

BAPTIZED PATRIARCHALISM

The Cult of the Family

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Other Books by Gary North

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Because of the importance I place on the question of the covenantal relationship between the family and the local church, I hereby place the entire contents of *Baptized Patriarchalism* into the public domain. Anyone may reproduce all or any part of this book without permission from the author or the original publisher.

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PREFACE

I wish this little book had not become necessary. If the integrity of the church of Jesus Christ were not at stake, I would not have written it. Writing it took a week out of my life that I cannot get back. But I had to write it. The stakes are too high.

The church is under assault from within the camp. So is the family. Yet this assault is being waged in the name of the both the church and the family. This is why you, as the reader, have a responsibility to understand what the theological issues are. You must decide which view is correct. Then you must act.

Some readers will think to themselves something like the following: "This conflict is unnecessary. Shouldn't we be building bridges? Why make needless trouble? Let us have peace. These issues are really minor." These are not minor issues, and peace cannot be secured by ignoring them. As Rushdoony wrote in 1968 regarding the early church councils, "*The Councils came together for the purpose of conflict, the battle of truth against error. . . . The foundation of Constantinople's ecumenism was not smoothing out differences and building bridges to the opposition but, on the basis of uncompromising faith, to drive out the enemy and allow him no entrance save conversion. The enemies were plainly termed 'wolves'; they had to become lambs before they could be approached peaceably.*"¹ Amen.

1. R. J. Rushdoony, *Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, [1968] 1978), pp. 19, 21.

There is another possible mental response: "I don't care what you say. I don't care what Bible verses you cite. I don't care what evidence you offer. I have made up my mind. I will not listen to you. I don't have to listen to you. You can't make me listen to you Go away." This is the mentality of someone who has joined a cult. If your reaction as you read my book is anything like this, I warn you: *you have already been snared*. You must escape from the snare while there is still time.

Your snare was set in 1956. In that year, a woman divorced her husband, a pastor. I do not believe she had biblically lawful grounds to do so. Half of their children – the older ones – voluntarily accompanied her when she departed. His pastorate was undermined. He left the pastorate in 1962 to become a full-time writer. He has long refused to mention his divorce in public and rarely in private. Instead, he has invented a new ecclesiology. You may have accepted his ecclesiology. Don't.

In 1990, another woman sued her husband for divorce. She, too, took their children and departed. (One went back to his father.) She placed herself under the authority of the man who had been the victim of a similar attack in 1956. In 1991, he created a local church and welcomed her into it. This forced him to modify his ecclesiology once again. Although she had never attended college and had never written anything for publication, he made her the managing editor of his monthly theological magazine, beginning in the month after her divorce became final. ***One year later, in 1994, she quit his church and left town.*** This was his risk when he restructured his theology (again), thereby sanctioning her divorce. He put his trust in the wrong person. And you may have put your trust in him.

Divorce is a fearful thing. So is creating a new ecclesiology and a home church to justify this new ecclesiology.

Follow the footnotes. Examine the original sources. See if I am quoting out of context. Make up your own mind. But be sure that you do make up your mind. Do not try to defer a decision. The stakes are too high.

INTRODUCTION

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household (Matt. 10:34-36).

Jesus Christ attacked the non-Christian family in far harsher language than He ever attacked the State. He recognized that a man's commitment to his own family is very powerful, both emotionally and legally. A man usually looks to his earthly future in terms of his children. When pagan man looks beyond the grave, he sees his heirs, not final judgment. This was especially true in the classical world, where one's condition after death was thought to be determined by the continuing cultic rites of the family.¹ Jesus understood that patriarchalism was an anti-Christian force to be reckoned with in the ancient world, especially the Roman world, where the father had the power of life and death over the children of his household. He launched a frontal assault against every social ideal of the family which would place loyalty to the family above loyalty to Him. Jesus did not identify the family as the central institution in

1. Fustel de Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, [1864] 1955), Book I.

society. Instead, He identified it as the central institutional threat to the kingdom of God. Loyalty to the family rather than to Him, He said, is *the* great temptation. We must resist it.

Sometime in the early 1960's, R. J. Rushdoony wrote the following critique of the Roman family. It was published in 1971, but he had written it years earlier when he was a full-time employee of the William Volker Fund in California.

In early Greek and Roman cultures, paternal power was religious power, a power continuous with all being and essentially divine, requiring duties of the father and conferring him with authority. The father, as Fustel de Coulanges has shown, in *The Ancient City*, was under law; but, it must be added, he was not only under law but a part of that law and continuous with it in the chain of being. He was thus to a degree the law incarnate, in that he possessed a measure of the ultimate law in his person. This manifestation of law moved steadily from the father to the state, so that the state, originally the creature of the family and of the fathers, made itself the father, and the source of law, with the family turned into its creature.²

The Roman state steadily absorbed the Roman family under the Empire. This is the perpetual threat to all patriarchalism. The patriarchal system begins with almost total loyalty to the father, but eventually this loyalty is transferred to the state because the state takes over the family's welfare functions and its sacramental office. Bread and circuses are provided by the state. Copulating priestesses replace the father's lustral rites.

