

*Faith for All of Life*  
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# FAITH FOR ALL OF LIFE

PROCLAIMING THE AUTHORITY OF GOD'S WORD OVER EVERY AREA OF LIFE AND THOUGHT

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# Government: A Terror to Whom?

By Mark R. Rushdoony



This is not a good time to be a statist in the West. The utopian promises of the past century are increasingly drowning in a sea of debt and unstable currencies dissolving into self-evident failures. Those who saw the reins of government as a means of creating a brave new world have only succeeded in creating the largest system of bureaucracy and regulations in history.

There has been push back. Unfortunately, most of the opposition to statist government has been piecemeal and issue-oriented, unfocused, and lacking a consistently principled alternative. Hence, in the last U.S. presidential election, it coalesced around a candidate who was also unfocused and lacking in principles.

When the state tries to play god, it is sure to fail. When it tries to rewrite the laws of God, justice will be perverted if not inverted into legislated injustice. As unpleasant as this process is to watch, and as destructive as it is to experience, God's people and purposes have repeatedly survived such eras of history and outlasted the regimes which have implemented them. We are coming to the end of the era of statism. The pure partisanship in Washington is the infighting and finger-pointing of a losing cause. The heyday is over; the decline and fall of any state is not a pretty sight.

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## Government Is Necessary

Despite what men have done with it, government is not an evil. It is, in fact, a necessary aspect of man's existence. As my father pointed out many times, we think like statists when we equate "government" with "civil government." We constantly live with many forms of government in our lives. The most important level of government is self-government. Family and church are major governing influences in our lives, but there are many others. Our employers and vocations impose rules which govern much of our lives. Every student is governed by his school or tutor. You may be governed by a homeowner's association, or, if you belong to a private club or volunteer organization, to its bylaws. If you so much as download an app or access the internet at your local coffee shop, you must agree to abide by their "terms and conditions." Government is inevitable, and in a free society it should be spread out to many administrations. Civil government tends to be our problem, however, because it tends

to be the means whereby evil men seek power rather than justice.

Some have suggested that civil government is a product of man's fall into sin and man's consequent need for restraint. This would effectively make civil government a punishment. Others have seen the origin in the sixth commandment as an extension of the family. Taken to its logical conclusion, this would justify the paternalism of the state acting as an uber-parent over the family sphere.

Both views read into Scripture. Before the fall, Adam and Eve were given the responsibility of exercising dominion in terms of God's revealed Word. When the Hebrews were given their liberty by God, He gave them a law as a standard of justice (or righteousness, as the two English words come from a single word in both the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures) and He organized the tribes in family groups in multiples of ten. This tribal confederation was its first civil government later seen in the land-deciding matters of war and peace for the nation of Israel, then Judah.

## The Kingdom of God

All spheres of life and their governance represent an extension of men's activity and responsibility to exercise dominion under God's authority and in terms of His Word. Once given the land, the nation, and later the kingdom, was the civil context of God's collective people.

With the coming of the Messiah, man's dominion mandate was expressed in an expanded metaphor. It was still a kingdom, as John the Baptist first proclaimed (Matt. 3:2), and later by Jesus as well (Mark 1:14). Now the metaphor for the rule of God through His people was not a Palestinian kingdom or a Jewish people, it was the Kingdom of God (or Heaven) with a rule that transcended the geography of the Middle East. Our Lord often spoke of life in the Kingdom and the responsibilities of its citizens. Man has a duty to serve God, to exercise dominion in His Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is the new context for thought and action in the Messianic era.

When Jesus taught us to pray, He gave us a model of prayer and thought that looked to the providential government of God over both heaven and earth:

**Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven ... For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen. (Matt. 6:10, 13b)**

All life and thought, including man's governing, can serve a role in the Kingdom that is neither a punishment nor paternalistic.

There is no reason to expect that there will not be a civil government in the fullness of the Kingdom in history, when God's will is, in fact, done "in earth as it is in heaven." In fact, another part of the Lord's Prayer requires us to place our administration of law and justice under God: "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matt. 6:12). This is the only part of the prayer to which our Lord added a commentary: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (v. 15). To pray that is to ask God's help in applying His standard of righteousness to ourselves as

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**Right now the Kingdom seems in decline in the West, but in many parts of the world it is growing.**

well as to others. We know that God's standard of justice, at times, demands the intervention of a civil authority to uphold His righteousness.

Contrary to what is often preached, God does have a standard of righteousness and justice, one that demands restitution. For some offenses no monetary restitution was allowed; the lawless man's life was forfeited. There was no cheap and easy forgiveness, and God's justice required that His Son die in our place before atonement was made.

God's justice does not change and its demands will remain the same as the Kingdom grows. Right now the Kingdom seems in decline in the West, but in many parts of the world it is growing. The low ebb we see in our culture is due to two primary factors. *One* is a lack of faith. This is a problem in the church as well, as many churches have abandoned Christian faith in favor of any number of contemporary philosophies. A *second* cause of decline is the lack of any objective ethical standard in the church, which instead follows an antinomian subjectivity. Because the church today does not itself hunger and thirst after righteousness, its moral impact on the culture is nominal.

A commonly expressed observation is the change in society in the last two generations or so. The decline in morals has created an inherent distrust and suspicion. We assume for good reason that

we must take extra precautions to safeguard our family and property. Vulgarity, blasphemy, and sexual deviancy are now protected. It is obvious there has been a cultural regression of enormous proportions. The problem is more than a lack of Christian faith; the abandonment of Biblical law has left the church without an ethical direction of its own much less a light for the darkness. Few Christians know what a Christian civil government would look like because a subjective, "Spirit led" piety cannot be translated to a civil administration.

## Forms of Government

We tend to seek good government in legislation, procedural forms, or constitutions. Scripture, on the other hand, stresses man's accountability to God and His law in every sphere. There is no procedural form which guarantees good government or prevents its corruption by evil men.

When the American *republic* was effectively reduced by the rise of centralism occasioned by the U.S. Civil War, its public schools began promoting *democracy* as the means to just government. The argument used presumed the Christian ethic that still prevailed. It assumed the basic problem of governments was their control by a few bad men. Most men were assumed to be good, so democracy sounded like a solution that would protect the "good" majority from the bad minority.

But what can democracy do if that proportion changes? It can itself become the mechanism of tyranny when the civil power is used to deprive others of property and freedom.

The only protection against any power is its limitation by spheres of authority, by a division and separation of powers. This can be cumbersome, and absolute power by a tyrant is a simpler alternative, but one far more threatening than complexity. It was, in part, the

difficulty of getting the elders of twelve tribes to agree on war that caused Israel to demand a king (1 Samuel 8:20). The result was a simpler and more efficient means of going to war, but at the cost of their liberty (vs. 10–19).

The Hebrew commonwealth of tribes had a very limited cost. The only civil tax was a half shekel of silver for every man over the age of twenty. Scholars debate the exact weight of that amount of silver in any given period, but it was somewhere in the range of two or three-tenths of an ounce. That would today be the cost of a fast-food meal. Many functions of law were likely administered by elders at no cost as part of their tribal responsibilities.

An observation is here in order. The most effective means of limiting the power of government is through limiting its funding. “The power of the purse strings” has been effected in various ways throughout history, but these were all bypassed by the advent of central banks, particularly when they were given the power to print currency. A civil government allowed to create currency can fund any activity. A civil government limited to a tax the price of a Whopper meal would represent strictly limited power. Constitutional limitations are good; fiscal constraints are far better.

### What’s the Problem?

If a Biblical government would be smaller, cheaper, and more conducive to liberty, what is the objection to it? Have you noticed the first objection to Biblical law as a standard for civil government is always the criminalization of some sexual activity? Western man is one of the most regulated, tracked, taxed, and controlled peoples of history, yet he believes he is free because his sexual morals are not questioned. This is the mark of a truly degenerate social order.

My father, at times, spoke of Christian libertarianism. Secularists see that as an oxymoron, and are quick to point out his “puritanical” moral code. But we should note that such offences were very difficult to prove. Two witnesses were required for conviction, which made prosecution difficult. Sexual offences would have to be done flagrantly for there to be two witnesses. This is why the woman taken in adultery (John 8:1–11) had her case dropped by the Scribes and Pharisees. Jesus merely asked who the witnesses were who would testify against her and be required to take part in her stoning. No witnessing accusers were forthcoming as required so Jesus would not discuss the matter. No formal accusers meant no formal charge and hence no case.

Paul described the role of civil magistrates as being a terror to those who do evil (Rom. 13:3–6). Instead, we know that rulers are often a terror to those who do good. A smaller government would necessitate stronger self-government and family government, as well as a multitude of interlocking levels of structure based on a uniform code of justice. This code of justice we have; it was given to Moses three and a half millennia ago. We cannot force men into righteousness. We cannot organize them into it by governmental forms, constitutions, or legislation; they must grow into it by the sanctifying power of the regenerating Spirit of God.

Remember the lesson of the Soviet Union: a government is never too big to fail. Western governments are fiscally unsound, top-heavy in bureaucracy, and face the ever more vocal contempt of their citizenry. The present size and scope of government is tottering. Our solution for big government should be the same as our approach to self-government, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). 🇺🇸



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# Malachi 4 and the Homeschooling Movement

by Shawn Mathis

[EDITOR'S NOTE: It would be very easy to misunderstand the intent of Pastor Mathis's article, or Chalcedon's intent in publishing it. Chalcedon will continue to be one of the most committed supporters of the homeschooling movement, in keeping with our founder's reputation as the father of the homeschooling movement in America. We've not changed our mind about the value of homeschooling and its significance (viz., the fact that parents are willing to exercise Christian self-government and take back education from the state).

A strong emphasis on homeschooling can leave faithful Christian day schools (those that impart a full-throated Biblical worldview) in limbo, depending on how homeschooling is marketed. This becomes troublesome when such marketing bends a text of Scripture for promotional purposes. Faithfulness to Scripture *must absolutely come first*. The homeschooling movement doesn't need to drive a square peg into a round hole to promote itself.

A favorite proof text may amount to a total misfire when scrutinized more closely. Moreover, seizing upon texts without first studying them with care is the fast track to becoming "a workman ashamed." This cannot fail to then raise the question, "What other scriptures are being force-fitted to promote this agenda?"

So, correcting a misuse of Scripture is always legitimate: whether it was inadvertent or intentional, the potential harm that can be inflicted remains the same.

As for other potentially controversial aspects of Pastor Mathis's exposition (e.g., dealing with family, church history, revival, or his enumeration of various Christian leaders and ministries by name, etc.), a charitable reading is called for. Look for nuance: Pastor Mathis (himself a homeschooling father) may be discussing a matter of degree rather than setting forth absolutes. Keep in mind that Dr. R. J. Rushdoony routinely published articles where he didn't

agree with the authors on many points, but he still felt that the main point was important enough to share with a discerning audience who would know not to throw out the baby with the bathwater.

We don't agree with every point Pastor Mathis makes, but his main point (which was anticipated in 2010 in *Faith for All of Life* magazine, as his fifth endnote acknowledges) provides a cautionary tale we cannot ignore: *always* support good ideas *with the right scriptures*, and drop any proof texts (however popular or sloganized) that do not faithfully represent what God Himself has written. Better to reprint your stationery or redesign your website than to continue to treat His Word, which He magnified above all His Name (Ps. 138:2), without unalloyed respect. As Warfield warned, if you want to be God's mouthpiece, you'd better get His Word right. We owe our King nothing less. — MGS]



## What's the Big Deal?

I personally think that [homeschooling] was the beginning of a spiritual revival as the hearts of parents turned to their

children and vice versa ... I believe that home education is producing, and will produce, the future leaders of our culture. I believe that you will lead America into decades of revival and national reformation. (Rick Boyer, *Take Back the Land*, 2011)

Such an amazing sentiment is not

uncommon in homeschooling circles. For the last decade, there have been various claims that the homeschooling movement is a revival stirred up by God. And some of the leaders within homeschooling offer Malachi 4:6 as proof:

Homeschooling is a spiritual revival ... More and more parents are beginning to teach their children at home. God is beginning to "restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (Malachi 4:6) ... the Holy Spirit has moved

on hundreds of thousands of families in the United States and around the world to understand the need for training their children in His ways. (Chris Klicka, *The Heart of Homeschooling*, 2002)

Home educators, almost by definition, have turned their hearts to their children [Mal. 4] ... So there's been a revival that's taking place in the heart of these homeschool families. And this revival works itself out to the local church ... our prayer: every Christian in the world is in a family-integrated church. And there should be nothing but that,

but you know what that is going to lead to? That's going to lead to people homeschooling! (Doug Phillips, Generations Radio interview, June 12, 2006<sup>1</sup>)

I see the hearts of fathers turning to their children and the children to the fathers. That's the explanation as I see it for the homeschooling movement. (Rick Boyer, "How to Change the World," sermonaudio.com, 2012)

Ministry of youth includes the hearts of the fathers turning to their children and the hearts of children turning to their fathers, as we read in Malachi 4:6. We know that a sign of revival, a sign of the Gospel, is that hearts of children and parents turn toward one another. (Scott Brown, "Scripture is Sufficient for Ministry to Youth," sermonaudio.com, 2012).

