

ChalcedonReport

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How Do You Preserve a Legacy While Looking to the Future?

An Abridged and Edited Interview with Chalcedon President, Mark Rushdoony.

When your father left Chalcedon in your hands, what sort of guidance did he give you for the vision he saw for the future of the ministry?

Well, to understand what he saw as the future of the ministry, you have to first understand what he considered important, which was the legacy of his writing. Even his audio recordings, which many people find of high value, he personally did not consider of great importance, because much of what he spoke ended up as the content of his books. When he passed away, it was obvious that I needed to preserve his writings, many of which were unpublished. At the time, I had an entire shelf full of manuscripts to publish, and we're just now coming towards the end of those documents.

In the last weeks of his life, he did give me specific instructions on what he wanted to prioritize, such as the articles he wrote for the *California Farmer*, a farming publication. His column was called "The Pastor's Pulpit," which he wrote for 25 to 30 years, and he considered these short articles as some of his best writing because each article was self-contained and he had to choose his words carefully.

In 2001, when he gave me his instructions, the archive of his column was not organized, and he wanted me to get those articles in order and have them published. This vast collection would eventually be published as the

seven volume paperback series *A Word In Season: Daily Messages on the Faith for All of Life*.

I remember reading the three volume set *Good Morning, Friends* and being astounded that I had never seen those writings before. Did you know that those existed?

I knew my father had done a radio program when he was a full-time pastor in Santa Cruz, California, but I was very young at the time, and it was before he founded Chalcedon. To do the radio program, he had written out his short messages, which all began with the line, "Good morning, friends."

I found folders of these written radio messages buried in his library, and at first I wasn't even sure what they were. Fortunately, he kept records in his journal entries; although not well organized, he kept track of what he wrote and what he did. In his journals, I found the list of radio talks he did and cross referenced them to find out which ones I had and when they were done. These radio messages were over 60 years old, and they're now published in the three-volume paperback series *Good Morning, Friends: A Collection of Weekly Radio Messages by R. J. Rushdoony*.

I'm amazed at some of the things I happened to find in my father's library, such as a few manuscripts that have missing parts to them that I may never find, but for the most part we were able to assemble a good many of his

writings together and publish as much as possible.

So would you say that publishing has remained a major focus for you as president of Chalcedon?

Yes, before my father passed away, it was pretty obvious that he was irreplaceable, and I knew that I wasn't the person to do what he did nor lead the Christian Reconstruction movement in general. However, because of the priority of getting his books in print—and those that were out of print back in print—it became obvious what needed to be done, and my role was clearly defined. It was just going to take a long time, and emerging technology would soon introduce an expansion into digital publishing.

An example are the *Journals of Christian Reconstruction*—years worth of scholarly journals on multiple topics—which we are continually digitizing as we have time. In this sense, we've not only been keeping past books in print, publishing new books after my father's passing, but we've also produced ebook versions and most recently, audiobooks. There's been a great deal of progress.

The reason for all this is not just to create an archive of his writing but because I believe my father's influence in the future will be more than it has been in the past, because he spoke to so many things the church still needs to address. I think people are going to have to fall back on some of his ideas,

and so my father's writings are going to be a tremendous resource for the future, and that's why we keep going. It's not just for the vanity of saying that my father's work endures. We're keeping all this alive, and we're keeping his books available, because I believe the church will have to contend with these issues.

Did you have to battle with some people's expectations of you? How did you come to decide on the lane you should be in?

There were people who thought that we needed to have a personality to lead Chalcedon. In fact, I was in a meeting once, after my father's passing, where the question was actually raised, "Can anybody think of a Christian organization that has survived its founder's passing and is still prominent?" Those in the meeting had trouble coming up with an example. Many major ministries fade after the founder passes, or they become different altogether.

I made it clear that I was not my father, nor could I assume his role. Some suggested we hire someone to lead Chalcedon, but this proved unnecessary. Our mission was already well-defined, especially in the realm of publishing. We didn't need a figurehead to sustain the work; we needed to continue making my father's writings available. While we haven't abandoned the pursuit of new scholarship, with Martin Selbrede contributing significantly in that area, our immediate task was preserving and disseminating what we already had. This work, I believe, will serve the Kingdom in the years ahead, even long after our own time.

