

ARISE & BUILD

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I'M A PASTOR, AND I'M STILL READING RUSHDOONY

BY REV CHARLES H ROBERTS, D.MIN.



I came to faith in Christ from a life of principled atheism. Having majored in philosophy as an undergraduate student,

and as with many young people of my generation, I was on a quest to find the all-encompassing truth about reality.

The philosophers of world history offered a bewildering number of explanations about the meaning of life, but at that time, of one thing I was certain: the Biblical worldview, as I had known it, offered nothing at all.

When many years later God by His grace called me into His covenant family, I was stunned to learn that someone had actually articulated a worldview based solely on Holy Scripture, and that person was R. J. Rushdoony.

I had become a presuppositionalist and Calvinist before having heard of Rushdoony but when I did learn of him, it was through a less than complimentary magazine article that was highly critical of his work.

As I repeatedly read that critical assessment of Rushdoony's writings it didn't make sense to me. I was already familiar with the words of Dr. Van Til who said: "The Bible speaks with authority concerning everything about which it speaks, and it speaks about everything!"¹

More than any other Reformed theologian and scholar with whom I was familiar, R. J. Rushdoony took that sentiment seriously. The magazine article showed that some men are hated more for their virtues and not their vices.

ARMED FOR THE WARS OF THE LORD

After earning degrees from two Reformed seminaries and entering full-time pastoral ministry, the works of Rushdoony became one of my primary sources of information and guidance in terms of applying all the Bible to all of life.

As I have continued in pastoral ministry for a quarter of a century I am still puzzled by the hostility that some in the Reformed churches have toward Rushdoony's solidly Biblical, Reformed writings.

In the book *Sovereignty*, Rushdoony addressed one reason for such hostility. He described perfectly the problem that has created an environment in some circles against the full-orbed message of God's Word:

Calvinism had become truncated and more governed by traditions than by the power of God. From a feared power, Calvinism had receded into a dour and critical collection of men who endlessly preached the "Five Points of Calvinism" to one another ... It is especially sad that the name of

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Calvin is associated with such sterility and impotence. Theology has been made an academic discipline rather than the arming of a man for the wars of the Lord.²

Throughout the years of my pastoral work I have found the writings of Rushdoony to be an important and vital source of guidance and help in my teaching, preaching, and counseling others regarding the things of God.

It may come as a great shock to some clergy to realize that most of their flock do not come to worship on the Lord's Day to hear a theological lecture.

They come having faced the challenges of the previous week, including a barrage of humanist propaganda and statist religion.

They come having faced their own, and others', failures in family and married life.

They come with genuine concerns about the education and upbringing of their children.

They come, hoping to hear a word from the Lord about the real problems they face in daily life.

PRACTICAL AND RELEVANT

If the Bible actually does speak to all areas of life, if God is in fact sovereign over all His creatures and their actions, and over His creation, why do so many Christians think and live as if none of those things were true?

The one source that I have found that consistently and effectively presents the Word of God as a total Word, has been, and continues to be, the wide-ranging works of R. J. Rushdoony and the message of Christian Reconstruction.

Another way of saying this is that for all of his erudition and the wide-ranging scope of his academic work, Rushdoony's message and relevance to my work as a pastor is that it is highly practical.

In a 2007 *Chalcedon Report* article, Pastor Jim West made this point:

Here is an exchange of dialogue from G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown detective series that highlights the Rushdoony approach to faith and life. A doctor says to Father Brown, "I'm a practical man and I don't bother much about religion and philosophy." To which Father Brown immediately responds, "You'll never be a practical man till you do."

Rushdoony would Amen Father Brown's repartee! So it is a mistake to think of Rushdoony as an ivory-castle theologian, sequestered from the world and entrenched in a kind of monastic seclusion.

On the contrary, and despite the scholarly nature of his writings, Rushdoony sought to be practical (he would say relevant) at all times.³

I listed above the serious problems that church members face day in and day out, and their starving to have a word from the Lord for godly solutions to their problems.

IRRELEVANT PREACHING

How many sermons do church members need to hear on such topics as "the passive and active obedience of Christ" or "the true nature of assurance"?

This is not to say that these topics are unimportant. The problem in too many churches is those, and similar points of doctrine, are all that congregations hear week after week.

And so they are left to assume that Scripture has little or nothing to say about politics, medicine, culture, education, child rearing, and a host of other front-burner topics that are of far greater concern to the average church member.

One of the things that has been a great encouragement to me as a pastor is knowing that the formative years of Rushdoony's thought were spent during

the several decades of his own pastoral ministry.

Many years ago, he penned an article titled “Irrelevant Preaching” where he spoke directly to the issue that I am referring to:

Some years ago, during the middle of a winter night, a farmhouse caught fire. The family barely escaped with their lives.