What should Christians make of these claims? Is it Biblically acceptable to invoke Malachi 4:6 for the homeschooling movement? Is homeschooling a sign or even an instrument of a God-honoring revival?

These are serious claims. If homeschooling is a revival sent by God to unite families, then the church needs to espouse homeschooling with the same fervency as these advocates. But if these claims are exaggerated, then these advocates are adding unnecessary burdens upon the children of liberty.

But what are the sources of these claims?

These claims may arise from two intersecting mindsets or ideology. The first I dub *radical homeschooling*. This view claims, in practice or in theory, that homeschooling is the sine qua non of Christian education. Since homeschooling is part and parcel of God's law in this viewpoint, then revivals would include homeschooling because revivals, by definition, include a renewed interest in God's law.

The *second* is a form of familism: an unhealthy focus on the family. For

purposes of this paper, this will be considered practically part of the radical homeschooling mindset, although logically distinct.

The most well-known proponent of radical homeschooling was Doug Phillips. Quoting him is not an attempted ad hominem. Vision Forum was the preeminent proponent of radical homeschooling until its demise in late 2013. It reached hundreds of homeschooling conferences and thousands of homeschoolers. And that does not count the influence they had (and still have) through other pastors and organizations that promoted its work and his ministry.<sup>2</sup>

Doug was talented at making clear what many others implied about the superiority of homeschooling:

Gregg [Harris] argued that we must charitably and sincerely, but soundly, make the case for the superiority of distinctively Biblical Christian home education ... I believe that Gregg is spot on. And don't kid yourself: both government and Christian school advocates vigorously make the case for the superiority of their own systems and methods. They actively attempt to evangelize Christians into sending children to their institutions. And let them do so. Bring on the debate. It's healthy. Methods are not neutral. Education is religion externalized. May God prosper all those who seek to make the Word of God the exclusive sourcebook both for the content and methodology for the training of their children.<sup>3</sup>

The superiority of homeschooling made sense to Vision Forum because of its message that fixing the family will fix the church and society:

The defining crisis of our age is the systematic annihilation of the Biblical family ... It is God's primary vehicle for communicating covenant promises to the next generation ... minimize the father and the family will perish.

Minimize the family and you have neutralized the church ... The mission of The Vision Forum is to address this problem.

The end of the about-page explains the connection of homeschooling to Malachi 4:

The Significance of Home Education to God's Kingdom Work: Home education, with its emphasis on relationship-driven training, is a distinctively Hebrew approach to education, while the modern classroom, with its emphasis on efficiency, is a distinctively Greek and pagan approach to education... The last verse of Malachi and the New Testament passages heralding the coming of John the Baptist indicate that the turning of the hearts of parents to their children is a sign of great revival.<sup>4</sup>

This reasoning—that American society needs revitalized families and homeschooling is the tool that will accomplish revitalized families—spread from Vision Forum and other like-minded organizations. It was the explicit or implicit assumption in the books, seminars, and blogs for fourteen years with virtually no push-back.<sup>5</sup>

Even in circles in which this sentiment is not endorsed in an explicit manner, the palpable expectation that homeschooling is from God and will do great things for American conservatism is widespread. Norm Wakefield's organization is named after the Malachi passage: The Spirit of Elijah Ministries. Other groups (usually homeschool related) also tend toward this view of Malachi 4 to one degree or another: the National Center for Family Integrated Churches, Voddie Baucham Ministries, Family Renewal (Israel Wayne), Generations Radio, and various state homeschooling organizations.<sup>6</sup>

This essay will examine these claims while exploring the meaning of the Malachi passage. Various other related arguments about homeschooling being a

revival will be evaluated as well. Finally, the ramifications of such a view will be explored while offering a Biblically balanced alternative to the question of reviving America and homeschooling's place therein.

### What Are the Arguments for a Homeschooling Revival?

The homeschooling leaders who make the connection between homeschooling and Malachi 4 have not made a formal argument for this position.

Since there is no known exegesis of this passage from those who make this claim, its specific nature is unclear. Yet the seriousness of these claims demands a response anyway. And this can be accomplished through exploring the underlying assumptions.

There appears to be a tower of assumptions beginning with the phrase "will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (Malachi 4:6). It is assumed the phrase is about homeschooling. Or more precisely, the assumption is that the phrase is about biological families being drawn together. And that the drawing together is accomplished through homeschooling.

This in turn is apparently based on the assumption that schooling children at home by their parents is the way to turn hearts of fathers to children and children to fathers. It is not just homeschooling but home discipleship in the widest sense to the inclusion of the family integrated church movement as Phillips and Brown pointedly assert.

These latter two (and those who follow them) make some grand claims about Malachi 4:6 that should be highlighted: homeschooling families "almost by definition" fulfill Malachi 4:6 and the turning of hearts in the family (both homeschooling and family integrated churches) is a "sign of revival, a sign of the Gospel."

Do these grandiose claims stand up to scrutiny? Does the tower of assumptions stand firm?

To answer these questions, it would seem logical (out of Christian charity) to place these assumptions upon two different but related foundations to the text in question.

The *first* foundation may be that this text is *directly* about biological (homeschooling) families, especially in today's American context; thus, this usage of this text is by way of *explication*. A *prima facie* reading of Malachi 4:6 seems to support this position:

**And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.**

A *second* foundation may involve similar reasoning but buttressed with some nuance: Malachi 4:6 is *indirectly* about the biological (homeschooling) families, especially in the American context; thus, the usage of this text is by way of *application*.

If either of these foundational approaches to the text is found weak, then the house of reasoning built upon them will collapse.

An examination of Malachi 4:5–6 will demonstrate the unsoundness of the first foundation. And a logical and historical examination of the second foundation will demonstrate its inherent weakness.

### What Does the Text Mean?

The book of Malachi was written about the time of the book of Nehemiah, during the post-exilic age (c. 450 B.C.). The book is generally accepted as being divided into six sections: God proves His love for Israel (1:1–5); God rebukes the priesthood (1:6–2:9); God rebukes the people's mixed marriages (2:10–16); God announces His com-

ing messenger (2:17–3:6); God rebukes the withholding of tithes (3:7–12); and God predicts the destiny of the wicked (3:13–4:6).<sup>7</sup>

The last section (3:13ff.) contains the passage in question:

**Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse (NKJV, vv. 5–6).**

Some commentators may include verse four ("Remember the Law of Moses ...") with these verses, but that does not materially change the meaning of this passage. All parties would agree that any revival would include a renewed interest in God's law. Nevertheless, verse five seems a natural place to start a new thought with the declarative *behold* (compare 4:1 and 3:1).

The relation to the earlier verses is not immediately clear. It is likely related to this last section of Malachi (3:13–4:4). These verses begin the last of six formulaic expressions of God's pronouncement ("Says the Lord") and the Jewish nation's complaint ("You have said"):

**"Your words have been harsh against Me," Says the LORD, "Yet you say, 'What have we spoken against You?' You have said, 'It is useless to serve God; what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked as mourners before the LORD of hosts? So now we call the proud blessed, for those who do wickedness are raised up; they even tempt God and go free'" (NKJV, vv. 13–15).**

The post-exilic Jews complained that obedience to the Lord was for

naught. And that the wicked got away scot-free.

God's answer is two-fold: He shall write a book of remembrance for "those who fear the Lord" (3:16) and He shall bring judgment on the wicked (4:1). The righteous will be exalted, trampling the wicked under the soles of their feet on that day (4:2, 3). Verse four, then, would be a reminder to Israel to be righteous by remembering the law of Moses. They should trust in God's promise that the wicked will be judged and the righteous vindicated, and that trust should be expressed in obeying God's law (v. 4).

But God in His infinite mercy will provide what He requires in verse four: renewed hearts (vv. 5–6). The law was never given in the absence of the gospel in the Old Testament. And this last prophecy and promise of the older dispensation points to a great movement of God in the future when hearts will be united together by the coming prophet.

That future is described as the "coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD." This day is either the first coming of Christ, the fall of Jerusalem, the second return of Christ, or some combination. The first two instances would decisively narrow the fulfillment of this prophecy to the New Testament era.

Without detailing my eschatological bent, I will take it as a given that all parties concerned will take the first two options. This would naturally fit with the view that the prophet in question was only John the Baptist and not some future iteration as well.

Now the text still has other outstanding questions: who is this prophet? Who are the fathers and children? And what does it mean to have hearts united?

The Jews of old believed that Elijah himself would come to fulfill this prophecy. Apparently, some of the

Roman Catholic commentators agreed. And a number of the early church fathers believed that there are two Elijahs: the first fulfillment is John the Baptist and the second is Elijah in the flesh.<sup>8</sup>

But the bulk of commentators retain the simpler reading of the New Testament explanation: John the Baptist is the fulfillment of this prophecy. Specifically, Christ links John with Malachi 3:1:

**For this is *he* of whom it is written: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You" ... For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. (Matt. 11:10, 14, cp. Luke 7:27).**

But is the Elijah in Malachi 4 the same as John the Baptist? The angel that spoke with John's father, Zacharias, declared:

**And he [John] will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, "to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children," and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. (Luke 1:16–17)**

John the Baptist is the fulfillment of Malachi 3 and 4. He fulfills the prophecy, not by being the reincarnated Elijah, but by having the same "spirit and power of Elijah."

The question of who exactly are the fathers and children of 4:6 is already answered in Luke 1:17: the *disobedient* and the *just*.<sup>9</sup> But even without this explicit New Testament testimony, the book of Malachi had the answers within it already.

One theme in the book is the contrast between the faithful Israel of

the past and the faithless Israel of the present. Consider Malachi 2:10–11: "Why do we deal treacherously with one another by profaning the covenant of the fathers? ... The Lord's holy institution which he loves; he has married the daughter of a foreign god." The reference to the *fathers* is clearly to the church members of the original generations.

Malachi 3:7 makes a similar point about tithes: "Yet from the days of your fathers you have gone away from My ordinances and have not kept *them*. Return to Me, and I will return to you ..." Again, this is clearly a reference to the *religious* fathers of old.

A less overt allusion to the religious fathers is found earlier in Malachi 2:8: "but you have departed from the way; you have caused many to stumble at the law. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi," Says the LORD of hosts." Levi is the *father* of the then current priests. God is comparing the just father with the disobedient priests (children).

The theme of contrasting the faithful past with the faithless present is reiterated in the prophecy of chapter 3. There Jesus Christ is presented as the Messenger of the Lord, one who is "like a refiner's fire and like a launderer's soap." He will purify and clean the faithless priests of the present to become like the priests of old: "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to the LORD, *as in the days of old, as in former years*" (verse 4, emphasis added).

The idea of children is reciprocal to the idea of fathers. Thus, wherever the idea of *spiritual* or *institutional* fathers is highlighted, the then current Jewish audience would be the children (descendants). Two words express this idea: seed/descendants and sons/children.<sup>10</sup> The moral or institutional usage of seed is explicitly seen in the condemnation of



the faithless priests in chapter two: “Behold, I will rebuke your descendants and spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your solemn feasts” (verse 3). These *descendants* are *institutional* descendants of the priests in verse one.

