

# Chalcedon Report

MINISTRY NEWS FROM THE CHALCEDON FOUNDATION® JUNE 2021

## What's Next for Christian Reconstruction?

Chalcedon Editorial

(featuring transcriptions from a recent episode of the Chalcedon Podcast)

“We thought it would be good to talk about where we think we are and where we hope to go.”

That's how Chalcedon's Andrea Schwartz opened a recent Chalcedon Podcast episode as she sat down with Chalcedon president, Mark Rushdoony, and Chalcedon vice-president, Martin Selbrede, to discuss the future of Christian Reconstruction—an important topic in light of the times in which we live.

For longtime readers of R. J. Rushdoony, nothing we're witnessing today should come as any surprise, but rather it is to be expected in light of the failure of the modern church to embrace and apply Biblical law to life and society.

For many years, Christian Reconstruction was on the rise, and its influence was felt throughout many denominations, although it was often mishandled, misapplied, and unacknowledged. Even those who once boldly professed the name “Christian Reconstructionist” have sought to erase it as if it were a blemish.

Yet, we've watched the Religious Right become a faint voice—thereby losing the political and cultural wars—and still there has been neither rapture nor revival to save the day. What's developing is what Rushdoony always predicted although our social and political challenges are still not enough to bring men to repentance. The average Christian still believes in salvation by politics while the church is at its weakest politically.

### Christian Theocracy

The answer to our social ills is God's government, but that is one of the most misconstrued aspects of Christian Reconstruction. Secular conspiracy theorists have watched groups dedicated to exposing the hidden threat of “Christian theocracy,” and no doubt, Chalcedon and Christian Reconstruction are the religious equivalent of a “hidden hand” behind all Christian political activity. The alleged plan is to seize the reins of political power in order to impose Biblical law on an unwilling population through a select group of Taliban-like religious leaders. Rushdoony debunked that theory repeatedly as he does here in his book *Sovereignty*:

It is a serious error to see theocracy, the rule of God, as a government over men by a group of men in the name of God. The Biblical doctrine of theocracy means the self-government of the Christian man.<sup>1</sup>

So, if theocracy means the self-government of the Christian man, then Christian Reconstruction is the means to that end because it provides the theology, philosophy, and worldview for creating Biblical self-government, i.e., self-government in terms of God's law.

This is precisely why the promotion of Christian Reconstruction is slow-going and remains a hard sell. Self-government requires great responsibility,

but since it is God's way of advancing His Kingdom, we must continue to vigorously proclaim it.

### The Book Of Reconstruction

When Chalcedon vice-president, Martin Selbrede, was asked on the recent podcast episode about where he thinks we are, he noted the importance of embracing the long-term mission when he said, “Where we're at is it's been a long seed planting program from the beginning. And I think it's always been consistent with the premise laid down in the book of Nehemiah. In fact, when we look at some of the early sermon series that were preached at Chalcedon Chapel, like by Dr. Douglas Kelly, he focused on the entire book of Nehemiah, what he called the ‘book of reconstruction.’ And what's distinctive about that book is that we have a recovery of the whole counsel of God, and that takes some effort to sink it into the hearts and minds of the people. They have to be attentive and discerning, and then it falls to the leaders to then actually plant that seed, not just little bits of seed that are going to increase the coffers or make the people happy, but rather what the people need.”

In Nehemiah 8:8 it reads, “So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.” Martin noted, “And that's really everything that Dr. Rushdoony was about, to read from

the book of the law distinctly, so you understand it, and then to give the sense. Which means also to say, 'How does this apply to us today?'"

Martin continued, "And so we have an expansion of the domain of the Word of God being propagated with this one idea. This one idea about the big picture, the big idea of Rushdoony's, I think falls under the rule that John F. Kennedy laid out in one of the few sentences he said that I actually agree with when he says, 'Ideas have endurance without death.' Well, this particular idea, because it's anchored to the Word of God, is not going to die. In fact, it's going to prosper."

### **The Broad Scope Of The Kingdom**

We sometimes have to remind ourselves of the broad scope of the Kingdom of God, which means that although there might be resistance in the United States, God is opening minds and hearts in other countries. Martin notes the importance of seeing this broader picture by saying, "And so we see the seed still being planted, but it's a long-term harvest. Certain parts of the harvest will come up before other parts of the harvest. One of the things we're interested in is extending the scope of the harvest. We're not just focused provincially on the United States ... I think we're going to see an expansion of the translation of the Word of God. Firstly, the Bible has to proceed but then the application of it is laid out by scholars like Dr. Rushdoony and those who are similarly committed to the whole counsel of God being needful for man."

It's also clear that we can misconstrue where, how, and why Christian Reconstruction may take root, which is why Chalcedon must be flexible when it comes to equipping these foreign needs. Martin said, "But when the pure Word of God is coming through, you have living waters flowing into this area, that area, this discipline, to this subject, this business, this concern, this economic system, that's where you have to go... Because how we apply Christian Reconstruction might vary nation to



In Episode 13 of the Chalcedon Podcast we discuss what's next for Christian Reconstruction.

nation. Another nation might have a more serious problem in economics and another one might have something in the medical area and that might be where the reconstruction over there launches."