Any attempt to strengthen the family without also strengthening the institutional church is self-defeating for Christians. The autonomous family is not an alternative to the state; rather, it becomes the state's most important agent. The father represents the state to his children. The willingness of fathers to send

2. R. J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, [1971] 1978), p. 130.

their children into the established church known as the public school system is the obvious example.

The family is not an agency of public law enforcement, for it cannot lawfully impose sanctions outside its own boundaries. The ability of the state to tax away the wealth of the family makes the state the primary agency in society if it is a question of family vs. state. The family will always lose the contest. Only by converting the family into a mini-state – warlordism – can patriarchalism reverse the drift into centralized statism. Warlordism is the sociology of the Mafia, not the Bible.

This is why a program to strengthen the family must be accompanied by a program to strengthen the institutional church. The church and the family together can offset the self-declared authority of the messianic state.

The church has a lawful claim on ten percent of its member families' net income.³ The church therefore possesses legitimate sanctions over the Christian family. In short, the church is a separate jurisdiction. It is a jurisdiction superior to the family, for the decisions of the head of the Christian household can be appealed to the local church's elders.

Christian Patriarchalism?

The reason why this little book is necessary is that there is a professedly Christian patriarchalism being seriously proposed today as the solution to the modern messianic state. What do I mean by "Christian patriarchalism"? I mean the suggestion that a Christian father, as the head of his household, possesses the keys of the kingdom: the right to baptize his children and serve the Lord's Supper on the basis of the marriage bond, not on the basis of his membership in the institutional church.

This new patriarchalism insists that the twin sacramental monopolies that identify the institutional church as a separate

3. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994), Part 1.

covenantal jurisdiction are not monopolies of the institutional church, but in fact are family rites. This assertion, if true, would strip the institutional church of its authority to bring sanctions, both positive and negative, in God's name. This would destroy the legal basis of the oath of church membership: *no sanctions – no oath*. This would leave society with two rather than three covenantal institutions: family and state. We know the direction in which such a society will then move: toward statism.

If Christian fathers possess lawful authority over the sacraments merely on the basis of their legal status as heads of households, then so do widows and divorcees who are heads of households. *The new patriarchalism becomes the new matriarchalism*. Marriage becomes the means of an implicit ordination of women as second in command. By defining the central institutional manifestation of the church as the Christian marital family rather than the adopted family of God – the institutional church – the new patriarchalism is theologically incapable of resisting matriarchalism. The ordination of women is an extension of the marriage bond. A widow or a woman whose husband has deserted her has already been ordained.

The problem facing the Christian Reconstruction movement today is that this theology of the Christian patriarchalism has come out of one wing of the movement. It was formally and publicly proclaimed in early June, 1994. This is why I finished this book in late June, 1994. An error as dangerous as baptized patriarchalism is must not be allowed to go unchallenged. The theological stakes are too high.

In a society facing a massive reaction against the political centralization of the New World Order and the looming bankruptcy of the welfare state, Christians must be sure that they do not become unpaid cheerleaders for some new form of humanism, which is in fact the oldest form of humanism: patriarchal familism. Let the Mafia advocate familism. Christians should have a better solution: the Trinitarian covenantalism of church, family, and state, each with its own oath and sanctions.

BAPTIZED PATRIARCHALISM

The family is central to the covenant and therefore to every Christian institution, church, state, school, and all things else.

R. J. Rushdoony (1984, 1994)¹

In this book, I show that there has been a major shift in R. J. Rushdoony's theology. This shift parallels his adoption of a doctrine of the church totally at odds with what the Westminster Confession teaches, and every other historic confession teaches. When those whom he had recruited in the 1960's and 1970's refused to adopt it – all of us refused – it split the Christian Reconstruction movement into two visible camps: Vallecito (anti-ecclesiastical) and Tyler (sacramental church). (A third group, more Presbyterian, is unorganized and underfunded.)

The foundations of Christian Reconstruction were laid in the 1960's, prior to Rushdoony's exegetical work on biblical law. He wrote almost a dozen books on social theory, history, political theory, theology, and education before he wrote *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (1973). In these negative critiques, he made a definitive break with the theology and sociology of humanism.

This Independent Republic had been completed in the summer of 1962; it was published in 1964. After the publication of *The*

1. Rousas John Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1994), II, p. 678. The chapter seems to have been written prior to 1984.

Messianic Character of American Education in 1963, Rushdoony's next major writing project was *The One and the Many*, although it was not published until 1971. He was working on the manuscript of *The One and the Many* in the summer of 1963 when we both worked for the William Volker Fund. The book's early chapters were completed in the mid-1960's. In his chapter on "Christ: The World De-Divinized," Rushdoony warned against patriarchalism as a precursor to the divinization of the state. I have already cited his statement in my Introduction. He said that the Roman state absorbed the Roman family, making the family the state's creature. Rushdoony understood clearly that the authority of the family is not sufficient to keep it from being absorbed into the state and used for the state's purposes.