I'm glad you brought up Martin Selbrede because many times I've heard you say that you don't consider yourself a scholar, and Martin certainly fits into that category. Do you feel comfortable that he has that role, and was it a difficult choice to say, "I think Martin should hold this position?"

No, it wasn't a difficult choice. It was the obvious one—particularly to the Chalcedon staff who have worked closely with Martin for a few decades.

Martin, by the way, is Chalcedon's Vice President, and he works for us only part-time and then volunteers a lot more of his time. He has his own employment but chooses to dedicate himself in serving multiple needs at Chalcedon, especially in the area of research and scholarship. He is by far the most knowledgeable of my father's writing than anyone else living, and I wish he was in a position to write and research full time, because he has a lot to contribute.

Like your father, you've mentioned that we are witnessing the collapse of humanism, and yet you remain hopeful and persistent in our duty and success in furthering the Kingdom of God. Is this a laborious task for you, or one that actually energizes you?

Well, I think it helps in any situation to be a realist, and if our cultural and spiritual conditions are serious, we need a realistic assessment of where we are. We know that the Kingdom of God continues to grow, but my father was clear that the forces of humanism were going to fail. In fact, that's why he characterized our current age as the death of humanism. It is faltering due to the diminishing influence of Christianity and the abandonment of a Christian foundation for life and culture.

In a de-Christianized world, we're going to have problems, but my father's ministry began when things looked pretty good and people were optimistic. Since then, we've had a series of problems, but my father pointed out early on the coming failure of humanism. Some of his first writings in the late 1950s addressed these problems in the arena of public education. He saw where public education was going logically because the culture was abandoning Christianity in favor of humanism.

Fast forward to today, and why are young people rioting, renouncing the past, and trying to destroy what is good and stable with nothing to replace it? My father simply said it is the result of our rejection of God and the Christian faith while placing our faith in man, which is faith in nothing.

And although things may get worse, my father wasn't a defeatist. His eschatology proclaimed that the Kingdom of God is going to grow and that the Kingdom will outlast the secular state. We are nearing the end of the age of humanism. How it fails, how fast it fails, and what's going to replace it, we don't exactly know. This is because we can't predict how and when the Holy Spirit moves. When God wants things to change, things will change. When people turn to God, that's the work of the Holy Spirit, and we can't really predict that.

What would you say at this point is Chalcedon's greatest need?

Certainly, as I'm in charge of paying the bills, I'm always concerned about where we stand financially and what projects we're even capable of undertaking. We do struggle financially at times and one of the things I hate spending money on is facilities. For example, we have a large amount of pavement that's starting to look like a gravel road because it needs so much work, but I hate spending so much money on something like asphalt when we don't know what our income is going to be like next year. Therefore, we have to often ignore certain needs on our facilities because we don't have the income. So, knowing we had a strong financial base would be helpful.

However, I don't think that our problems are always financial. We need to stay focused on what we're doing, and we don't always know what we are going to need to be involved in six months, a year, or two years from now. In that sense, we try to stay flexible as well while using what we have in the best way possible, in the most efficient way possible.

Lastly, I do very much appreciate our givers, and Darlene and I do pray for you on a very regular basis, and thank God for you. 🙏

Taken from the Out of the Question Podcast, Episode 305. You can listen to the full interview at our website at <https://tinyurl.com/OOTQEp305>

Ambassadors for Christ: Carrying Forward the Legacy of Christian Reconstruction

Mark R. Rushdoony

When my father, Rousas John Rushdoony, started Chalcedon in 1965, it represented a unique approach. I do not know if there is an older worldview organization in existence or not, but Chalcedon and its message of Christian Reconstruction was from its inception something of an outlier.