Making our content accessible to the world is nothing new. As Andrea Schwartz noted in this podcast discussion, "Years ago at Chalcedon we made the decision—it was a top-down decision so Mark gets a lot of credit for it—to make our material accessible online to anyone, any place. And so that means you can access the books, you can access past issues of the magazine, you can listen to lectures ... Mark, speak a little bit about why that was an important factor, that you didn't want to make it that people had to pay to access this material."

### **The Breadth Of The Word Of God**

Mark Rushdoony responded, "Well, primarily we're a ministry. We have bills to pay obviously, but our primary goal was to get a message out and to communicate with as many people as possible. And when computer technology came along, we were a little slow in getting on the bandwagon because frankly, we were dependent upon others to help us with that learning curve and provide the expertise. But when others began digitizing material and such, we wanted to make it available to people so that they could learn, they could read, they could study. And particularly it was becoming difficult

to communicate with people by mail in foreign countries. We used to have a very large foreign mailing list, but it was notoriously inaccurate. Mail to many countries could take months to get there and sometimes it would be months and they would send back a stack of material to address returned, address unknown, or something to that effect. And so the ability to communicate online meant that the material was available worldwide to anyone who could speak English. And so we decided to do that. We're also trying to get as much material in other languages as is feasible."

There have already been numerous books by Rushdoony translated into other languages such as Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Italian, and Chinese, and the permission requests just keep coming. Martin asks, "Why do they come to us? Why do they call Mark up? Because there's something intrinsic to the material that Dr. Rushdoony produced that is needful for our times. And what is that exact component? It's breadth."

### **The Work Which Is Closest To Us**

The same effect is still true here in the states. The power of the idea of Christian Reconstruction can still inspire Christians to apply their faith. As Andrea noted, "One of the things that I saw happen—it certainly happened with my family—the more we understood, the more we took the things that we thought we were good at and started applying the Word of God in our area ... when

I ran out of children to homeschool, it was like, ‘What am I going to do now?’ I decided that I was going to mentor homeschooling mothers!”

She continues, “We’re hoping and counting on the fact that the Holy Spirit triggers things with people, and now really how we can be instrumental at Chalcedon is when they run into roadblocks and they think, ‘Oh, it’s not worth it,’ you say, ‘No, no, no, no. Dr. Rushdoony used to travel up and down California on Sundays and preach to various groups. It did have lasting value, but it’s not always going to be the most exciting thing you ever did.”

Mark responded, “That’s important because if we get back to the whole term *Christian Reconstruction*, people envision that differently. Our critics will say it’s this top-down thing; we want to take over the country, if not the world, and we want to impose something by force and start killing people. I always describe Christian Reconstruction as an analogy of the believer’s responsibility as a citizen of the Kingdom of God, and therefore, we have to be careful about constructing this idea, or trying to create an image of what Christian Reconstruction will look like at some distant point in the future, and then trying to force that image that we create in the present. It’s incremental. It’s step by step, and we begin where we have areas of responsibility, or influence, and we push forward. The work of Christian Reconstruction to us is our work, which is always that which is closest to us. It’s the responsibilities that are closest to us. The areas of faithfulness that are available to us.”

### **Modest Things Are Where God Is**

One of the reasons for the lack of emphasis upon managing our closest responsibilities is that we tend to focus on either big picture issues, or obscure, detailed issues which allow us to speculate. Mark said, “Christian Reconstructionists can fall into that trap of trying to solve problems that are nowhere within our reach, or our influence, and we want to talk about them, and it becomes a theoretical thing where in fact, the whole idea of Christian

Reconstruction is that it has to be practical, and it can only be practical if we begin close to home. And that’s going to look different for different people.”

Mark continued, “For instance, I think one of the obvious examples of Christian Reconstruction in our lifetime so far has been Christian education, but it has changed. What did Christian education begin by doing? It modeled the public school model, and that was not a cost effective way. It was difficult to maintain. And so it morphed into homeschooling, and it’s probably got some different developments yet ahead.”

The key is to think of areas in need of reconstruction, or a Biblical application, that are easier to address with our present resources. Again, finding practical areas close to home are a great way to get started. We saw this done with Christian sharing ministries. Mark said, “It was very doable when you think about it, but it’s basically taking the idea of the diaconate and expanding it beyond and getting Christians across large and diverse areas to help one another in times of need. I think that was a brilliant idea, but it took someone to take that idea and feel a burden for it and to apply it. And that’s what we need.”