What should we conclude? This: the family is a legitimate and necessary institution, but separated from the institutional church, it has been no match for the state in history. The high point of the state in Western history, and the low point of the family, was during the Roman Empire, when Jesus issued his warning. Not until the twentieth century has the family in the European West been more oppressed by the state.

The West needs a solution to this question: *What are the biblical limits of State authority?* Christian Reconstruction has been dealing with this problem for over two decades. Its preliminary answer is this: *the tithe sets these limits*. Civil government at all levels combined is not authorized by God to collect taxes equal to the tithe (I Sam. 8:17). Nothing funded by the state beyond this limit is biblically legitimate. Taxation in the twentieth century has exceeded this limit by at least three to one in every nation. The modern world stands condemned.

If the state must be shrunk, what should replace it? The secular conservatives' most popular practical answer to this question is this: the family. The problem is, history does not move backward. The Western family was very strong prior to the Enlightenment, but it has surrendered to the state, generation by generation. How can this process of surrender be

reversed? How can the family be kept from drifting back into statism should it ever be delivered from today's bondage?

A Question of Funding

There are three – and only three – covenantal institutions: church, state, and family. Each is legitimate. Each has a God-assigned role to play. But when the church is weak, the state increases its power. The family moves alongside either church or state, strengthening the position of whichever institution seems to be dominant. No better example of this process exists than tax-funded education. The vast majority of families have accepted the offer of “free” education. They have demanded it. The church was the dominant force in education, especially higher education, for seven centuries. In 1850, every college in the United States was Christian; a century later, almost all were secular. This got much worse after 1950.² The family has not been able to resist the lure of tax subsidies. What happened in ancient Rome is happening in the West.

The lesson should be obvious: the family is not the central institution of society in the sense of giving direction and vision to society. It is central only in the sense of having what might be called the crucial swing vote. It allies itself with either church or state. Whichever institution seems to offer healing – earthly salvation – will gain the support of the family. The family cannot independently offer social healing. It looks to external authorities to do this. The family is called upon to fund those agencies that promise social healing, either through the tithe or taxes. Healing must be funded, and the family is the source of this funding. But the state's offer is a false one.

There is an unbreakable rule in institutional theory: *the source of the funding determines the structure of the system*. The source of the funding is either the family or the productive

2. George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

individual. The family must support both church and state. It is therefore judicially subordinate to church and state in the area of money. *The judicial subordination of the family is an inescapable concept.* It is never a question of family subordination vs. no family subordination. It is always a question of the degree and the spheres of family subordination to church and state.

In one sense, it is legitimate to speak of the family as the central institution and above church and state. Imagine three boxes. The box in the middle is labeled "family." The box on the right is labeled "church"; the box on the left is labeled "state." The family is elevated above both. Out of each side of the box labeled "family" is a pipe. Through these two pipes flows money. Like water, the money runs downhill. So, in this sense, the family is the central institution and above both church and state. This, however, is not what the familists have in mind when they speak of the family as central.

To rest social theory on the idea of the centrality of the family is to rest on a weak reed. The family is the primary agency of welfare, but it is not the source of law in society. There are too many families to serve as the single source of law and judgment. The family's legitimate sanction – the rod – is not valid outside of its own limited sphere of authority. It does not lawfully wield the sword (state authority) or the keys of the kingdom (church authority). Also, church and state can bring sanctions against the family. The family is not in a position to bring autonomous sanctions against the state. It is required by God to pay the tithe. It can rebel against the church, but excommunication is a far greater threat to family members than their threat to cut off funding or quit is to the local church.

He who believes that the family exercises primary authority in society has not examined his tax forms lately. The family pays; the state collects. The church is owed money, too. One task of Christian economic theory is to search the Scriptures to see how much is lawful for church and state to collect.

Rushdoony understood this two decades ago. In *Institutes of Biblical Law*, he cited a pseudo-Augustinian sermon regarding tithe vs. taxes. "Our ancestors had more than they needed because they gave God tithes and paid their taxes to the Emperor. However, since we do not wish to share the tithes with God, everything will soon be taken from us. The tax collector takes everything which Christ does not receive."³ In short, no tithe to the church – no protection from the tax collector.

But Rushdoony's theology had a flaw in it. At first, it did not seem to be too dangerous. In the last two decades, it has completely undermined the biblical foundation of his social theory. *Rushdoony believes that the tithe-payer has the authority under God to allocate his tithe as he sees fit.* If the tithe-payer wishes to send his tithe money to a non-profit foundation chartered by the government rather than to his local church, according to Rushdoony, he has this authority. This undermines the church.

Rushdoony insists that no church can lawfully compel its members to pay it their complete tithe or even any portion thereof. "It is significant, too, that God's law makes no provision for the enforcement of the tithe *by man*. Neither church nor state have [*sic*] the power to require the tithe of us, nor to tell us where it should be allocated, *i.e.*, whether to Christian Schools or colleges, educational foundations, missions, charities, or anything else. The tithe is to the Lord."⁴ With respect to tithing, Rushdoony teaches *the divine right of the head of the household*: no earthly appeal beyond conscience. This is familism.