The housewife, a very neat and precise woman who always wanted everything just right, paused for a second as they dashed with their children through the hot, smoke-filled living room to the safety of the out-of-doors.

To her husband’s amazement, she automatically reached out and straightened a picture that was hanging crooked on the wall, and then dashed through the door to safety.

Their house and all their belongings were lost, but at least her picture was hanging straight when it burned up!

I am reminded of that story when I listen to some preachers. The flames of destruction are licking at their world, and the walls of discipline, which are the mainstay of any civilization, are crashing down around them, and they are busy straightening pictures on a burning wall.

One minister spent a morning recently preaching against the rise of “gosh” and “darn.” Another spent the evening hour preaching against the miniskirt and dress. Is this what men are called by God to do?⁴

Of course, those kinds of emphases were not what God has called pastors to teach and preach.

In the same article he went on to say that the joyful news the church must proclaim is found in the Great Commission. That all power and authority is given to Christ the King, who rules absolutely over heaven and earth. Christians are members of a victorious and conquering army!

NO ROOM FOR POLITICAL SAVIORS

Sadly, many Christians and their church leaders find preparing for defeat an easier path than engaging in the “battles of the Lord” toward an assured victory.

I must also add that as a clergyman who has learned much from Rushdoony it has been a sad thing to see how those who also have learned from his work have veered from the path toward compromised expressions of Reconstruction.

Typically, those expressions have involved confusing the advancement of God’s work with the advancement of certain political parties and their agendas, or, equally, the success of one politician over another.

Writing in 2007, Mark Rushdoony noted that his father’s firm fidelity to Holy Scripture had no room for political saviors:

In 1965 my father moved to Southern California to begin Chalcedon and emphasize the need for Christian Reconstruction. Many of his early supporters were those who were disillusioned with the landslide loss of Barry Goldwater in the 1964 presidential election. Some urged him to take more of an anti-communist approach in order to attract conservative money. Others have suggested his constant criticism of “the state” was repetitive and tiresome. His approach was, however, consistent. He renounced both the ascendant statists and their phony political opposition as themselves statists who coveted the reins of power. His alternative was to pronounce a pox on both their houses and proclaim an alternative in limited law spheres and Biblical self-government.⁵

One rarely encounters sermons on Biblical self-government from modern America’s evangelical and Reformed pulpits. In too many cases pastors publicly stand and share their exegetical research with the congregation on the selected Bible text for that day, and

that is made to pass for preaching. Or, if there is application of the text, it is generally framed in a pietistic way so as to emphasize the inner spiritual life of the believer.

AN IDEA, NOT A MOVEMENT

Rushdoony's enduring message is the uncompromised echo of Van Til's statement mentioned above, which itself is simply expressing Christ's words in Matthew 28:18: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."

The failure of some advocates of Reconstruction to maintain commitment to Christ's words in the areas of politics, theology and government, and the rise and fall of the so called "Christian Right," has led some to declare the theonomic worldview dead. It was a fad, a passing movement that saw its better days and has now passed on.

Such an obituary is wrong for the simple reason that Rushdoony's ideas and teachings, expressed through his many books, lectures, sermons, and interviews, were never a "movement." There has never been a central headquarters for Christian Reconstruction where members enroll and pay annual dues, no member ID cards, and no annual convention.

Rather, these ideas have flourished, and continue to do so, in a variety of contexts ranging from house churches, homeschool and Christian school organizations, denominational and non-denominational churches, to websites and social media, to name only a few.

Because Rushdoony was more concerned about the advancement of the Biblical worldview than about self-aggrandizement, many thousands of Christian educators, pastors, and church members have been positively influenced by the scriptural message that all the Bible applies to all of life, without necessarily realizing the vital role Rushdoony played in its advancement.

THE PASTOR/THEOLOGIAN

One major component of that message is the lordship of Christ over all things. Of course, humanists and others who hate the idea of a totally sovereign God are quick to shriek "theocracy!" when they encounter the message of Reconstruction.

Rushdoony pointed out many years ago this cogent fact: we are already in a theocracy; the theocracy is already present. The only issue is, what is our relationship to the King of the theocracy? Are we willing subjects or rebels? Are we God's in-laws or His outlaws?

I began reading Rushdoony over thirty years ago and I continue to read his works today with even greater interest. Interestingly, of the many hundreds of books and articles that I was assigned to read in the several seminaries I attended, I consult relatively few of them in my daily work.

I mentioned earlier the significance of the formation of Rushdoony's ideas during his years of pastoral ministry. The ministerial student in today's seminaries may be surprised to learn that few, if any, of his professors have ever served as either an elder or pastor in a local church!