The only usage of *descendant* (*seed*) as biological children is in chapter two wherein the Lord judges Israel (possibly the priests) for marrying outside the covenant:

“...the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But did He not make *them* one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.” (vv. 14b–15)

Yet even here, the spiritual accent of the Old Testament is not missing (“a godly offspring”). Biological continuity was never the main point of generational faithfulness. Both were desirable, of course, but only one was essential.

However, Malachi 4:6 does not use the word *descendant* but *son*. This word is used four other times: Malachi 1:6, 3:3, 3:6 and 3:17.

The first usage clearly refers to biological ties: “A son honors his father, and a servant his master: if then I am a father, where is mine honor?”

The next two verses use the word in the religious-institutional-collective sense: “... and he will purify the *sons* of Levi ... For I, Jehovah, change not; therefore ye, O *sons* of Jacob, are not consumed.”

Malachi 3:17 is an interesting passage since *man*, and not *father*, is used in connection with son: “‘They shall be Mine,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘On the day that I make them My jewels. And I

will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.’”

Of more significance is that the two verses that allude to the biological father-son relationship are metaphors. In the book of Malachi, biological relations are used as comparisons for religious (moral) and institutional relationships. And only one passage is directly about biological families (2:15). Biological families are not the primary focus of this book.

The last question, what does it mean to turn the hearts, is already answered: to bring them to follow the faith of their fathers.

This interpretation is based upon the object of the verb, (*re*)turn. The Hebrew word (*shub*) can be translated *turn* or *return*. And this key verb is used four times outside of the text in question: Malachi 1:4, 2:6, 3:7, 3:18.

Malachi 1:4 is not relevant to the question at hand, dealing with the arrogant claims of Edom to *return* to their broken land and rebuild it.

The next verse, 2:6, is an interesting complement to the verses in question:

**The law of truth was in his [Levi’s] mouth, and unrighteousness was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned [*shub*] many away from iniquity.**

Levi is painted as a powerfully upright and spiritual leader. He is so powerful that he “turned many away from iniquity.” The verb “turned” is the exact same word and form as 4:6.<sup>11</sup>

The parallel here is quite informative: Elijah and Levi both are described as those who turn people. The objects of Luke’s description are similar to the language of Levi’s turning: *uprightness* (just) and *iniquity* (disobedient).

Although not explicitly mentioned in the text, this turning is a repentance of the heart toward God manifested in

some outward obedience to His law. This is the assumed moral stance of the entire Bible. In some contexts, this verb is translated as *converted* or *converting* (cp. Psalm 51:13, 19:7, NKJV).

Malachi 3:7 begins the section on tithes:

**“Yet from the days of your fathers you have gone away from My ordinances and have not kept *them*. Return to Me, and I will return to you,” Says the LORD of hosts. “But you said, ‘In what way shall we return?’”<sup>12</sup>**

God is urging Israel to follow the old paths of obedience, to imitate the faithful fathers of old.

The last verse, 3:18, is a promise of God to turn the people back to a healthy spiritual life that discerns between right and wrong:

**Then shall ye *return* and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not. (ASV)<sup>13</sup>**

*Turning* or *returning* is used consistently in a moral sense outside of chapter one. This matches Luke’s usage of the verb.<sup>14</sup> Malachi frequently laments the current generation’s faithlessness in comparison to the previous generation’s faithfulness, even using the comparable ideas of father, son and seed frequently.

Thus, Malachi 4:5–6 is a fitting ending to a book that frequently uses the parental relationship as a picture of spiritual and institutional relationships.

Even so, Luke’s interpretation is decisive in answering all these questions: John the Baptist fulfilled Malachi 4:6 by being used of the Spirit to turn the hearts of the disobedient, unrighteous, and wicked to the obedience of their spiritual, institutional and just forefathers.

## What about Homeschooling as an Application of Malachi 4?

If the text of Malachi 4:5–6 is not directly about homeschooling then could it be *indirectly* about homeschooling? Could homeschooling be an application of this passage?

Theologically, to apply Malachi directly to the homeschooling movement of today would seem to involve several assumptions. The first assumption would be that the *fathers* and *children* of the passage refer to biological families. Such an assumption has already been found wanting in a close reading of the book of Malachi and its fulfillment in Luke.

But even if one were to ignore the book-level context of the words, two theological facts would call this interpretation into question. The first is Christ's own words about the effect of the gospel upon families:

Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to “set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law”; and “a man's enemies will be those of his own household.” He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. (Matt. 10:34–37, NKJV)

How can this round peg be squared with a prophecy about families being united lest He strike the earth with a curse? A biological reading of the text would mean the gospel brings a curse upon the earth since it divides and unites families.

The *second* theological fact that calls this interpretation into question is the truth that spiritual families are more important than biological ties, as Christ asserts:

“Who is My mother and who are My brothers?” And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, “Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.” (Matt. 12:48–50, NKJV)

Another assumption is the belief that the *turning of hearts* is a strengthening of familial ties between family members. Fathers would love their children and the children would obey their fathers. Obviously if the family of this text is the house of God, the church, then the turning of hearts has a different signification.

According to Luke 1:17, this signification is the *turning* of the disobedient to the ways of the obedient:

He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, “to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,” and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord

Luke purposefully parallels the language of biology (*father* and *children*) with the moral categories (*disobedient* and *just*). The chiasmic form (ABB'A') of the original Malachi passage is retained in Luke: the fathers are the *just* and the children are the *disobedient*.

In fact, the turning (or repentance) is primarily toward God as Luke first notes: “turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God” (v. 16). This goal is reiterated at the end of verse 17: “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” The purpose of turning of the disobedient to the just is to make a people holy for God.

Even if biological families are in view (and they are not), the *instrument* of the Spirit to bring about the turning of hearts is Elijah. But Elijah is John the Baptist. And both men, for all practical considerations, are church officers—

prophets—if one were to take the text as applicable for today.

In other words, even with this view one could not logically conclude that homeschooling is the instrument of the turning of hearts. That would be the church leader—a prophet, or at least a pastor.

But there are particular positions about the relationship between homeschooling and Malachi which shall be addressed.

Some assert that homeschooling as such is an instrument of revival or transformation. Others assert it is “almost by definition” a fulfillment of Malachi 4. Still others seem to believe it to be a sign of revival. The mildest version simply offers Malachi 4 as the “explanation” for the homeschooling movement.

The *first* claim is the most extreme view: that homeschooling “is producing, and will produce, the future leaders of our culture” because it is a “spiritual revival as the hearts of the parents are turned to their children and vice versa ...” This is a claim that homeschooling is an *instrumental* cause of revival or renewal. But based upon a careful exegesis of the text this is false. Theologically it is false as well when the rest of the Bible is taken into consideration (cp. Matt. 10:34). Statistically and historically (see below) it is equally false. There is no sound reason for this claim.

The *second* claim—that homeschoolers “almost by definition” are turning hearts toward each other—can be taken in one of two manners. It could be taken in a qualitative sense that the simple act of homeschooling is a fulfillment of Malachi 4. “Almost by definition” could also refer to the demographic makeup of the homeschoolers: that the vast majority could be described in terms of Malachi 4 while an insubstantial minority could not.

The fuller quote helps shed light

upon its meaning:

So there's been a revival that's taking place in the heart of these homeschool families. And this revival works itself out to the local church ... our prayer: every Christian in the world is in a family-integrated church. And there should be nothing but that, but you know what that is going to lead to? That's going to lead to people homeschooling!

This clearly expresses the idea of radical homeschooling. The idea is that the vast majority—"almost by definition"—of homeschoolers are fulfilling Malachi 4. They are part and parcel of a revival. And this revival "works itself out to the local church"—implying a cause and effect relationship.

In either case—qualitatively or quantitatively—the adverb *almost* is the Achilles heel: *almost* is not *completely*. It is a statement that allows for wiggle room in contrast to the passage in Malachi which is a blanket statement, a prophecy that Luke said was fulfilled with Christ's first coming.

The *third* claim that homeschooling is a "sign" of revival suffers from similar analysis. Consider Voddie Baucham's claim:

According to Reid and McDow, "Revival is God's invasion into the lives of one or more of His people in order to awaken them spiritually for kingdom ministry." It is on the basis of this definition that I believe that the recent rise in parental awareness, desperation over the future of our families, churches, and communities, the homeschool movement, and the family-integrated church movement constitutes a modern revival on the American landscape ... God is truly turning the hearts of fathers toward their children. Anyone who has been around the Christian church in America knows that these people are way outside the mainstream. The lifestyle choices they have made are not the kind we typically hear about in Sun-

day school. Something has happened to these folks. Something that God ordained.<sup>15</sup>

But Malachi 4 is not about biological families as such. The Bible does not offer homeschooling as a sign of revival. It was not offered as a sign during Christ's ministry or in the revivals of the book of Acts. And statistically and historically it is false.

Granted, the drawing together of family members could be construed as a "sign" of revival in the loosest sense. However, a proper revival would have various and sundry positive effects upon the people of God, any number of which one could point to instead of homeschooling.

But this is a far cry from a strict and proper sign of revival as described in Malachi and understood in the rest of the Bible. The powerful preaching of the gospel, a renewed interest in God's law, widespread repentance, many conversions to Christ—these are strict and proper signs of revival. Such things will always and everywhere accompany a full revival. Renewed family relationships can and have accompanied revivals but since families are also divided by the gospel, it cannot be a strict and proper sign of revival.

### What Does Church History Show?

If it were granted that renewed family relationships or homeschooling are signs of a Malachi 4 revival, then historical and statistical analysis would reinforce this claim. A revitalized family via homeschooling would imply a history reflective of this fact, and current statistics would demonstrate powerful spiritual growth in homeschooling. But the history of Christian education and the current statistics of homeschooling do not demonstrate such.

The most obvious fact against this thesis is that none of the major commentators, theology works, or confes-

sions makes such a claim. And the proponents of this view have offered little to no historical proof in their favor.

In fact, a review of the Reformation and the First and Second Great Awakenings will demonstrate the opposite of this claim.

The Reformation is considered by many historians as partly an educational movement.<sup>16</sup> Yet not one Reformer promoted homeschooling as such. They taught the importance of parental instruction of basic morals and life skills. They promoted family worship. But formal, non-parental schooling was equally emphasized.<sup>17</sup>

The Reformers shared a common concern for the education of the covenant children, especially that they be able to read the Bible. Luther's letters and sermons reflect a strong desire for public education ("Letter...in Behalf of Christian Schools" and "The Duty of Sending Children to School"). After traveling through the local region and noting the deplorable state of learning, he wrote his catechism for the children. He and Melancthon helped establish more and better schools in the Germanic lands.

Similarly, Zwingli, Bucer, Beza and Knox also supported their local day schools, not just the colleges. These men were not anomalies but were part of a larger church-led movement that included the Reformed bodies of Poland, Holland, Germany, France, Scotland and England that created, supported, and promoted schools for children. Catechisms were created along with catechism classes.

Calvin is well-known for his Geneva Academy, but many do not realize that Geneva also had a city-school for children. This lower-level school (*schola private*) was divided into seven grades, admitting children as young as age six. Most boys stayed in each grade a year,

but could advance earlier. School began at six in the summer and seven in the winter and lasted until four in the afternoon. Classes were on Saturday as well and included an afternoon recess.

Over a century later, the typical New England child would begin instruction before age six, attending a local Dame school wherein an older woman (usually widowed) would teach the rudiments. After mastering reading through the hornbook or *The New England Primer*, he would advance to a writing school. If he were proficient he would next attend a grammar school, learning the classics. It was common for the schoolmasters to teach the catechisms as well. At times, such catechizing was furthered through assemblies of the children, not unlike Sunday school (perhaps following the Scottish pattern).

Leaders, such as John Eliot and Cotton Mather, promoted Christian day schools. The Synod of New York and Philadelphia publicly called for more schools. Eye-witness accounts from Professor Samuel Miller (late 1700s) and Pierre Samuel du Pont de Nemours (1812) describe an America with a large school population. By 1840 perhaps 55 percent or more of school-aged children attended school for some amount of time. These statistics do not include attendance to school overseas, local tutors and informal local schools run by rich households.

This growth and encouragement for day schools for children occurred through both American revivals. There is no indication that the First and Second Great Awakenings in America were brought about by or were accompanied with homeschooling as a “sign” of revival.