Familism

Familism has been a common heresy throughout history. In the modern world, it is far more common among secular con-

3. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), p. 512.

4. Rushdoony, "The Tax Revolt Against God," Position Paper 94, *Chalcedon Report* (Feb. 1988), p. 16.

servatives than among secular liberals. But Christians have been overcome by the lure of familism. One of the strongest statements to this effect was written by G. K. Chesterton. The family, he wrote, "is the only check on the state that is bound to renew itself as eternally as the state, and more naturally than the state."⁵ His reference to eternity betrays his confused social theology: neither the human family nor the state is eternal; the church is (Rev. 21; 22). Because evangelical Christians have social and moral values that are more often espoused by secular conservatives than by secular liberals, they are more easily lured into the conservative heresy of "family first" or "family central." This is a serious weakness of modern evangelical thought.

The only family that is central in time and eternity is the family of God, entrance into which is attainable only through **adoption**: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will" (Eph. 1:4-5). The only valid proof of a person's membership in this family is his or her membership in God's institutional church. A person who does not belong to a church but who insists that he is a Christian is like a man without a uniform or credentials who tries to enter a military base that has been closed to the public. Maybe he used to be in the military. Maybe he still has his old uniform. But if he puts it on and goes onto the base, he can lawfully be arrested or shot as a spy. His testimony that he means well is judicially irrelevant. And if he was dishonorably discharged from service, or if he had gone AWOL,⁶ woe unto him if he dons his old uniform and pretends that he has lawful access.

5. Chesterton, "The Story of the Family," in *The Superstition of Divorce* (1920); *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*, vol. 4 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), p. 256.

6. Absent without leave, i.e., desertion.

So, if you ceased to take the Lord's Supper two decades ago, you went AWOL from the church. You are now an outlaw.

The judicial marks of church membership are baptism and participation in the Lord's Supper. The greatest threat in history is the decision of a lawful institutional church to cut a person off from participation in holy communion, i.e., excommunication. The officers of the church possess this authority. They control the keys of the kingdom: the right to preach *and enforce* the word of God by means of the authority to excommunicate those members who refuse to obey: "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19).

John Calvin was clear about the keys of the kingdom in history. He cited Matthew 16:19. He then commented that "the latter applies to the discipline of excommunication which is entrusted to the church. But the church binds him whom it excommunicates – not that it casts him into everlasting ruin and despair, but because it condemns his life and morals, and already warns him of his condemnation unless he should repent. . . . Therefore, that no one may stubbornly despise the judgment of the church, or think it immaterial that he has been condemned by the vote of the believers, the Lord testifies that such judgment by believers is nothing but the proclamation of his own sentence, and that whatever they have done on earth is ratified in heaven."⁷ *This is why a sacrament is a monopoly of the institutional church; the church alone is lawfully sacramental.* It is worth noting that the Westminster Assembly devoted more space in the Larger Catechism to the sacraments (questions 161 to 177) than it did to preaching (questions 155 to 160).

Anyone who calls himself a orthodox Christian theologian must affirm that the Christian church is more important for

7. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), IV:xi:2. Edited by Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), II, p. 1214.

eternity than the non-Christian family. But when conservative Christian theologians begin to discuss social theory, most of them begin to waffle. They tend to affirm the family as society's central institution. In a non-Christian society, this may be the case operationally. The relevant theological question, however, is this: In God's design for His holy commonwealth – the visible social manifestation of the kingdom of God – is the family the central institution? The correct answer is *no*. The institutional church is the central institution, for it alone possesses the authority to excommunicate: the most fearful sanction in history. God has turned this authority over to His institutional church. "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). Through excommunication, the institutional church lawfully declares God's judgment.

Which father's wrath is more terrifying: God the Father or a family patriarch? Which father's authority is absolute? Which family is the model: the institutional church or the marital family? To ask these questions is to answer them, or so you might think. You would be wrong. That is why this little book has become mandatory.

The Bible nowhere says that the patriarch has the power of the keys. The institutional church does. In history's representative matters of eternal salvation, fathers have nothing covenantally binding to say; church elders do. You would think that no Christian theologian would argue otherwise. You would be wrong. That is why this little book has become mandatory.

Jesus was clear: He was at war with any ideal of the kingdom of God which would place the marital family at the center of either formal worship or faith. He was therefore at war with any definition of His church which would transfer the sacramental monopoly of the institutional church to the marital family. Men can either get behind Jesus on this issue or they can take their stand in opposition to Him. I strongly recommend getting behind him. Otherwise, you will be run over.

Familism and Racism

Basic to pagan familism is a theology of racism. Because the pagan family is seen by its defenders as a blood covenant, the question of inter-racial marriage becomes decisive.