In the 2007 article mentioned above, Rev. Jim West also wrote:

With regard to his own teaching and preaching, [Rushdoony's] messages were succinct and precise. He never went on too long. He preached with reverent seriousness and gravity, yet without leaving himself open to the same charge that Calvin's classmates tagged him—"the accusative case." I like to say that no man pronounced the word evil with more gravity than Rushdoony!

It is also beneficial to mention three other practical achievements of Rushdoony. The first is his concern for the pastoral oversight of God's people. This is highlighted in one of

his recently published books titled *The Cure of Souls*. It is a book about the spiritual midwifery of the pastor. The book is truly amazing to the person who thinks that Rushdoony's concerns are limited to ivory-castle questions and answers. When I first saw the book, I even asked myself, "Did Rushdoony really write this?" The second contribution pertains to Rushdoony's gift of hospitality. No one enjoyed ... a hearty meal more than Rushdoony! Hospitality was something he preached and lived. To these, perhaps a third contribution should be added: I refer to his accessibility to people. It seemed that whenever anyone called Chalcedon, Rushdoony was often the one who picked up the receiver. There was complete and easy accessibility, even when he was in the midst of writing a book.⁶

I can personally attest to Rushdoony's accessibility. When I became a Chalcedon supporter, and soon thereafter, a seminary student, I enclosed a note to Dr. Rushdoony in one of the modest contributions I mailed to him. I asked him a question about books that chronicled the Armenian holocaust. To this day, thirty years later, I still have his hand-written reply.

Not long after that, my wife and I had a rare, East-coast opportunity to actually meet him at a Chalcedon fundraising event. He took time out of his busy schedule to personally greet us and discuss a few issues of the day.

RUSHDOONY'S ENDURING MESSAGE

In 2016–17 Mark Rushdoony wrote a series of biographical articles about his father in *Faith for All of Life* magazine.⁷ In those articles he told the back story of the many struggles and set-backs, victories and successes that characterized the life and ministry of this remarkable man.

But in this, his experiences were no different than those of the apostle Paul, who speaking of his own struggle to

proclaim God's law-word wrote in Acts 20:22–24 (NKJV)

And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

The message of R. J. Rushdoony is an enduring message because it is the message of Holy Scripture, that the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ, in time, and in history, and He shall reign for ever and ever. 🏰

Dr. Charles Roberts is the pastor of Reedy River Presbyterian Church (PCA) in South Carolina and the co-host of Chalcedon's *Out of the Question* podcast.

1. Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics*, Second Edition (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003), p. 19.
2. R. J. Rushdoony, *Sovereignty* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2007), p. 334.
3. Rev. Jim West, "Rushdoony's Influence on Pastors," *Faith for All of Life*, November–December 2007.
4. R. J. Rushdoony, *A Word in Season: Daily Messages on the Faith for All of Life*, Volume 1 (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2010), p. 69.
5. Mark Rushdoony, "From Statism to Christian Reconstruction," *Faith for All of Life*, January–February 2007.
6. Rev. Jim West, "Rushdoony's Influence on Pastors," *Faith for All of Life*, November–December 2007.
7. The seven-part series can be found in *Faith for All of Life*, January–February 2016 through January–February 2017.

WE STILL HAVE PRAYER

BY ANDREA SCHWARTZ



As many know, R.J. Rushdoony expressed his heartfelt convictions in poetry, most of which were private dialogs

between him and God. I had the honor to help compile these for the book *The Luxury of Words: The Poetry of Rousas John Rushdoony* and to select some for a special anniversary CD that set some of his poems to music and others recited by those impacted by his life and work.

One of my favorites is *I Still Have Prayer*.

O give me, Lord, a task to do
And strength to walk and be true,
Someone to love me, someone to love;
This I ask of the Lord above.

Children whose lives will glorify
The Lord of glory ere I die.
A church that ever faithful stands
Midst an alien world's demands.

And having these, I have my share –
But if none, I still have prayer.
And having these, I have my share –
But having none, I still have prayer.

Today the Chalcedon Foundation faces many challenges, but has remained true (by God's grace) to the mission of its founder. Moreover, Rush's prayer has come to fruition. He has a son, Mark, who continues to carry on the work begun by his father, and has remained true to the conviction that God's law-word alone will bring a revival in Christendom that can meet our "alien world's demands."

Another bright spot on the horizon is a real-time example of "a church that ever faithful stands," right in Silicon Valley, California. For over forty-six years, St. Paul's Anglican Church and its mission work, Canterbury Christian School, has influenced the lives of countless students whose early education included a solid foundation in God's Word and its relevance to every area of life and thought.

First under the direction of Rev. Norman Milbank and his wife, Tillie Ann, the mantle was passed on to Bishop Ron Johnson and his wife Barbara, almost ten years ago when the Milbanks were well into their nineties. In 2017, the day before Thanksgiving, God in His providence took Bishop Johnson unexpectedly, leaving this vital work without a leader at the helm.