A worldview is a “big picture” approach to understanding our times, one that puts them in a larger context. In a recent article, Martin Selbrede addressed the problem of not keeping the big picture of our worldview in focus.¹ He warned against emphasizing issues, which are symptoms of more fundamental causation. Focusing on such manifestations without going to the root of the problem can then be counterproductive, as the “solution” is likely to be a wound-dressing at best, certainly not a preventative. Large-scale social issues are then dealt with in a top-down, external approach that seeks to suppress the manifested issue. Such approaches that focus on issues rather than their core causes tend to rely on pragmatic, external fixes. Unfortunately, many who engage in such issue-oriented “reforms” become very self-righteous in their methodology, declaring that “at least we are *doing something*.”

Chalcedon’s approach has always been to keep believers aware of the big picture. Issues should and must be addressed, but in terms of the bigger picture of the Kingdom of God and our responsibilities therein. Seeing how several analogies common to Scripture and Christian lingo necessarily relate can help us understand our responsibility.

“Ambassadors for Christ”

In discussing the transformation of the word in terms of the risen Christ (II Cor. 5:14-21), Paul first reminds us of the fact that the redeemed man is a “new

creature” (v. 17) who has been given a “ministry” (v.18) and “the word of reconciliation” (v.19). Paul then says that he and others who declare that Word “are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you by us*” (v. 20). Paul’s specific word as an ambassador was that the Corinthian Christians be “reconciled to God” (v. 20).

An ambassador does not speak his own words or convey his own opinion. An ambassador gives the opinion and position of the one he represents; he speaks on behalf of that one.

In 1915, Woodrow Wilson wrote a letter declaring his position on the sinking of the *Lusitania* by Germany. Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan had campaigned for Wilson on an anti-war platform but felt that Wilson was now leading the nation into war. Unable in good conscience to advocate for Wilson’s new position, Bryan resigned as his Secretary of State. He knew his obligation as ambassador was to represent Wilson’s position, not his own.

We are ambassadors of Christ, who “hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (II Cor. 5:19). We are to represent *that* Word, not our own. If we fail to represent God’s Word, or offer the world another message, we are doing more than neglecting our duty, we are supplanting God’s Word with our own.

The idea of men being the mouthpiece for God’s Word was not a new one. Human agency is never presumptuous when it is pursuant to God’s decree. Note that “the *Lord testified*” against Israel “*by all the prophets, and by all the seers... which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets*” (II Kings 17:13). Moreover, even disobedient priests were reminded that their calling was to be “the messenger of the Lord of hosts” (Mal. 2:7). Jesus told the seventy, “He

that heareth *you* heareth *me*; and he that despiseth *you* despiseth *me*; and him that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me” (Lk. 10:16). This is why Paul said in his first letter to the Corinthian church, “For I know nothing of myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord” (I Cor. 4:4). Paul was not saying he was above reproach as an apostle, but he knew what he was speaking was faithful to the word of the God.

Jesus is King

The references to Jesus as king don’t mean much to us because we are unfamiliar with kingship. The modern examples familiar to us in the West are powerless, figurehead monarchs who may be given ceremonial deference but possess no real power. In Western governments, men confer power on their leaders, but that is not the image of Jesus in Scripture. It is the Kingdom of God or Heaven that is in view and from which emanates “the power, and the glory forever...” (Matt. 6:13). Until modern times kings proclaimed the law in their name (by their authority as the monarch). They made decisions of life and death that were to be obeyed. As the representative of Roman authority, Pontius Pilate’s only concern about Jesus was if He claimed to be king, a revolutionary claim of treason against Rome (Jn. 18:31ff). Jesus deflected the question as He sometimes deflected questions and challenges of the religious authorities because He would not let men set His agenda. When Jesus said His kingdom was not of this world and that His purpose was to speak truth, Pilate dismissed the issue. Pilate assumed Jesus was a religious mystic concerned with abstract philosophic ideas and so dismissed any political implications. What Pilate did not see was that Jesus was claiming a transcendent position

over “this world.” When we see references to Christ as Lord or King, we must see Him in this light. When we refer to His Word, we are not to think of it as a dated one, but as the authoritative law-word of the God-man and Redeemer, the Lord of all lords and the King of all kings.