Rushdoony in 1965 wrote an essay on the doctrine of marriage. In it, he argued that race and culture are overriding considerations in marriage. His language indicates that these considerations are equal to profession of faith. Speaking of the wife, he wrote:

Moreover, if she is to be 'a help meet as before him,' a mirror, there must be a common cultural background. This militates against marriages across cultures and across races where there is no common culture or association possible.

The new unit is a continuation of the old unit but an independent one; and there has to be a unity or else it is not a marriage. Thus, the attempt of many today to say there is nothing in the Bible against mixed marriages whether religiously or culturally is altogether unfounded.⁸

The theological error here is monumental. Paul was emphatic: "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him" (Rom. 10:12). "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). "Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:11). Paul rejected the Jews' belief in the racial-cultural separation of their nation. This separation had always been *confessional*, not racial.

Rushdoony's exposition ignores these verses. Given his view of the family as a blood covenant established in terms of a

8. Rushdoony, "The Doctrine of Marriage" (1965); *Toward a Christian Marriage*, edited by Elizabeth Fellersen (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1972), pp. 15-16.

common culture, not just a common profession of faith, how can the racism inherent in Rushdoony's familism not become a factor in his ecclesiology? The family administers the sacraments in Rushdoony's ecclesiology, as we shall see. The family in his system is the most visible manifestation of the church.

Laws Against "Hybridization"

This was not some one-time error on Rushdoony's part. In his exposition of Leviticus 19:19 as a law prohibiting hybridization, which it was not,⁹ he concludes: "St. Paul referred to the broader meaning of these laws against hybridization, and against yoking an ox and an ass to a plow (Deut. 22:10), in II Corinthians 6:14."¹⁰ Broader meaning, yes; judicial specifics, no. Paul wrote: "Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" The issue here is faith. Christian faith overcomes all other divisions.

Rushdoony says that the hybrid comes at great cost – *sterility* – "and thereby violates God's creation ordinance."¹¹ He identifies the prohibition against genetic mixing within a species as a *creation ordinance* rather than a temporary ordinance governing tribalism in national Israel. Then he adds that "the commandments clearly require a respect for God's creation."¹²

Second, Rushdoony writes: "But Deuteronomy 22:10 not only forbids unequal religious yoking by inference, and as a case law, but also unequal yoking generally. . . . The burden of the law is thus against inter-religious, inter-racial, and inter-

9. The law prohibited mixing of seeds in a man's field. It was a law illustrating the requirement that the tribes in Israel be kept separate. This law was annulled by the New Covenant, when the church replaced Mosaic Israel. Gary North, "Hermeneutics and Leviticus 19:19 – Passing Dr. Poythress' Test," in North, ed., *Theonomy: An Informed Response* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), ch. 10.

10. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 256.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

12. *Ibid.*

cultural marriages, in that they normally go against the very community which marriage is designed to establish.”¹³ Note his asserted equivalents: inter-religious marriages and inter-racial or inter-cultural marriages. He is not speaking here merely of civil law; he is speaking of biblical law in general.

The shift in his argument is both subtle and significant. He is not arguing that inter-racial marriages do not produce children. Such unions are not biologically sterile. Then are inter-cultural marriages genetically sterile? He does not argue that they are. So, what has “hybridization” got to do with either type of marriage? Genetically speaking, not a thing. *Rushdoony has shifted his argument from genetics to race and culture.* He has moved from an annulled Mosaic case law regarding cattle, planting, and clothing to a racial-cultural application. He has invented a legal category of “hybridization” in order to apply it to inter-racial and inter-cultural marriages. What he is saying is that such marriages are *covenantally* sterile. The problem is, this is a denial of the New Testament’s doctrine of the gospel’s power to break down the wall separating Jew from Greek, bond from free. His theology of sterility has mixed a false interpretation of a case law with traditional racism’s theory of “inferior races.”

The standard of *unequal covenantal yoking* unquestionably applies to marriage. Rushdoony is correct on this point: Paul makes this clear in II Corinthians 6:14. This Pauline prohibition is universally believed by orthodox Bible commentators to apply to marriage covenant. But covenantal yoking has nothing to do with race. Covenantal yoking is just that: covenantal.

The judicial standard involved in the biblical concept of “yoking” is exclusively covenantal: public confession of Trinitarian faith, local church membership, the regular celebration of the Lord’s Supper, and public obedience to God’s law. For a Christian to deny salvation through faith in Jesus Christ is apostasy. To refuse to join the local church is an assertion of

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 256–57.

one's judicial autonomy. To refuse to celebrate the Lord's Supper is self-excommunication. To deny the law of God is antinomian. A Christian should not marry anyone who is remiss in any of these four areas. To be remiss in any of them is to break covenant with God. But marrying a Christian from another race or another culture is not covenant-breaking.

This principle of covenantal discrimination applies to each of the three institutional covenants: church, state, and family. "Equal yoking" means a public commitment of all covenantal participants to the Athanasian creed or some other Trinitarian creedal statement, as well as church membership. *The judicial issue is faithfulness to the covenantal oath.* "Equal yoking" is strictly a judicial concept. "Unequal yoking" is therefore also strictly a judicial concept; as such, it has nothing to do with race or culture: in family, church, or state.¹⁴ It has nothing to do with community standards except to the extent that these derivative standards are confessionally Trinitarian – a product of the covenant. Community standards must conform to God's law.