Historically, the Reformation and the first two Great Awakenings in America were *not centered on educational methods*. Instead, preaching repentance

from dead works and faith in the Living Savior was central. Calvin, Luther, Knox, the Puritans and the Pilgrims *all promoted schooling for education and the church for revival*. Today too many homeschooling leaders are confusing the two agencies.

In point of fact, a simple public declaration by the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America during the height of the Second Great Awakening conclusively proves that revival was not associated with homeschooling:

In those parts of the church, without exception, in which vital religion has flourished, in the course of the last year, the fundamental doctrines of the gospel; viz. the total depravity of human nature, the divinity and atonement of Jesus Christ, justification by His imputed righteousness, the sovereignty and freeness of divine grace, and the special influences of the Holy Spirit in the regeneration and sanctification of sinners have been decidedly received and honoured.<sup>18</sup>

### What About the Modern Homeschooling Movement?

If the Malachi passage is not about biological families and homeschooling as such, could it still apply to the modern homeschooling movement? Possibly.

It could apply in the sense that many prophecies of old could apply today in a less-than strict sense: when there are moral truths embedded in the prophecy, those truths are still applicable. And since Malachi is a prophecy about turning the hearts of a new generation to the old paths of the church fathers it could be loosely applied to any similar scenario.

But is the modern homeschooling of the last thirty years just such a scenario?

It is hard to evaluate since the statistics of the movement tell us very

little. One could argue that its meteoric growth (partly exaggerated) or its academic success is evidence of the moral superiority of homeschooling. And if morally superior, then it could be a sign of a Malachi revival.

Certainly, numerical growth in and of itself is a sign of nothing but popularity. And if academic prowess is a sign of revival, then the touted studies of Rudner and Dr. Ray tells us almost nothing. Neither study incorporated the best statistical tools since they were not random samples. And both men admit their studies cannot be used for comparison with public schools.<sup>19</sup>

If the homeschooling movement of today is a mighty act of God in turning hearts toward God, then statistics will tell us little unless they examine the spiritual fruits. But there are some studies that are suggestive of the current spiritual state.

The statistics over the last fifteen years paint an ugly picture of doctrinal ignorance and indifference toward piety in the average evangelical's life. And if the average homeschooler is an evangelical, then they are not exempted from these statistics.

The 2008 massive religious study by the Pew Forum found 57 percent of self-described evangelicals believe there are other ways to heaven. Barna studies show similar levels of doctrinal ignorance as well as problems of piety.<sup>20</sup>

Homeschoolers are not exempt from such problems. One early Barna study suggested problems in homeschooling circles early on. Half of those polled denied that salvation was by grace alone. In some areas, such as frequency of religious activities during the week, they were slightly more engaged. But church attendance, prayer and devotional time were the same as the national norms. Half of the polled homeschoolers considered themselves



somewhere between politically conservative and liberal.<sup>21</sup>

The Nehemiah Institute (a worldview assessment center) has a worldview test that, although certainly far from perfect, suggests that homeschoolers are sub-par. The 2008 study states:

Homeschool students generally have ranged between the Traditional Christian school students and the Worldview-based school students, [with an] average score for high school level at 48.65 for the past three years. A small percentage of home school students have scored very well, above 80.0 (about 8%) but a surprisingly higher percentage score low, less than 30.0 (about 25%).<sup>22</sup>

The spiritual ramifications may be seen in the rising second generation of homeschoolers: many complain of their legalistic upbringing and unreasonable burdens placed upon them. Naturally, not all of these complaints are accurate, and some express more confusion than reality. Yet much rings true.

In fact, some of the homeschooling leaders in the trenches admit that the spiritual state of homeschoolers is not as good as it should be:

During the great apostasy, friends, whether they go to public schools, private schools, Christian schools, homeschools, what you have, for the most part, we are seeing failure. Failure everywhere.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, a 2011 large-scale, longitudinal educational study, the Cardus Education Survey, found normal to lackluster results for homeschool high school graduates.<sup>24</sup> The random-sample nature of this study makes it stand out as one of very few such studies that include homeschoolers. The study was able to separate between religious and non-religious homeschoolers.

Religious practices of homeschoolers were similar to those in Protestant

schools except for tithing which was noticeably lower. As for academic achievement, homeschoolers had noticeably lower rates of college preparedness, attended “open admission” universities and had generally lower rates of attending college at all. And, contrary to fifteen years of hearsay, they had lower SAT scores compared to other peers in private schools.

Of significance is the section about cultural engagement. Homeschoolers seem to have higher rates of helpless feelings in dealing with difficulties of life; they lack clear goals and direction; they get married at younger ages; they get more divorces than their private school peers. This last point was verified to be uniquely statistical to homeschoolers: more of them are divorcing even when their parents do not.

None of this is to say that homeschooling is a terrible choice. Larger sample sizes are needed. And these statistics are not the final word. Even so, they should be enough to silence those who hype the movement out of due proportion.

Homeschooling is a good, even an excellent option for many families. Yet the Bible, history and statistics all attest that it is neither an *instrument* nor a *sign* of revival. The language of Malachi 4 can only be used for those who are being brought back to God, whether they homeschool or not. It cannot be used to describe the movement as such.

### What Now?

Mislabeling something a *revival* is very serious: it misleads people into a false hope. It leads homeschooling families into a false sense of security. They become less open to challenging any of their own practical or theological errors. It may even harden them in their sins.

And such a mislabeling sets the homeschoolers up to accepting more

false teachings and practices from anyone who strokes their ego with such a dangerous claim. It may also blind them to the presence of real revivals in their midst.

The singling out of homeschoolers as those special of the Lord creates a dangerously divisive atmosphere. Under such a mindset families will readily gravitate to churches that promote this view, bypassing good Protestant and Reformed churches that do not subscribe to such a view. It is already happening.

Further, this claim of revival and homeschooling is frequently tied to renewing America, adding a socio-political dimension that further aggravates the negative impact upon listeners:

[H]omeschoolers on the forefront of the battle to restore family, faith and freedom in the 21st century ... Folks, one of the passions we have on this radio program is to see a Malachi 4 revival in the hearts of fathers and sons across America. I believe this is the catalyst to the restoration of faith, family and freedom in the 21st century.<sup>25</sup>

Imagine the burden this puts upon families who homeschool. And imagine the burden upon families who do not homeschool. The former are told they are the catalyst to renewing America (and the faith!). The latter feel left out wondering if God is working in them at all.

The church does not need this misguided movement. In today's climate of spiritual darkness, churches and families do not need to focus on educational *method* as much as upon the *old message*. The rank ignorance as noted earlier—denial of *solus Christus*, theological ignorance, practical godlessness—cry out for reformation and revival not for more homeschooling.

The renewal Christian families need is the power of the Spirit through the means of grace, especially the public

means of grace, in particular the proclamation of the law and gospel. Certainly, many need to take Christian nurture more seriously, and homeschooling is likely a good means toward that goal. But it is neither a sign nor an instrument of revival.

The agency of revival is normally the church. Malachi's historical prophecy is but an application of the Spirit's ordinary work of using the church—the pastor in particular—to preach repentance from sin (like John the Baptist) and faith in Jesus Christ to bring the hearts of the disobedient to the path of the righteous in Christ.

If these homeschooling leaders want revival, then they need to promote healthy, mature and confessional churches. They need to challenge their audiences' false practices and especially false gospels. They need to cry out to the Spirit for more conviction of sins. They need to cry out to the Spirit for more John the Baptists—more faithful ministers—who will preach repentance from dead works and faith in the Living Christ.

May God answer this prayer. 🙏

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1. National Center for Family Integrated Churches (NCFIC) blog, endorsed the original interview on their blog back in January of 2009.
2. The broadcast this quote came from was endorsed on the NCFIC blog in 2009. The NCFIC is the brainchild of Phillips and has never disowned the radical homeschooling claims but assumes them. Other groups influenced by Vision Forum and/or promoted it or shared the speaking circuit with him include R.C. Sproul Jr., Scott Brown

(NCFIC), Voddie Baucham Ministries, Botkin's Western Conservatory of the Arts and Sciences, and various homeschooling organizations such as Christian Home Educators of Colorado.

3. Doug's Blog, Oct. 8, 2004.
4. <visionforum.com/about/ and /aboutvf/> from 2001-2011. See Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/web/>.
5. Thatmom.com (Karen Campbell), Jen's Gems (Jen Fishburne), Chalcedon and I and others wrote about our concerns from the mid-2000s onward but had no nationwide platform to express these concerns. Most of these authors published concerns about this aggressive form of homeschooling and patriarchy but did not tie the theme to Malachi 4 except for myself and Chalcedon's Martin Selbrede in *Faith for All Life*, March/April 2010.
6. See Scott Brown's quote above. Israel Wayne, "The Second Generation Homeschooling Movement" (<http://www.homeschoolalumni.org>). Generations Radio names this theme several times, including in their commercial breaks. State organizations include Christian Home Educators of Colorado (parent institution of Generations Radio) whose former executive director asserted: "[Homeschooling is] beyond any doubt, a veritable reformation of life ... unmatched by anything we have seen in the last century or two in Europe or America." (*Homeschool Update*, Christian Home Educators of Colorado, Fall, 2008).
7. Kaiser, Walter C., and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, ed., *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, vol. 23, The Preacher's Commentary Series (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1992).
8. Cp. Lange's Commentary for a list of names at [books.google.com](http://books.google.com).
9. Greek: *apeitheis* and *dikaiois* respectively.
10. Hebrew: *za'ar* (seed) and *ben* (son).
11. Hiphil, perfect, 3 person, masculine singular.
12. Qal, imperfect.
13. Qal, waw, perfect.
14. Luke uses *epistrefou*, repent, change one's ways (Friberg).
15. Voddie Baucham, *Family Driven Faith*

(Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), pp. 171, 175.

16. Spitz, Lawson, Cubberley, McNeil, Benedict, to name a few.
17. See author's last chapter summarizing the history of Christian education in his book, *Uniting Church and Family* (at Amazon and in Kindle format). More details are found in his unpublished paper on the history of Christian education (you may contact the author for details).
18. Report of the General Assembly in the *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, 1810, p. 443, [books.google.com](http://books.google.com).
19. Reading the studies will demonstrate as much. See my article "The Statistics of Homeschooling" in *Uniting Church and Family* or my articles at Examiner.com, under Denver Christian Perspectives Examiner.
20. Pew Forum, Religious Landscape Survey, 2008, <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2013/05/report-religious-landscape-study-full.pdf>. Barna's *UnChristian* book collects a host of statistics, showing the widespread ignorance of Christians and the rising lack of piety.
21. Barna Group, "Home School Families Have Different Backgrounds Than Commonly Assumed," 2001, <https://www.barna.com/research/home-school-families-have-different-backgrounds-than-commonly-assumed/>
22. Nehemiah Institute, "Where are we Going?" August 1, 2008, <http://www.nehemiahinstitute.com/articles/index.php?action=show&id=35> <http://www.nehemiahinstitute.com/articles/index.php?action=show&id=35>
23. Generations Radio, Sept. 5, 2011.
24. Cardus Education Survey, 2011, online, [http://www.cardus.ca/research/education/survey\\_schedule/](http://www.cardus.ca/research/education/survey_schedule/).
25. "Homeschool Education Neglect" (2014) and "Signs of Gigantic Reformation in the West," Generations Radio, [sermonaudio.com](http://sermonaudio.com), 2013.

# Terminating the Legal Murder of Unborn Babies

by Peter Allison



In 2003 the Republican Party gained control of the Texas legislature for the first time since the Reconstruction Era 130 years earlier,<sup>1</sup> and has held it ever since. With this new-found majority and a national media buzz around the recent double murder of Laci Peterson and her unborn baby by her husband,<sup>2</sup> the pro-life Republican legislature introduced personhood legislation, SB319, which changed the legal definition of an “individual” from a human being who “has been born and is alive” to “a human being who is alive, including an unborn child at every stage of gestation from fertilization until birth.”

This bill had strong support from all the nominally pro-life organizations (including Texas Right to Life, Texas Alliance for Life, and the Eagle Forum) and was even given double weight on some pro-life legislative scorecards. However, while the bill recognized unborn babies as people it also amended the homicide statute in the penal code, which criminalizes killing “individuals,” to allow mothers and doctors performing approved procedures to murder or assault unborn children. What it gave with one hand it took away with the other.