As I sat in the memorial service, I became convicted that *this work must continue*. Trust me when I quickly discerned I was being given "marching orders" and this was more than a fleeting thought. Having had such "charges" before in my life, I quickly began making phone calls after I prayed for God to help me accomplish the task He laid before me. Long story short, my first and best candidate, Steve Macias, ended up being

the person who now holds the dual position of pastoring the congregation of St. Paul's and serving as the headmaster of Canterbury Christian School. He, along with his wife Sarah and their three children, have



Rev. Steve Macias and Andrea Schwartz

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responded to God's call on the life of their family and the work will indeed continue.

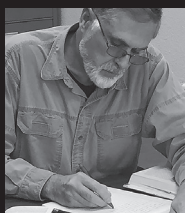
What sweetens this story even more is that Steve, for years, has been and continues to be an ardent student of R. J. Rushdoony, and back in 2013 was one of our speakers at the Bay Area Law & Liberty Conference. He would tell you that he was still wet behind the ears back then (and has much still to learn today) but he is a living example of how God continues to provide a faithful remnant to carry on the work of His Kingdom.

We must always remember that, first and foremost, we still have prayer. Moreover, that Jesus Christ rules and will guarantee us the victory He accomplished at Calvary. Silicon Valley seems like an odd place to have a haven for Christian Reconstruction, yet this is where God has placed my family and

now the Macias family, too. What's more, there are many here on the far coast that refuse to bow the knee to Baal and are working within their spheres of influence to advance the Kingdom of God. The future is bright if we (as Dr. Rushdoony used to say) put on the glasses of Scripture. Then as we walk by faith, our sight will be 20/20. 🙌

Andrea Schwartz is Chalcedon's family and Christian education advocate, and the author of several books including *A House for God: Building a Kingdom-Driven Family*, *The Biblical Trustee Family: Understanding God's Purpose for Your Household*, *Empowered: Developing Strong Women for Kingdom Service*, *Woman of the House: A Mother's Role in Building a Christian Culture*, and *The Homeschool Life: Discovering God's Way to Family-Based Education*. She's also the co-host of the *Out of the Question* podcast. She can be reached at Andrea@chalcedon.edu.

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Since 1965, the Chalcedon Foundation has served as the founding and leading ministry for the message of Christian Reconstruction, which is simply the mission of advancing the Kingdom of God in every area of life. Now, fifty-three years later, the need for this message and ministry is greater than ever as we continue to face the enemy of humanism both in the world and in the church.

Our objective is to help equip Christians to "take back" govern-

ment from the state by means of Biblical self-government and to apply their faith to every sphere of life and thought. We've already gained significant ground through helping to restore Christian education, but it's time to move into other spheres by God's grace, law, and power.

We desperately need your help to continue this mission, so please take a few moments today to prayerfully consider supporting Chalcedon with your tax-deductible giving. We've enclosed a self-addressed, postage-paid envelope to make it easy, and you can also donate online at: Chalcedon.edu/Give

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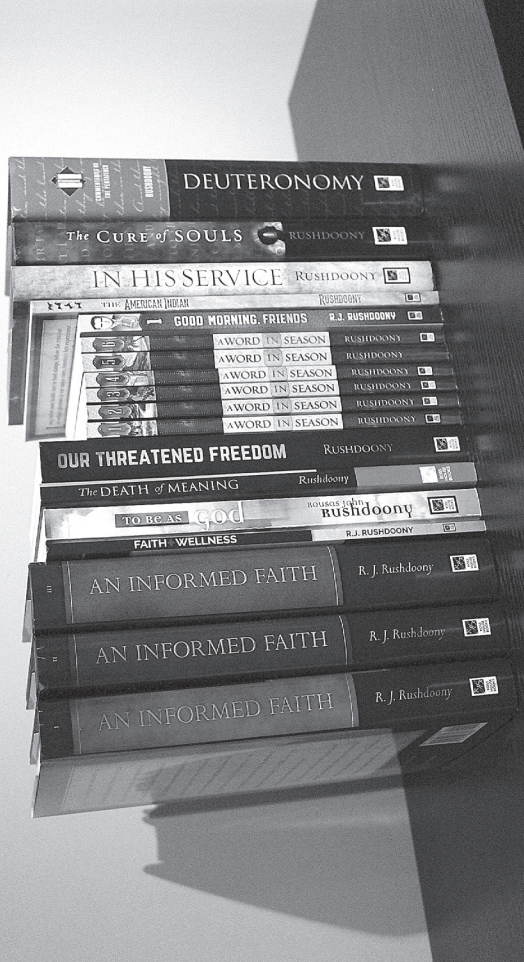
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