What criteria determine which group is excluded from what covenantal organization? Rushdoony has made his view plain: *community standards*. Once again: "The burden of the law is thus against inter-religious, inter-racial, and inter-cultural marriages, in that they normally go against the very community which marriage is designed to establish."¹⁵ But there are also church communities and political communities. Are they autonomous

14. Obviously, if two people cannot speak the same language, they may have future marital problems. This is not a valid covenantal objection to their marriage. The presumption is, one or both will learn the other's language. This is also true of churches. Members of churches cannot lawfully be excluded from the Lord's Supper because of a language barrier. Should a person be excluded from citizenship because of a language barrier? No. But he will have trouble being elected to public office. He can be barred from voting on the basis of functional illiteracy in the language on the ballot, but states that require secret ballots – only one person per booth at a time – can and should provide translations on the ballot for major linguistic groups. Quebec's linguistic discrimination against its English-speaking citizens is notorious.

15. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 257.

from biblical law? Can they lawfully ignore a creation ordinance (the law against "hybridization")? *Racism spreads.*

Rushdoony's analysis here is not concerned with a Mosaic case law governing state authority. His analysis rests on an all-inclusive principle: a creation ordinance. He has announced the existence of a creation ordinance in order to justify a view of marriage based on community standards of order and propriety. His assertion of the existence of a creation ordinance mandating racial separation based on community standards is an affirmation of a theory of society that he elsewhere opposes so eloquently: John Dewey's view of community standards and community authority.¹⁶ *Humanism spreads.*

In Christ, the only valid standards for judicial exclusion in a formally covenanted church, state, or family are: (1) denying the Trinitarian faith (confession); and (2) repeatedly breaking God's law as a way of life. Race is not a valid standard for covenantal exclusion. Whenever race becomes a means of exclusion within any covenantal organization that is bound by a common confession of faith, this works against the ideal of the biblical covenant. While there is no earthly court-enforceable biblical law against voluntary separation from others outside the boundaries of the church, there can be no morally valid judicial exclusion of any race from the rights and obligations of the ecclesiastical covenant. The same is true of family and state. *A program of court-enforced racial segregation within any covenantal institution is judicially evil.* If a high court annuls such segregation within its covenantal jurisdiction, this must not be dismissed as a program of mandatory racial integration. The court merely prohibits a judicial evil: mandatory racial segregation.¹⁷

16. On Dewey, see Rushdoony, *The Messianic Character of American Education: Studies in the History of the Philosophy of Education* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1963), ch. 15.

17. This should not be understood as a legitimization of laws requiring businesses to serve people or hire employees irrespective of race. Economic discrimination is not a covenantal act. If a business decides to hire or not to hire people of a certain race,

Rushdoony's Ecclesiology in 1984

Rushdoony completed the manuscript for *Systematic Theology* in 1984, but for a decade, he did not mention its existence in his *Chalcedon Report*. Then, in early 1994, I published *Tithing and the Church*, in which I mentioned that he had never published his promised systematic theology. I suggested that he had not come up with a final position in his doctrine of the church, and that this was the cause of the delay. I was wrong about the cause of the delay; I was correct about his failure to come up with a final version of his doctrine of the church. What he wrote about the church in 1984 is different from what he has written since 1990: less radical, less rhetorically confrontational. On the other hand, it is more radical and more confrontational than Chapter XIV of *Institutes of Biblical Law*.

He reports that Ellsworth McIntire contacted him and asked about it. McIntire put up the money to publish it, as Rushdoony says in the book's March 1, 1994 dedication to McIntire. The book was in print by June: very rapid production. What is obvious in reading it is that it had not been revised since 1984. What also is obvious is that Rushdoony's shift from Calvinism to patriarchalism was not yet complete in 1984, but it had surely begun. (Note: Calvin's theology was anti-patriarchal because of his view of the sacraments as the church's monopoly.)

I am not arguing that Rushdoony in 1984 had ceased to hold to all of Calvin's doctrines. He cites Calvin throughout the book. But in his chapter on "The Doctrine of the Church," he uses Calvin in a preposterous way. He asserts that Calvin declared the Lord's Supper to be a family rite.¹⁸ He then quotes a passage from Calvin's *Institutes*. The passage in fact speaks of God's adoption of His people into His family, "the society of

the state should remain silent. Civil laws prohibiting economic discrimination inevitably become laws mandating quotas. To keep bureaucrats from becoming arbitrary, the law must place barriers around them. Numerical boundaries become quotas.

18. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, p. 737.

the Church.”¹⁹ What Calvin proclaimed in the *Institutes* was the doctrine of the church as the ecclesiastical assembly of the adopted children of God. In his commentary on Isaiah, Calvin was even more explicit. Speaking of “being accounted his children,”²⁰ he insisted that to be so accounted, a person must be inside the institutional church. “Hence it follows, that strangers who separate themselves from the Church have nothing left for them but to rot amidst their curse. Hence, also, a departure from the Church is an open renouncement of eternal salvation.”²¹ When Calvin wrote *church*, he meant *institutional*.

Rushdoony in 1984 had not regularly taken the Lord’s Supper for well over a decade, and he was not a member of a local congregation. He met on Sunday mornings in a Bible study attended by his family and Chalcedon’s employees.²² So, when he referred to *family*, he really meant a family: a marriage covenant. In “The Doctrine of the Church,” Rushdoony offers his attempt to redefine Calvin’s doctrine of the church and thereby escape Calvin’s terrifyingly harsh condemnation. The chapter reveals his preliminary move away from historic Calvinism to patriarchalism. This move was completed in the early 1990’s. Because this chapter on the church was not published until mid-1994, many of his followers during the 1980’s could not see in which direction he was moving. Those of his employees who did see it, and who refused to move with him, were banished from his presence one by one: “excommunication.”

The Marks of the Church: Three or Four?

He begins his discussion with what appears to be a minor addition to Calvinism’s doctrine of the church. It is not a minor

19. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV:xviii:1.

20. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, [1550] 1979), VIII, p. 41.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

22. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994), ch. 10.

addition. In the chapter's first paragraph, he makes an assertion: modern theology is plagued by Greek categories, most notably reductionism and abstractionism. In the second paragraph, he applies this generality to the five points of Calvinism and to historic Calvinism's definition of the church. "Again, the true church is defined in terms of (1) the faithful preaching of the word, (2) the Biblical administration of the sacraments, and (3) godly discipline by the church. C. John Miller has wisely added another, (4) the fruits of the Spirit."²³ He does not say when or where Mr. Miller added this fourth point, but if Miller did, he was surely not wise in doing so.²⁴ The addition of this point moves the doctrine of the church from Calvin's strictly judicial definition to Anabaptism's partially mystical definition.

Calvin on the Institutional Church

Calvin defined the institutional church covenantally, i.e., judicially. Recognizing that the great temptation of fallen man is to seek to become as God, knowing the hearts and minds of his fellow men, Calvin closed the door theologically on such attempts. He defined the church in terms of outward standards: profession of faith and conduct in conformity to God's law. He devoted more space in *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* to the doctrine of the church than to any other topic: Book IV. Significantly, he called this section "The External Means or Aids by Which God Invites Us into the Society of Christ and Holds Us Therein." This emphasis on external means was not afterthought on Calvin's part. He was challenging two rival views of the Church: Roman Catholicism and Anabaptism.

The Roman Catholic position views the institutional church as having the power to infuse grace into people through the

23. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, p. 669.

24. Rushdoony, Miller, and I worked together at the William Volker Fund in 1963. Miller later became a faculty member of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

sacraments. The Anabaptist view denies that the sacraments are more than memorials: authority through naming (nominalism). Calvin rejected both views. In his theology, the sacraments are neither an aspect of Greek realism ("secret powers")²⁵ nor Greek nominalism. They neither infuse grace, as if grace were a substance, nor do they serve merely as symbols. His theology was judicial, and so was his view of the sacraments. He said that they are signs and seals of the covenant, which is a judicial bond between God and man (vertical) and among all those who have been placed under these signs and seals (horizontal). The sacrament is "an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of his good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith; . . ."²⁶ The sacrament of baptism does not by itself save men, but when combined with preaching and saving faith, it heals men from sin.²⁷

The element of faith is given to men through God's sovereign grace. But this is God's work, not the work of the church. The church baptizes, but it does not impart the grace of saving faith. This is the heart of Calvinism: *saving faith is imparted to a person exclusively by God's grace*. This is what the five points of Calvinism teach. "But the sacraments properly fulfill their office only when the Spirit, that inward teacher, comes to them, by whose power alone hearts are penetrated and affections moved and our souls opened for the sacraments to enter in."²⁸

Calvin affirmed the necessity of saving faith in the individual in order for the sacraments to have a positive effect in the process of salvation, but he made it clear that this saving faith is God's work, not the church's work. Thus, the sacraments are external and judicial signs insofar as they are marks of membership in the church. The church does not have the authority

25. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV:xiv:14, p. 1289.

26. *Ibid.*, IV:xix:1, p. 1277.

27. *Ibid.*, IV:xix:3, p. 1279.

28. *Ibid.*, IV:xix:9, p. 1284.

to detect saving faith other than through observation of the individual's profession of faith and his moral conduct.

He made this point inescapably clear in his discussion of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. He linked four things: preaching, faith, confession, outward obedience. "For whatever benefit may come to us from the Supper requires the Word: whether we are to be confirmed in faith, or exercised in confession, or aroused to duty, there is need of preaching."²⁹ The church supplies preaching; God supplies saving faith through His grace; and the visible evidence of this faith is the individual's two-fold public response: confession and duty (i.e., obedience).