By this artifice the bill’s proponents accomplished three legislative objectives.

*First*, supporters could claim the bill had nothing to do with abortion and that its purpose was simply to facilitate the prosecution of people, like Laci’s husband, who have murdered or assault-

**The truth was proclaimed again and again in compelling and sometimes entertaining ways—abortion is murder and you have a duty to bring the wrath of God on those who shed innocent blood.**

ed unborn babies against the mother’s wishes. This approach enabled them to receive legislative support from members who wouldn’t necessarily support legislation just because it was pro-life.

*Secondly*, it allowed nominally pro-life legislators who represented predominantly pro-life constituencies to enhance their pro-life credentials by voting for a strong pro-life bill that didn’t stop one murder.

*Thirdly*, it placated the proponents of abortion exactly because it did nothing to stop or hinder abortions.

And so, a few weeks after Laci and her unborn son Conner’s decomposing bodies were pulled out of San Francisco Bay, only fifteen out of one hundred fifty legislators voted against the bill—and one of them claimed he intended to vote “Yes.”<sup>3</sup> Those “No’s” represented the hard-core abortion supporters who were neither moved by the gruesome double murder captivating the nation nor fooled by the hollow protestations of the bill’s supporters that it wasn’t about abortion.

One of those “no” votes, Mr. Farrar, explained himself on the house floor,

If this bill isn’t about abortion, then why is this [i.e., the unborn child’s fundamental right to life] so important to them? Why isn’t this bill a law and order bill that is endorsed by law enforcement groups? The truth is, the goal is to have statutes in place that are building blocks or foundations for future legislation, litigation, and the possible overturning of *Roe v. Wade* by the U.S. Supreme Court.

If this suggestion of personhood is established, the appellant’s case, of course, collapses, for the fetus’ right to life is then guaranteed specifically by the Fourteenth Amendment. This is part of an organized nationwide effort to lay these foundations in other states.<sup>4</sup>

Mr. Farrar was exactly correct. If the new definition of individual that brought abortion under the scope of the murder and assault sections<sup>5</sup> of the penal code withstood court scrutiny, future legislators wanting to criminalize abortion simply had to remove the exceptions added to those chapters. Even the plaintiffs in the blatantly immoral and unconstitutional *Roe* case<sup>6</sup> acknowledge that their case collapses if unborn babies are actually people.<sup>7</sup> It is also much harder for a future appellate court to find the absence of a law unconstitutional than it is to find a newly enacted law unconstitutional. Thirteen years later, when the public media circus had long moved on to other amusements, the next generation of pro-life warriors, encouraged by similar efforts in other states, seized the opportunity that had been set up a decade earlier.

## Important Developments in the Battle

Some may think that a decade was lost in the battle for justice for the unborn. But this is not necessarily the case. Nations have the laws that “the people” collectively want. The AEI’s recently published study on Abortion Attitudes found from their review polling data over the past forty-four years that though most Americans do not want the Supreme Court to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, they are willing to put some restrictions on abortion. “Majorities of Americans favor notification of spouses, parental consent, and 24-hour waiting periods. They support first-term abortions, but oppose second- and third-trimester ones. They oppose public funding.”<sup>8</sup>

These polling data on abortion are a very close match with the current laws on abortion. (The same data sets also prove that Americans are fundamentally confused with many believing abortion to be murder while simultaneously believing it should be personal choice).

Politicians can only lead people where they are willing to be led (Prov. 14:28). Although a good leader can move public opinion, it is a slow process. That doesn’t mean the people don’t also bitterly complain about their laws and the political leaders who enacted them. It simply means that even legally valid laws fail when a sufficient plurality does not accept them.

In 2006 South Dakota’s legislature made it a felony for a doctor to perform any abortion.<sup>9</sup> At the time there was only one abortion mill in the state. It was open for abortions one day a week and was staffed by out-of-state doctors because Planned Parenthood couldn’t find any doctors in the state willing to kill babies for hire.<sup>10</sup> In other words, this is not California or Massachusetts. Nevertheless, the people rejected the new law 55 percent to 45 percent in a

**This amazing accomplishment was clearly from the Lord. But the heavy lifting was just beginning. Proposed legislation is typically written by lobbyists, think tanks, foundations, or other policy organizations with extensive legislative connections and the ability to make large campaign donations.**

statewide petition referendum<sup>11</sup> later that year because many felt there should be exceptions in certain cases. To change laws, the hearts of the people need to be changed. That happens when, moved by the prayers of the saints (Rev. 8:3–4; James 5:16–17) and the actions of a dedicated minority, God acts.

In this case, God worked through three longtime friends, Mr. Wesley Thomas, a computer programmer, Mr. Arthur Sisneros, a welding supply salesman, and Mr. Bradley Pierce, a home-schooled attorney practicing in Austin. On learning of the beachhead that had been codified in the Texas penal code and the strategic simplicity with which a law could be written repealing the exception clauses to murder and assault, they sprang into action.

Their first campaign began with the statewide precinct caucuses on Election Day, March 1, 2016. They circulated sample platform resolutions calling for the state legislature to remove the exemptions and make abortion murder. Precinct caucuses in our area are usually sparsely attended (e.g., my family usually constitutes a super majority at our caucus), so many people were able to pass resolutions in their caucuses that collectively came to be known as the

Abolish Abortion plank. These precinct platforms were passed up to the county caucuses a couple of weeks later. The fact that the same plank came from a number of precincts ensured its inclusion in the county platforms. After all, who could publically be against ending abortion?

The second campaign was waged at the Texas state convention in June 2016. Mr. Thomas made Abolish Abortion postcards and T-shirts and recruited a small dedicated team that made it seem like Abolish Abortion was the biggest thing going at the biggest political convention in the United States (yes, it’s larger than the national convention). All their work paid off when the Abolish Abortion plank was made the second of five legislative priorities out of over two hundred fifty planks in the platform. The plank called on legislators to “abolish abortion by enacting legislation to stop the murder of unborn children; and to ignore and refuse to enforce any and all federal statutes, regulations, executive orders, and court rulings, which would deprive an unborn child of the right to life.”

## From Party Plank to Proposed Legislation

This amazing accomplishment was clearly from the Lord. But the heavy lifting was just beginning. Proposed legislation is typically written by lobbyists, think tanks, foundations, or other policy organizations with extensive legislative connections and the ability to make large campaign donations. Their bills promote their agenda or the agenda of their underwriters.

But why couldn’t a few regular citizens with no money and few connections write a bill to promote the interests of unborn citizens? Without waiting for or caring about the answer, Mr. Pierce led the effort to draft legislation implementing the will of the convention and



shepherded it through the legal review by the legislative council. This was a crucial step as no legislator will accept a proposed bill that hasn't passed the council's legal review.

The next step was to find a legislator willing to author and file the bill. After approaching a number of house members, Representative Tony Tindenholt agreed to author the bill. On January 11, 2017, he filed HB 948, the "Abolition of Abortion in Texas Act." It made both doctor and mother guilty of murder for performing an abortion. No exceptions.

"When asked why the bill makes no exception for rape or incest, Tindenholt said he's 'a firm believer that God creates children in His own image, regardless of how that child is brought into the world, it's created in His image, and how can someone want to destroy that?'"<sup>12</sup> As might be expected in today's tolerant culture, he and his family received numerous death threats from those who apparently think murder is the only solution to all their problems.

The next three months were occupied with ongoing efforts to build support for the bill within and without the legislature. Eventually a respectable eleven other members signed on to the radical bill<sup>13</sup> as coauthors. Although the committee chair to whom the bill was assigned never held a hearing for the bill, far more was accomplished than usual for a first attempt as again and again throughout the entire campaign the Lord brought success beyond what anyone had expected.

A rally planned in February brought nearly a thousand people to the capital—double and triple what even the staff of the bill's author and (the staffs of the bill's coauthors) were expecting—and there weren't any buses with professional demonstrators, either. Hearings on abortion-related

bills were inundated with citizens of all ages willing to wait all day to ask the committee why they were not willing to hold hearings on HB948 and urging them to do so. On three different occasions thirty or more people<sup>14</sup> showed up to testify, turning committee hearings on what the committee thought were noncontroversial pro-life bills into extended referendums on the murder of unborn babies.

The truth was proclaimed again and again in compelling and sometimes entertaining ways—abortion is murder and you have a duty to bring the wrath of God on those who shed innocent blood. Several overheard members speak of the sobering effect their testimony had on the committee and the "buzz" created by the fact that a bill making abortion murder with no exceptions had not only been filed but was being boldly promoted.

### Can We Overcome the Fatal Disconnect?

On learning that the Committee Chairman holding up the bill was a deacon in evangelical church, one lobbyist engaged his pastor in an email discussion on his role as a teacher and shepherd and received the following answer revealing the astounding misunderstanding of basic law that is representative of much of evangelical Christendom:

I understand my role completely. I understand the Bible. I am completely in favor of life. The problem is not with lack of understanding, or courage. The problem is with the bill itself. HB 948 (which I have read in its entirety) is a complete waste of time. Federal courts have already ruled on this matter again and again. Federal court has control over this situation. Even if a state (such as Texas) enacted such a law, it would immediately be barred because of previous Federal Court rulings.

It is unfortunate that there is such fundamental misunderstanding of our constitutional form of government by teachers.

The U.S. Constitution opens Article 1 with the clear statement, "All legislative power herein granted shall be vested in the Congress of the United States ..." The Supreme Court has no legal authority to either make or change any laws. They certainly have no authority to change the laws of Texas or any other state. Their rulings are binding only on the parties before the court. They can only penalize people whom they have determined violated the law, which action is limited to the parties before them.

As badly as our sixteenth President abused the Constitution, at least he understood this much, noting in his first inaugural address:

I do not forget the position assumed by some that constitutional questions are to be decided by the Supreme Court, nor do I deny that such decisions must be binding in any case upon the parties to a suit [*notice he doesn't say binding on everyone, just binding on parties to the suit*] as to the object of that suit, while they are also entitled to very high respect and consideration in all parallel cases by all other departments of the Government. [*Entitled to high respect and consideration by others is very different from binding on others.*]

And while it is obviously possible that such decision may be erroneous in any given case, still the evil effect following it, being limited to that particular case, [*the evil is limited to that particular case because the decision is only binding on that particular case*] with the chance that it may be overruled and never become a precedent for other cases, can better be borne than could the evils of a different practice.

At the same time, the candid citizen must confess that if the policy of the Government upon vital questions affect-

ing the whole people is to be irrevocably fixed by decisions of the Supreme Court, the instant they are made in ordinary litigation between parties in personal actions the people will have ceased to be their own rulers, having to that extent practically resigned their Government into the hands of that eminent tribunal. Nor is there in this view any assault upon the court or the judges.<sup>15</sup>

We have our work cut out for us. It begins with the church. Lord willing, we will be back for the next legislative session. In the meantime we'll remember the ancient Christian adage, *Ora et labora*. 🇺🇸

Peter Allison is a former nuclear submarine engineer, headmaster, college instructor, and diamond grower. He is the author of *Dollar Noncents* and holds 5 patents from his current engineering work for a Fortune 10 company. Peter also serves as the pastor of Crown & Covenant Church near Houston, Texas where he lives with his wife of 24 years, their seven children, a dairy goat herd, and other associated critters.

1. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Speakers\\_of\\_the\\_Texas\\_House\\_of\\_Representatives](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Speakers_of_the_Texas_House_of_Representatives). Accessed July 29, 2017.
2. "Autopsy: Laci Peterson's Head Was Missing," <http://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=90600>. Accessed July 29, 2017.
3. Representative Rose, *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Regular Session of the Seventy-Eighth Legislature of the State of Texas Being Held at the City of Austin*, May 28, 2003 (80th day), p. 4593. See House journal Day 80 (2003-05-28).pdf (710.8 KB).
4. Representative Farrar, *ibid.*, Wednesday, May 28, 2003 (80th day), p. 4591.
5. Texas Penal Code, Chapter 19 & 22. <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/PE/htm/PE.19.htm>.
6. Which only applies to the named parties in the case.
7. "The appellee and certain *amici* argue that the fetus is a "person" within the language and meaning of the Fourteenth Amendment. In support of this, they outline at length and in detail the well-known

facts of fetal development. If this suggestion of personhood is established, the appellant's case, of course, collapses, for the fetus' right to life would then be guaranteed specifically by the Amendment. The appellant conceded as much on reargument." *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973), pp. 156–157.