The Law of the King

This brings up the issue of God’s law. We must not dismiss it by our own criteria. Christ is the King in the Kingdom of God and God’s Law its law-word. We are speaking of His Kingdom, His jurisdiction. If we deny His law-word we cannot claim to be His ambassadors. We will, in fact, be working against His Kingdom if we are personally disobeying Him; and if we are teaching others to disregard His law, we are actually being subversives in His Kingdom. When churchmen declare that law-word no longer valid, and that we must figure out law for ourselves, we have planted a revolutionary flag in His court and defied His royal prerogative. This is the issue of theonomy, which merely means God’s laws (*Theos*=God, *nomos*=law).

The greatest tragedy of the church of our day is its rejection of the binding nature of God’s law and the substitution of man-made standards. We would expect this of the world, of course, because the unbeliever is a rebel against God. But tragically the church in the twentieth century largely chose to address “theonomy” as an abstract matter of theological debate rather than a plan of action. The revival of theonomy did not lead to repentance and obedience. In speaking of God’s law conceptually, the modern church betrays its deadness. In seeing it as a matter of debate, it is not addressed as the law-word of King Jesus or the marching orders of the citizens of His Kingdom.

Theonomy (“God’s law,” remember) is even falsely given an evil connotation as an alternative to God’s salvation by grace. It has never been presented as such by its modern advocates. My father, in his introduction to *Institutes of Biblical Law*,² clearly affirmed the Reformation stand of salvation as justification by God’s grace received through faith alone. The issue

of God’s Law was of sanctification, our obedience and growth in grace.

The church has a long way to go when its theological debate is “Do we really have to obey God?” It refuses to ask, “How is this to be made our plan of conformity and action?” One thing that is abundantly clear from the history of God’s people in the Bible is that He never blesses them in their sin. As Assyria collapsed, Judah was descending into the crude apostasy of fertility cults (Baalism). God sent them into captivity to be disciplined by Ezekiel until a faithful remnant was allowed to return. But when God was ready and a people was prepared, God resumed His purposes through that smaller group.

I believe things are different now. We are told that “of the increase of *his* government and peace *there shall be* no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this” (Is. 9:7). This speaks of the Messianic Kingdom continuing to grow. Count the evil empires that have come and gone and then see the growth of Christianity, a growth that in my lifetime has come to be the dominant faith in Africa, a powerful if yet persecuted force in China, and a significant segment in Islamic countries. It has grown and will continue to grow with or without us.

Humanism is, like Assyria, failing. It will not be replaced by an antinomian church of subjective pietism. What we do not know is how or when the Holy Spirit moves to expand the Kingdom. What we do know is that there are more people today self-consciously taking God’s law seriously than during any time in the last century. Those who say “Christian Reconstruction is dead” because Rushdoony, Bahnsen, North, and Chilton are gone cannot see the forest for the trees. Their work was as ambassadors, and it was only valuable to the extent they faithfully represented the Word of God. God did not need them to be His permanent ambassadors but to run the race set before them.

You and I have a limited amount of time and energy to be ambassadors of Jesus Christ. Be faithful to God’s Word; that is your calling, and why He gives you breath. Be assured your labor is not in vain because our King’s law-word is not going away. 🏰

1. Martin G. Selbrede, “Issues vs. Foundations” in *Arise & Build* (Vallecito, CA: Chalcedon Foundation, September 2024) pp. 1-3.
2. Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, NJ: The Craig Press/ Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1973) p. 4.

Ways You Can Help Chalcedon

Engage with Our Content: Read and share our articles, podcasts, and videos with friends and family. It not only enriches your understanding of Christian Reconstruction but also helps spread these ideas to a wider audience.

Host Study Groups: Organize small groups in your community to discuss the principles of Christian Reconstruction. These gatherings can serve as a powerful tool for education and outreach, creating a local support network for our cause.

Donate Financially: Your financial support is vital for us to continue our work. Regular donations help us to plan and execute projects more effectively, including publishing new materials and maintaining our online presence. Consider setting up a recurring donation to provide steady support.

Pray for Our Work and Mission: Prayer is the foundation of everything we do. Please pray for Chalcedon, its leadership, and its mission to educate and apply the message of Christian Reconstruction. Your spiritual support is invaluable.

By taking these steps, you can make a significant difference in helping us achieve our goals and spread this message. Together, we can work towards a society that reflects the faith for all of life.