The point is that we can be easily neutralized by imagining things that are beyond our present capacity, and so without support or resources, we do nothing but continue to talk about how these things need to be done. Or, as Mark noted, “We don’t need to try to envision what a reconstructed America would look like in a hundred years and try to move towards that, if we’re neglecting the hard work that’s right in front of us. And when people try to envision what things are going to look like in the distant future, or even the near future, they often make some very serious errors. They often miss by a country mile. And therefore, let’s not forget what is the work that’s closest to us and emphasize that.”

This is how we get Christian Reconstruction out of neutral and moving forward in a way that encourages others to do the same. It needn’t be

## **Repurposing Our Efforts**

**Andrea Schwartz**

**B**ack in 2008, I began to put together a study guide for Rushdoony’s book, *Law & Liberty*. Some people refer to that title as *Institutes of Biblical Law Lite*—less calories, but satisfying, nonetheless. In 2010, Chalcedon Vice-President Martin Selbrede and I began to go through the *Law & Liberty* book during a regular podcast, discussing the implications of Rushdoony’s main points and their relevancy for our time. We only recorded thirteen episodes, as other projects moved to the forefront at Chalcedon. I didn’t give up and resumed the *Law & Liberty* Tour in 2013-14, hoping to give this idea more traction.

Now in 2021, I am happy to report that a number of people are using the *Law & Liberty Course* (on the Chalcedon Teacher Training website), presenting the foundational principles to dominion and Christian Reconstruction. They are usually conducted by “graduates” of my other courses, and involve discipling their own children, or people from their church and community.

Had I second-guessed myself back then, concerning myself with immediate results, I might not have finished the task before I knew how God would use it. Now, over a decade later, God is reaping the harvest He planned for this project all along.

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glamorous. It only needs to be effective. As with Christian education, the power is found in the fact that individual Christian families are homeschooling or sending their children to private Christian schools. As Andrea noted, we must get beyond theory into practical action, “Well, I think it’s probably time for people to embrace the fact that they understand a lot of the theory of Christian Reconstruction, but then they should go out and find a very close at hand way to apply it. And by that I mean, if you look in your own church, you look in your own neighborhood, you look in maybe your own extended family, you’re going to see needs. You’re going to see things that are falling down because God’s law isn’t known or applied. And so what I do, for example, when I meet people and if there’s a group, and I can meet with it, I’ll meet with this group. It’s a neighborhood group, it’s a church group, even if it’s not the church I’m attending, and I can see the need and I usually try to volunteer for the thing nobody wants to do.”

Martin added, “Modest things are where God is. God’s there because He’s going to blow on it and cause it to expand into big things. The small moves to the big. God, it’s simply the way He likes to work.”

### Bread Upon The Waters

All the while, the work of Chalcedon remains focused on Christian education which means equipping the self-governing Christian to apply his or her faith, but this is also your mission as well. Christian Reconstruction grew because people like you opened their lives to others to share the needed resources that answer our most pressing problems.

Martin said, “If people are coming to you for answers, and you have the answer, you be generous with it, and you plant that seed further so that it can be spread. Here’s a reason why: when he (Rush) did the anthology of his *California Farmer* articles—they now appear as *A Word In Season*, a seven volume set. But the original anthology was smaller, and it was called *Bread Upon The Waters*. And that was a famous verse

**“What’s next for Christian Reconstruction is what you do. We’re not looking for another movement. We’re looking to spread the message. We’re looking to apply it individually. We’re looking to other areas that are closest to us, and we are hoping that God blesses the bread we’ve thrown upon the waters.”**

Rush related to how you grow rice, that you spread the rice seed on the waters, and you don’t know if it’s going to flow away, and you never have anything, and you starve, or you get a harvest of rice out of it. But that’s the way we have to see it; that we’re throwing bread upon the waters and perhaps in many days we’ll reap, but it doesn’t matter. You still have to throw the bread.”

In other words, what’s next for Christian Reconstruction is what you do. We’re not looking for another movement. We’re looking to spread the message. We’re looking to apply it individually. We’re looking to other areas that are closest to us, and we are hoping that God blesses the bread we’ve thrown upon the waters.

We are living in difficult times, but we believe this is also opening up more Christians to an alternative solution to politics, revival, or looking for a rapture. For example, the entire world discovered homeschooling this past year, and no doubt this is renewing the minds of Christian families to be more faithful to God with the educating of their children.

The closing of churches and the arrest of pastors over having services during the lockdowns are also acting as a line in the sand for Christians and pastors who saw no antagonism from the state. Little by little, the pressures from the outside are forcing Christians to rethink their approach to faith and life.

This is why the ministry of Chalcedon is an important one, or as Martin concluded, “We are throwing bread upon the waters just as R. J. Rushdoony did, and that’s why we were available for those who say, ‘Is there some bread that you can hand me in this area?’ And we try to be as generous as we humanly can. If you’re calling me at 3:00 AM, I might ask for a respite till the morning, but we try to be as available as possible!”

Listen, or watch, this entire podcast episode at <https://bit.ly/3uRt0gO>

1. R. J. Rushdoony, *Sovereignty*, (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2007), p. 31.

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