8. Bowman, Karlyn, and Heather Sims, *Attitudes About Abortion*, compiled by the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, Jan. 2017, p. 3.

<http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/ABORTION.pdf>

9. The text of the law is available here: <http://sdlegislature.gov/sessions/2006/bills/HB1215enr.htm>. Accessed July 31, 2017.

10. "S.D. Abortion Bill Takes Aim at 'Roe,'" <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/02/22/AR2006022202424.html>. Accessed July 31, 2017.

11. To initiate a referendum, signatures of registered voters equal to 5 percent of the total vote for governor in the last election must be filed within 90 days of adjournment of the legislative session in which the measure was passed. <https://sdsos.gov/elections-voting/upcoming-elections/ballot-question-information/signature-requirements-ballot-question-petitions.aspx>. Accessed July 31, 2017.

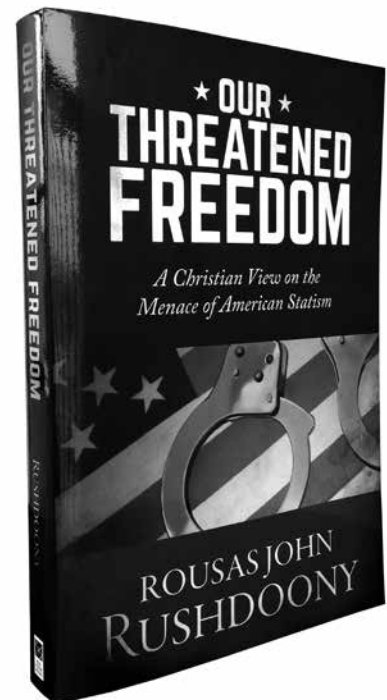
12. <https://www.texasobserver.org/texas-lawmaker-no-abortion-access-would-force-women-to-be-more-personally-responsible-with-sex/>. Accessed Aug 1, 2017.

13. The Attorney General, considered by many to be pro-life, apparently informed the Committee chair responsible for the bill that the measure was unconstitutional and indefensible.

14. The majority of these were from the two churches attended by Mr. Sisneros and Mr. Thomas.

15. [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/lincoln1.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/lincoln1.asp)

## Is the "Land of the Free" Becoming the Home of the Enslaved?



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# State Mandated Training Requirements: Help or Harm?

by Chris Zimmerman



Let me begin by stating that I am in favor of firearms training. I am a firearms trainer, I regularly receive training, and I compete to put my training to the test. I analyze my weaknesses and seek more training to eliminate them. With that said, however, I believe there is a glaring inconsistency within the pro-gun movement that at best undermines progress and, at worst, reveals an incorrect mindset. The popular saying, “We have met the enemy, and they are us” should give us pause for consideration.

As of mid-2017, approximately thirty-eight states have some form of training requirement to obtain a concealed handgun license. That translates to just over 75 percent of the country and a clear majority. The issue is settled then, right? A majority of states have training requirements and more people are getting concealed carry licenses, so it must be helping. But do these state-issued mandates actually help or harm the movement? To answer this question, we must first consider the nature of true freedom and then, with that in mind, examine the effects of state training requirements.

## True Freedom

Often in discussions around guns and legislation someone will proclaim, “It’s about freedom!” For others, the lyrics to a popular song come to mind,

I’d thank my lucky stars

To be living here today  
Cause the flag still stands for freedom  
And they can’t take that away.<sup>1</sup>

But freedom in what sense? Contrary to the sentiments of Mr. Greenwood, what is usually meant is freedom *from* responsibility or the freedom *to do whatever I want*. But the fact is, that’s not freedom, it’s anarchy. True freedom is freedom *unto* responsibility (Eph. 2:10, Rom. 8:7) to fulfill our covenantal duties before God (Gen. 1:28) with all our might without interference. Because of our sin nature, true freedom is also marked with the mistakes, failures, and risks that modern man cannot stand. Being lawless by nature, he is a slave at heart (to sin) and demands all the benefits of maturity but with none of the responsibility. We see the results of this drive for cradle-to-grave security in a variety of forms: too-big-to-fail bailouts, national healthcare, gun control legislation, and even state mandated training requirements. We thus have a choice: slavery which is void of risk and responsibility or freedom with all the risks and responsibility. There is no halfway point.

The issue of the state wrongly stepping in when men fail to fulfill their duties is not new to us. We do well to look to the Scriptures for a true understanding of man’s flight from maturity, as Dr. Rushdoony titled it, specifically at the time of the Exodus. Multiple times we see the covenant people that had been taken out of slavery in Egypt by God’s gracious power but were still slaves in their hearts. They murmured

(Exod. 17:3), they complained (Exod. 5:21, 16:3), they revolted (Num. 16:11–13), and they longed to return to slavery rather than face the problems of freedom (Exod. 14:11–12). Dr. Rushdoony stated it clearly,

So that the Israelites, in turning on Moses were saying “We don’t want a future,” and that’s the mark of slavery. A slavery situation means you don’t gamble, you don’t risk anything. You don’t have a future because it’s the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. You’re cared for from cradle to grave. You don’t have the options of advancing yourself. It’s a risk-free society, and this is exactly what people today want, risk-free society. And this is why we are becoming slave people, and unless God breaks that in us, we will be a slave people...<sup>2</sup>

Lest we should think that we are somehow different than the ancient Hebrews, we must remember that Christ has led His people out in the true exodus to victory, of which the prior exodus was a type (Luke 9:31). Therefore, we face the same problem of a hunger for slavery in both the unregenerate and the covenant peoples—the former being part of their sin nature and the latter as part of their sanctification. Again, Dr. Rushdoony statement was prescient,

What Israel wanted was not God, but miracles guaranteeing security. Slavery under Pharaoh meant security, and it seemed preferable to freedom under God, because freedom means uncertainties and responsibilities. This is why politics has replaced Christianity as the central concern of many peoples.



Politics succeeds by the promise of security, which is another way of saying slavery. The slave may or may not have a good life, but the slave has cradle-to-grave security. Slave revolts are simply destructive because the slave's vision rarely extends beyond security. This is why, when politics becomes primary in the life of the people, the people are headed for slavery.<sup>3</sup>

Later, ancient Rome held, "*Salus populi suprema lex esto*" or "The health of the people is the highest law." Rome's premise was built upon cradle-to-grave security in the context of salvation by law that could be summed up as: the force of law will force the heart to change. This was reinforced with Rousseau at the time of the French Revolution when he said, "The general will is always right and ever tends to public advantage."<sup>4</sup> However, for Rousseau, the general will was manifested by the state and not by the people at large. The former Soviet Union carried this idea forward with their tyranny of the dictatorship of the proletariat and we have it in our country as well. In every instance, the state moves in to control the people and progressively reduce them to slaves because men fear the possibility of failure or liability.

## **Mandated Training Requirements**

By this point you may be wondering what all this has to do with state-mandated training requirements. Based upon what has been presented, these mandates negatively affect concealed carry and the pro-gun movement in the following ways.

*First*, they cause an atrophy of the human mind with regard to responsibility. After all, the state has dictated what you have to do in order to carry, so little to no thought is required to pursuing the best training you can find. Instead, whatever will meet the state requirements is sought and purchased because,

**We must first recognize that without risks there are no blessings. Every business owner starts off with the risk that the venture may fail but, despite this, presses forward for prosperity. As Christians, we must be on the front lines teaching people about their covenant duty to defend life (Exod. 20:13) in a Biblically lawful manner, including the potential for liabilities.**

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after all, "If it's good enough for the state then it's good enough for me." This has also led to things like online safety training classes which, while minimally helpful, do not have the oversight of an instructor and allow for bad or unsafe habits to continue. In a similar vein, when was the last time any of us looked for ways to pay more taxes? Never: as we all seek the maximum lawful ways to minimize our required tax burden. The same applies to required training. The problem is not limited to firearms training, either, as required driver's education programs have similarly failed to overwhelm us with skilled drivers and safer roads.

*Second*, training requirements only affect the law-abiding. The criminal, by definition, does not obey the law. Often, those most vulnerable are also the ones hit hardest by this because of the high cost of the classes. This is, incidentally, an area where instructors can make a difference by offering low cost/no cost firearms training. Therefore, such mandates are nothing more than controls

on the law-abiding hidden behind the pretense of ensuring safety.

*Third*, it reveals something about us when we press for mandated training: we are statist slaves in our mindset. By supporting such legislation, we are implicitly agreeing with the gun controllers that some form of regulation by the state is required to ensure our safety. It is saying that we as a nation will be saved by law rather than by simply enforcing full liability and restitution for our actions. As a result, we end up arguing with the gun controllers over the amount of control by the state as a matter of degree rather than a difference of kind. Remember, true freedom means the messiness of mistakes, the possibility of failure, the risks of tragedy, but the blessings of fulfilling our duty. Someone may ask at this point, "Doesn't that mean more negligent discharges or bad publicity?" Not necessarily. By enforcing full liability for our actions and, more importantly, encouraging duty over anarchistic thinking, gun owners will have the motivation to get the training they need and can afford: the godly in their sense of gratitude for the grace of God and the ungodly by seeking to limit their exposure to liability.

*Finally*, state mandates create an effective monopoly by forcing the gun owner to attend some sort of state-approved training to fulfill their duty to defend life (their own, their loved one's, or their neighbor's). While there may be many offering approved training, the fact remains that the market is not permitted to operate freely and the quality of training suffers as a result. Gresham's Law states, "bad money drives out good" and likewise, training to state requirements drives out true, preparatory training. You end up with limited choices based upon bureaucratic whims with the force of law (i.e., coercion) behind them.



## What, Then, Do We Do?

As covenant men and women, we have been restored back into our original dominion mandate under Christ and as a part of our new humanity in Him. We must first recognize that without risks there are no blessings. Every business owner starts off with the risk that the venture may fail but, despite this, presses forward for prosperity. As Christians, we must be on the front lines teaching people about their covenant duty to defend life (Exod. 20:13) in a Biblically lawful manner, including the potential for liabilities. We must teach the Biblical penalties for those that take life, regardless of the tool they use, and the blessings of God upon a faithful society. As the Holy Spirit regenerates hearts that are no longer bound to slavery, He renews hearts open to His every Word with a hunger. But those that look at the cost of such freedom and decide it is not for them would then fit into the category of the servant who chooses voluntary slavery over freedom:

**And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him forever. And if a man sell his daughter to be a maid-servant, she shall not go out as the menservants do. (Exod. 21:5–7)**

We are commanded to pursue maturity (2 Tim. 3:16–17, Heb. 5:12–13) and freedom (1 Cor. 7:22–23) by walking by faith according to the law-word of God. This is not a lawless anarchy with its death and destruction, but a responsible blessed peace for man and society. State mandates only serve as a statist thermometer of sorts, warning us when we are coming down with a

bad case of slavery due to a lack of faith. But we have the certainty of knowing “that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). While this does not mean life without failure or problems, it does mean that all things are under His sovereign control and ordered for our good.

I recognize that many reading this actively pursue training. To those I will say: You understand the responsibility in carrying a firearm for protection and have embraced the mindset to continually improve yourself. Bravo! But state mandates did nothing to change your mindset to that end. It is time we stopped thinking as statists in this area by pushing for legislation that requires training as though that will change the man. Law has never and can never accomplish that. 🇺🇸

Chris Zimmerman is husband to Jen for 21 years, father to 4 children (ranging 18 down to a newborn) and resides in Washington state. His family has been going through a reformation for the past 8 years and he has been trying to apply all of Scripture to all of life. Chris works full time in IT and Cyber Security, and has recently started a new family business, Covenant-Defense.

