Humanists will decry such a martial characterization, but we suggest that if the jackboot fits, they should wear it.

“The humanistic dream of paradise is inescapably coercive, because it requires a humanity to exist in that dreamed-of order which has little relationship to existing man.” (58) But this dream turns into a nightmare when unregenerate man lashes out once reality fails to deliver. We again cite at length; vigilant readers may discern applicability to recent acts of violence against God’s people.

The characteristic of sado-masochism is rage and destruction, whether directed against others or against one’s self. The characteristic of the regenerate or “transformed” person is freedom from this rage and destruction. (200) ... In a culture burdened with sin and guilt, society and man are incapable of coping with their problems; instead, they are busy adding to them by sado-masochistic actions. Such a society is capable of a parasitic advance by sadistic aggressions towards others and by expropriations of the achievements and wealth of other peoples. (195)

But violence doesn’t gain its goal either. “Coercion and violence can harm man, but they cannot remake him.” (58) The bending of reality is driven by man’s false concept of himself. “Man seeks not only civil sovereignty but absolute control

over life and death, the ability to create and alter life at will ...” (131) Rushdoony notes that in the days of Noah, “man’s imagination ‘was *only* evil continually.’ His whole inner nature was given to replanning all reality in terms of his own centrality.” (82) This destructive mission is the logical result of worldviews that deny God. “Propositional truth binds and limits man” (48) which is why it is denied. Man “is now trying to abolish [the] creation” (67) and replace it with a new one. “*But independence from God is gained at the price of dependence upon men.*” (italics in original) (125)

These tragedies are the fruit of abandoning Biblical psychology. Our guide thus should get the final word. “Man dissolves himself whenever he seeks to dissolve God.” (94) 🏰

1. Herman, Judith, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York, NY: Basic Books, [1992] 1999), 119-122, 138.
2. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (Fifth Edition. Text Revision): *DSM-5-TR* (Washington DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2022). The index references to PTSD omit any reference to Complex PTSD, with no separate entry for it. In 1992, Herman, op. cit., 120, stated that “the working group for the diagnostic manual of the American Psychiatric Association has chosen the designation ‘disorder of extreme stress not otherwise specified’” to cover the suite of Complex PTSD symptoms. The earlier DSM-IV and DSM-IV-TR index entries only applied to infants, children, and adolescents; the later editions are even less forthcoming.
3. Cf. the ICD-11 published by the World Health Organization (WHO). ICD-11 is the 11th edition of the WHO’s *International Classification of Diseases*.
4. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (Fourth Edition): *DSM-IV* (Washington DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1994).
5. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (Fourth Edition. Text Revision.): *DSM-IV-TR* (Washington DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2000).
6. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (Fifth Edition): *DSM-5* (Washington DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2013).
7. See note 2.
8. *DSM-V-TR*, p. 1024.
9. R. J. Rushdoony, *Revolt Against Maturity* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, [1977] 1987).
10. *ibid*, p. 336.



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