1. Lee Greenwood, “God Bless the USA,” 1984.
2. Rushdoony, “Exodus: Unity of Law and Grace, The Loneliness of Moses,” audio lecture RR171H15.
3. Rushdoony, “Numbers: Faith, Law, and History, The Cowardice of the People,” audio lecture RR181N25.
4. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book II Chap. 3, [www.constitution.org/jjr/socon\\_02.htm](http://www.constitution.org/jjr/socon_02.htm)



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# Would Someone Please Discriminate!

by Andrea Schwartz



**W**e live in a world where there are words one is not allowed to say, and preferences one is not allowed to have. How remarkable

that we have become so obsessed with offending no one that we manage to offend everyone at some point. What's more, as our society has focused on avoiding hurting anyone's feelings, we offend God at almost every twist and turn.

One should not expect much from a world that has elevated man to the position only God Almighty rightly holds. It is in the church that this phenomenon is most disturbing. While it is true that we all begin our lives as sinners, it is not true that all people are the same. There is a difference. There are two kinds of sinners: those trying to honor God and obey His law, and those who are in open rebellion against Him. When preachers repeat the misleading statement that we are all sinners and none is better than the next, it groups all people (whether redeemed or not) into the same category. However, this is simply not true!

The redeemed in Christ are a new creation; old things are passed away and all things have become new (2 Cor. 5:17). This means that the person who made a practice of stealing steals no longer. It means that the person who regularly used other people as sexual objects no longer thinks, speaks, or behaves in that manner. It means that those focused on their own selfish desires, now defer to serving others (in family and community) as their living sacrifice unto their Savior and Redeemer. Those who are striving for holiness by means

**One should not expect much from a world that has elevated man to the position only God Almighty rightly holds. It is in the church that this phenomenon is most disturbing.**

of God's Word are the people we should prefer (Gal. 6:10); these are the faithful people we should discriminate in favor of.

R.J. Rushdoony notes,

To accept every act as holy is to deny emphatically the principle of discrimination in terms of good and evil. *Faithfulness* is adherence to an absolute law, and to persons and causes in terms of that absolute law and the sovereign God of that law. As against faithfulness, *the way* or walk is made a systematic unfaithfulness as man's life, joy, and pleasure ...

Because there is no principle of discrimination between good and evil, man and animals, *persons* do not count.<sup>1</sup>

Exercising discrimination and judging righteous judgments are the marks of one who is covenantally faithful to God. The evidence of being born again should be an obvious transformation in the lives of those who were dead in their sin and made alive in Christ. Yet modern Christianity makes allowances for all sorts of besetting sins and condemns those who judge them according to

the law-word of God. In short, what is promoted as love and care is actually an intolerance to God Himself.

We cannot use our feelings and experience as a test or standard. We readily develop a tolerance for many things. Our tolerance for pornography, national corruption, profanity, and sin in general has greatly increased in the past generation. Things once held to be intolerable are now hardly noticed. What was once shocking on television, for example, is now tame fare, and what once destroyed a politician's career is today no problem.

In brief, our level of tolerance is a false standard. This is why Isaiah declares, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20). We cannot use our thoughts and feelings as a standard: only God's Word is the test. We ourselves readily develop a tolerance towards sin and evil: God's Word remains the unceasingly clear and uncompromising Word.

The result of becoming tolerant towards sin is that we become intolerant towards God and His Word.<sup>2</sup>

## Waking Up from Our Daydreams

The world of statist planners determines for us what our likes and dislikes should be, all in the name of liberty and freedom. However, lest we forget, true liberty is the freedom to obey God. Moreover, God is the ultimate discriminator. He discriminates between the faithful and the unfaithful, the godly and the ungodly, the repentant and the defiant. Are we to be holier than God when it comes to making selections of friends, education, employment, words we choose to vocalize, or thoughts we

have? Christians have bought into the idea that if we show preferences (discriminate) to those who abide by God's law, openly and deliberately, we have somehow proven ourselves unworthy. Quite the contrary. Rather than living in the dream world of humanism, we are called to live and work in the real world of God's enscriptured Word. The acquiescence to humanistic political correctness and hindered speech merely places us on the road to hell. As Rushdoony notes,

There is neither dreaming nor day-dreaming in heaven, but only in hell. To dream or to daydream is to imagine what might be, or what might have been, and the redeemed of the Lord live in an eternal day which surpasses all imagination.

It is, however, the essence of the fool and the sinner to prefer dreams and illusions to reality.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, every false restriction on speech or attitudes because they might offend social planners is to agree with a supposed reality that is impossible to attain.

Those who live in terms of their daydreams soon despise reality and its opportunities. Possibilities lie not in the dream world, but in reality, in the world around us ... Our thinking about what might be or what might have been is needless, and also wrong. It is our obedience to the Lord that best reckons with tomorrow's problems.<sup>4</sup>

### The Issue Is One of Faithfulness

Life, as Jesus noted, has enough troubles on a daily basis (Matt. 6:34), and no humanistic program, legislation, or mandate that ignores God's law will ever right those troubles or wrongs. We must come to grip with the reality that most of life is mundane and routine without much excitement. When we strive for a utopia apart from God, we

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sin in failing to meet each day's challenges undergirded by the law-word of God.

The main concern of the Christian is the responsibility of faithfulness in everyday living, duties, and problems. Those who want excitement in their marriage, their church life, or their daily living are saying that they do not want responsibility, nor do they want maturity.

Paul, speaking against the hunger for continual "higher experiences," said, "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things." Now, Paul said, I meet life's responsibilities as a mature man in Christ, with faith, hope, and love (1 Cor. 13:11–13). This is God's requirement for all of us. Just as the valleys of California are more productive than our mountaintops, so too are the daily duties of the Christian walk more productive than the mountaintop experiences.<sup>5</sup>

As we embrace the callings and situations God has placed us in, the greatest of which is the commission to disciple

the nations, our concern should not be governed by a fear of accusations of racism, sexism, ageism, genderism, sizeism, or the multitudes of "isms" waiting to be claimed. Rather, we should be about our Father's business and making every effort to judge, by judging righteous judgments. And, if we are wondering how we will become equipped to make such judgments, the answer lies in learning and applying God's law to every area of our lives and our thoughts! 

Andrea Schwartz is Chalcedon's family and Christian education advocate. She educated her three children through high school, and has written books on homeschooling, the family, and developing effective women for the Kingdom of God. She is the author of two children's books for families to read together: *Teach Me While My Heart is Tender: Real-Along Stories of Repentance and Forgiveness* and *Family Matters: Read-Along Stories of Responsibility and Self-Discipline*. Visit her website at [KingdomDrivenFamily.com](http://KingdomDrivenFamily.com) to find out more about the Chalcedon Teacher Training Institute, a mentoring/study program designed for women to help them in their Kingdom service. She resides in San Jose, CA with her husband of over 40 years. She can be contacted at [Andrea@chalcedon.edu](mailto:Andrea@chalcedon.edu).

1. R.J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1973), p. 446.

2. R. J. Rushdoony, "Tolerance," *A Word in Season*, vol. 1 (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2012), pp. 31–32.

3. R. J. Rushdoony, "Daydreams," *A Word in Season*, vol. 4 (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2012), pp. 62–63.

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# Film Review: *Dunkirk*

Reviewed by Suzannah Rowntree



Christopher Nolan is surely one of the (if not the) most brilliant and meticulous filmmakers of his generation. His films are crafted with a total, cerebral intentionality. Many of them are structured like puzzles (*Inception*, *Memento*) or magic tricks (*The Prestige*). All of them come with serious philosophical heft, and ask questions that follow the viewers out of the theater for days or weeks afterwards.

And yet Nolan is the opposite of a snob: he makes his films accessible to the ordinary person, and he does this by ensuring that all of his stories are emotionally compelling, visually stunning (he is famous for his practical effects), unabashedly suspenseful with driving plots. Not only that, he does it without recourse to nudity, sensuality, or gore. For a critically-beloved auteur, his films are surprisingly clean.

His latest film, *Dunkirk*, is as good as anything he's done, if not better. Nolan's most visible flaw was a tendency to drive home his theme in overbearing dialogue or even voiceover; in *Dunkirk*, he practically eliminates dialogue altogether. Out of what's left, he gives all the best lines to Kenneth Branagh, who handles them with Shakespearean aplomb.

## Which Story to Tell?

*Dunkirk* tells the story—or more accurately, part of the story—of Operation Dynamo, the high-miraculous evacuation of 300,000 members of the British Expeditionary Forces, and some of the French First Army, from

the beaches of France as Hitler overran Europe in 1940. At this moment, the only thing standing between the Nazis and Britain was an army trapped on the wrong side of the English Channel. Churchill hoped to save 30,000 of the 400,000 men on the beach, but a hastily-assembled fleet of over 800 small craft including fishing boats, pleasure craft, yachts, and lifeboats, many of them manned by civilians, managed to bring back ten times that number.

In the words of G. K. Chesterton, “Art, like morality, consists in drawing the line somewhere.” No storyteller can tell every side to a story, even if given a fairly self-contained story to tell. In *Dunkirk*, Nolan draws lines to ruthless effect, creating a laser focus on his three subjects: a Spitfire pilot during a one-hour flight (Tom Hardy), a civilian yachtsman during a one-day voyage (Mark Rylance), and a hapless private during the one-week wait on the beach (Fionn Whitehead). The intense focus on these three stories results in an incredibly lean, efficient script from which all extraneous dialogue and characters have been pared down. For the viewer, it creates unrelenting suspense and pacing that grips in the first scene and never lets go. Allied with superb practical effects, the experience (even if not viewed in IMAX) is totally immersive.

To achieve this stylistic effect, Nolan sacrifices much historical background. Perhaps the most significant thing omitted from the film is the National Day of Prayer back home in England, in which thousands gathered to intercede for the men in France. Their prayers were

answered when a storm the night before the evacuation forced the Luftwaffe to the ground; the following morning saw an unprecedented calm which enabled the small crafts of the evacuation flotilla to cross in safety.

They called it “the miracle of Dunkirk” at the time, but Nolan’s film makes little reference to divine transcendence. His characters shout F-words in one moment of extreme danger and stress, but not the prayers that would have been equally realistic and historically authentic. What there is comes more from his own fingerprints: as a creator himself, he cannot help betraying his own existence and pointing to the existence of his own Creator.

Like all Nolan’s films, *Dunkirk* is structured tightly and with complete intentionality. The three storylines begin hours and even days apart and do not intersect until the very end, but when they do, the audience experiences that sense of surprise and joy which J.R.R. Tolkien called “eucatastrophe,” the sudden happy turn. Throughout the film we see characters interact, often out of chronological order, in a way that seems entirely predestined. For a Christian viewer, the obvious in-story explanation is providence.

In addition, Nolan chooses to cut out much more than simply the National Day of Prayer. The only scenes actually set on English soil (there is a brief scene on a quay) come at the end, after the rescue. The German army, only ever referred to as “the enemy,” appear onscreen in just one shot, purposefully out of focus. Churchill is only a name.



The United States gets only a passing mention. Exactly one character is given any kind of backstory. Michael Caine just manages to snag a voice-only cameo. Not even Tom Hardy's face rates more than a couple of brief appearances, but fortunately Hardy has experience acting in masks.

What's left once these lines are drawn—once all extraneous characters, events, and dialogue are excluded? The answer is simple: action. Specifically, the actions of those personally involved in the Dunkirk evacuation.

## The Defining Power of Human Action

Multiple reviewers have noted what they consider a lack of characterization in *Dunkirk*. As an author of fiction myself, I beg to differ. Perhaps what they notice is a lack of dialogue and backstory. But neither of these things is the meat of character.

On the contrary, to quote Syd Field's *Screenplay*, "Action is character. What a person does is what he is, not what he says." I believe that this is a Biblical principle. The apostle James tells us that there is something wrong with people who never take action on their faith. They're like people who look in a mirror and immediately forget what they look like (James 1:22–25). Without action, their faith is dead (James 2:17). A covenantal, ethical/judicial Christian worldview puts action at the center of the Christian life: we are created in Christ Jesus unto *good works* (Eph. 2:10).

When evaluating fiction, we're often tempted to put a division between character and action, to the extent that we'll describe some stories as plot-driven and others as character-driven. I'm convinced that a Christian theory of storytelling has no room for this unnatural division. In real life, our good works are the air that our faith breathes: our char-

acter is expressed in action. In fiction, characters serve the plot by being the agents through which the plot is acted out. And plot serves the characters by providing them with the opportunity to show who they truly are through action.

*Dunkirk* forces this question to the forefront by focusing almost entirely upon action at the expense of dialogue. There is very little talk in this film, although Nolan is ready to wield dialogue when necessary. The characters, especially the three protagonists, are defined almost entirely by their actions, and the characterization is clear and elegant. Privates Tommy and Gibson, for instance, have a crystal-clear motivation: survival. Their goal is to get home in one piece. Within the first few minutes of the film we've even learned something about their ethics and personal faults: they're not above imposture and queue jumping. All the building blocks of characterization are fully present, together with a moving character arc as they begin to look beyond their own personal survival.

All this is communicated primarily via action, and that's unsurprising. *Christopher Nolan seems to have a philosophy of action*. I first noticed this in *Batman Begins*, where action is the subject of a repeated line: "It's not who we are on the inside, it's what we do that defines us." Most likely, this line stems from an existentialist worldview. In existentialism, the universe is fundamentally absurd and meaningless, and meaning can only be imposed upon the universe by human action. Action thus becomes a means of salvation from absurdity, a way for man to transcend his inability to truly comprehend the world around him.

No doubt a similar philosophy underpins the artistic choices in *Dunkirk*, and yet the world of the story is far from meaningless. Perhaps Nolan believes that that it is his privilege as an artist

and creator to impose meaning upon a fundamentally meaningless historical event (and he certainly gives *Dunkirk* a sense of futility) through the medium of his very intentional film. Or, more likely, he believes that it was the actions of the civilian sailors, the RAF pilots, and the soldiers on the beach that brought meaning to what, even at the time, Churchill called a "disaster."

A Christian philosophy of action is not plagued by doubt about meaning and identity the way existentialism is. Instead, Christianity asks man to extend the Kingdom of God by faithful action. The two are not the same, but sometimes it takes a clever pagan to point out what God's people have come close to forgetting.

## Motivations in Collision

If action is the vehicle for characterization in this film, then its subject has to do with survival, heroism, and whether the two ever intersect. Since Jesus Christ, heroism has become synonymous with self-sacrifice for the love of others. Survival, on the other hand, puts self above others. And *Dunkirk* explores the moments when survival and heroism come into conflict.

Early in the film, we learn that Britain herself is in a struggle for survival, holding back the Spitfires and destroyers that might save lives at Dunkirk, keeping them in reserve for "the next battle—the one for Britain." As the Germans close in, Commander Bolton (Kenneth Branagh) faces a dilemma: whether to evacuate stretcher cases first, or healthy men who take up less room and will be able to defend Britain when the invasion comes. And the enlisted men, demoralized by fear and helplessness, seem more than willing to abandon or even attack anyone who might slow them down. At the end, afforded a hero's welcome in England, conscious that they have lost the battle and been

forced to retreat in disarray, one of them confesses, “All we did was survive.”

“That’s enough,” is the response. The army’s survival will, after all, be vital to the war effort in the coming days. But while the film shows a palpable sense of triumph and relief at the evacuation, it stops short of depicting the soldiers themselves as heroes, even those who have made small steps toward genuine self-sacrifice. Their survival was key. Their loss would have been devastating, not just in terms of the war but also to their loved ones. Their endurance of hardship was ennobling. Their rescue is worth celebrating. But Nolan never tries to paint them as heroes, even as he has his more heroic characters extend grace and forgiveness to them for the terrible things some of them do.

The heroism in this film is elsewhere.

Partly, it is in the sky. Nolan’s devotion to practical effects comes into its own here: his dogfights, filmed with an IMAX camera mounted on the wing of a real Spitfire, are endlessly thrilling to watch, and pilots Farrier and Collins are two of the film’s most unambiguously heroic figures, whose self-sacrifice becomes one of the most stirring and moving of the film’s subplots.

But mostly, the heroism in this picture is on the sea, as it should be: with the various civilian men and women who rose to the challenge of Dunkirk. Nolan chooses to elide the role of the Navy in requisitioning and sailing many of the small vessels that made the crossing, in favor of keeping the focus where he wants it: on the civilians.

It’s an unusual but refreshing choice for a war film. *Dunkirk* is largely devoid of statist or nationalist idolatry. The most stirring moments of glory in this film belong to the civilians, and it’s worth noting that even the military heroes in this story put personal con-

science above orders.

*Dunkirk* is not about glorifying war or nationalism. It defines heroism as conscientious, self-sacrificial, and primarily individual action. By contrast, bare survival is *reaction*: irrational, fearful, and often futile and destructive. It is understandable. Perhaps, where action is impossible, reaction is unavoidable. But it is not heroic.

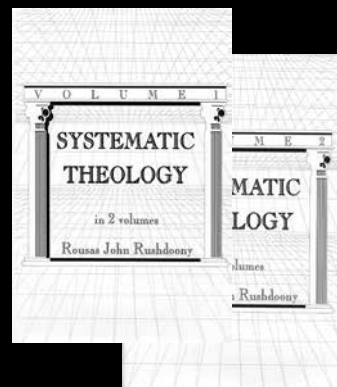
## Beyond Technical Mastery of Form

*Dunkirk* is surely one of Christopher Nolan’s best films, perhaps flawless. It is epic in scope despite (but more likely because of) its precise focus. It contains all the hallmarks of Christopher Nolan at his best: chronological puzzles, clever twists, visceral suspense, and even some subtle symbolism. In addition to these, there are some surprises in store, whether of sheer cinematic spectacle or cinematic technique: at least two moments have us cutting between parallel moments in the different storylines so seamlessly that for a moment we don’t realize the scene has even changed. These and many other things make the film a delight to watch.

But *Dunkirk* is not merely a technical tour de force, though it certainly is that. Any good story, well told, must by necessity reflect the greatest story, the gospel from which all other stories are derived. In *Dunkirk*, Christopher Nolan has made a film so good that it very nearly transcends his own worldview. 🙌

When Suzannah Rowntree isn’t travelling the world to help out friends in need, she lives in a big house in rural Australia with her parents and siblings, writing and publishing historical fantasy fiction informed by a covenantal Christian perspective on history. Visit her online at [suzannahrowntree.site](http://suzannahrowntree.site).

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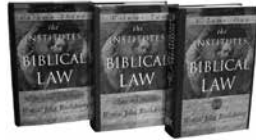
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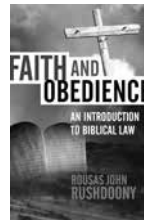
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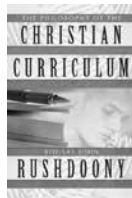
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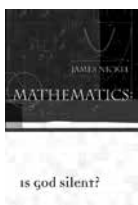


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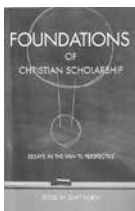
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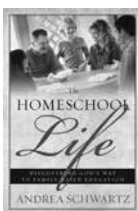
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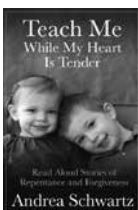
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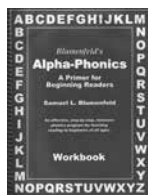
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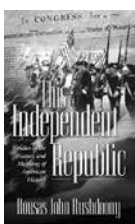
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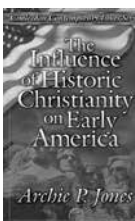
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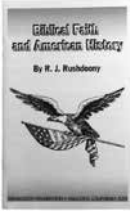
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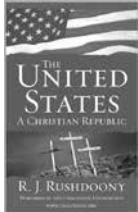
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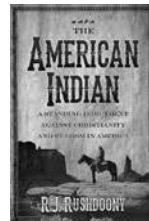


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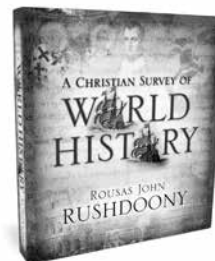


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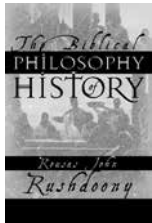
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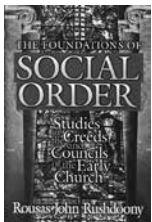
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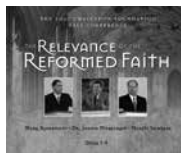
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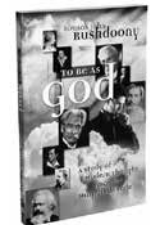
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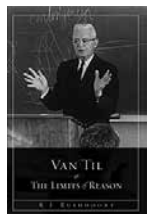
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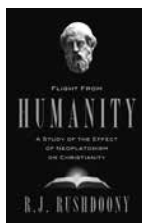
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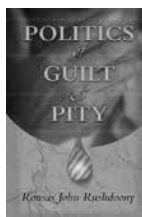
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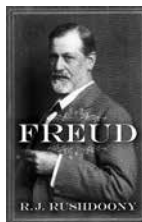


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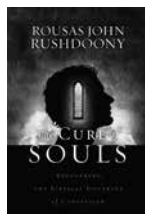


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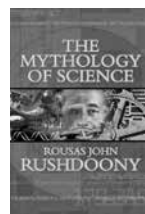
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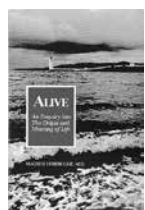
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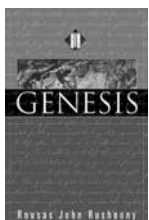
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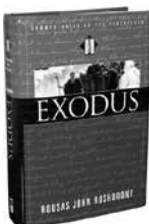
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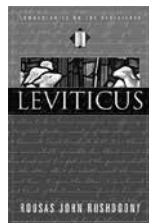
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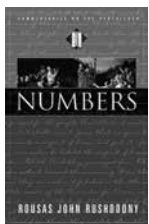
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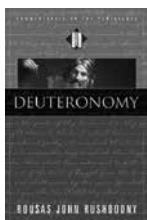
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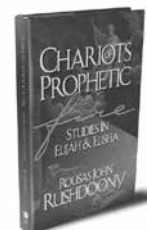
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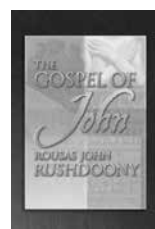
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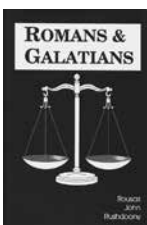


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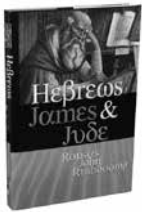


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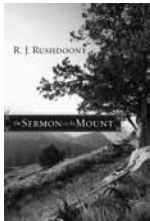




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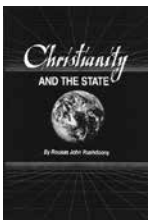
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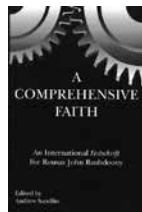


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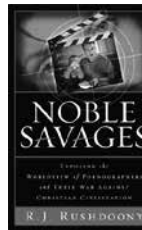
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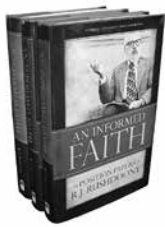
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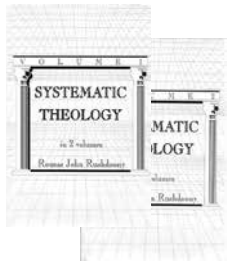
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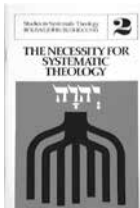
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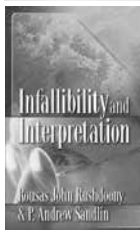
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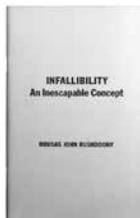
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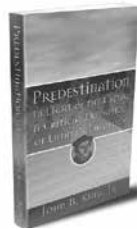
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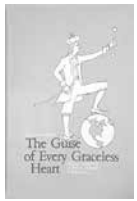
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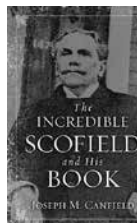
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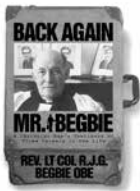


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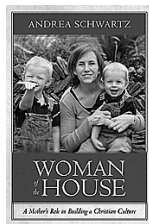


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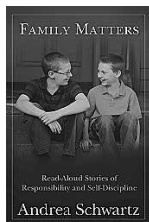
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