Officers of the church, like officers of the state, must make judgments in terms of evidence. This evidence must not be based on the officers' claim that they can read men's hearts. Their judgments must be based on evidence supplied by witnesses. To define church membership in terms of anything except baptism, profession of faith (creedal confession), and outward conformity to God's law represents a move toward mysticism and experientialism. This is the perennial Anabaptist heresy. Early in his career, Rushdoony rejected it totally.

Rushdoony's Calvinist Phase

During Rushdoony's Calvinist phase, which ended sometime after 1973, he supported Calvin's commitment to external standards for church membership: confession and outward obedience. He was totally hostile to American revivalism's emphasis on religious experience as a test of faith. He even called this emphasis *reductionistic*, a term he now reserves for the very three-fold doctrine of the church that he used to affirm. In *This Independent Republic*, he contrasted Puritanism with rationalism and experientialism, which (following Van Til) he identified as dialectical, mutually reinforcing heresies. In an extended pas-

29. *Ibid.*, IV:xvii:39, p. 1416.

sage of great importance for a correct understanding of his subsequent shift in theology, he wrote:

The theological inheritance of Puritanism made it hostile both to the rationalistic approach and, in the period prior to the early 19th century, to the emotional approach. Both involved a reductionism and a dissolution as well of the holy commonwealth in favor of (subjective) judgment or experience. . . . The departures were antinomian and gnostic as well, in that they assumed a private or subjective experience and possession of truth. Ann Hutchinson, for example, in three years' time brought no small chaos to Massachusetts by holding that the Puritan standard, which did not claim a heart-knowledge as the necessary test of faith, was 'a covenant of works' because it limited itself to the facts of an outward profession of faith and a life lived in conformity to it. . . . Salvation is in the covenant of grace, but, if the church or men rather than God is the judge of grace, then an omniscience is claimed, a knowledge of the heart impossible to men. The Puritan position was that a tree was to be judged by its fruits, and faith by its works. Experientialism and rationalism were thus two forms of gnosticism and reductionism which were to challenge insistently the holy commonwealth idea. Rationalism found its strongest expression in the French Revolution and the Jacobin Clubs, and experientialism in 19th century revivalism and romanticism.³⁰

I became one of Rushdoony's early converts when I attended a two-week summer conference sponsored by the Intercollegiate Society of Individualists in 1962.³¹ Rushdoony delivered lectures of what later became *This Independent Republic*. I accepted this Calvinistic view of church membership in 1965, i.e., covenant theology. Prior to 1965, I had been an ecclesiastical independent and an Anabaptist in my view of the sacraments.

30. Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic: Studies in the Nature and Meaning of American History* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1964), pp. 102-3.

31. Now called the Intercollegiate Studies Institute.

By 1973, we had developed Christian Reconstructionism. Ironically, at the very time that I switched to Rushdoony's judicial, hierarchical view of the church, he quietly abandoned it.

He hated revivalism in 1964. One reason why he hated it was its nondenominationalism, its deliberate blurring of ecclesiastical distinctions. "Revivalism, while experiential, was likewise concerned with the holy commonwealth. Its experientialism dissolved the church but not Christian civil government. Revivalism was undenominational and very often anti-denominational."³² In 1984, he had moved away from Calvinism and toward nondenominationalism. "For the church to stress the centrality of faith means that it is not the institution nor its forms which mark it as a church but something more than itself, something which is from God, the grace of faith. Without for a moment surrendering its Baptist, Presbyterian, or Episcopal nature, the more strong any one of these churches becomes in the faith, the less it stresses its own distinctives and the more it stresses the distinctives of Christ and the word."³³

He could not easily remain in this halfway-house position: pro-denominational forms yet anti-denominational in commitment. In 1991, he made public his acceptance of full-scale anti-denominationalism. "Another aspect of jurisdiction is this: every church, small or great, is Christ's congregation, not man's. Its loyalty must be to God in Christ, and to His law-word, *not* to a denomination nor a sister church."³⁴ Denominationalism, he said, is heretical. "There is in this an implicit and sometimes unconscious *heresy*. Heresy is a strong word, but nothing less can describe the problem. This authoritarian attempt to control other churches is revelatory of a lack of faith in the triune God and an unseemly faith in the power of man. It assumes the

32. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

33. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, p. 672.

34. Rushdoony, "The Nature of the Church," *Calvinism Today*, I (Oct. 1991), p.

3. Address: P. O. Box 1, Whitby, North Yorkshire, YO21 1HP, England.

virtual non-existence of the Holy Spirit.”³⁵ Those who hold a hierarchical view of church government are members of a modern Sanhedrin, he says. “We must separate ourselves from modern Sanhedrins.”³⁶ Yet since 1974 he has been a priest in a tiny two-congregation Episcopal denomination.

Abraham's Faith: The Issue of Subordination

Abraham gave his tithe to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:20). This is crucial for any discussion of the tithe and the church. Rushdoony never comments on this verse, for obvious reasons: he denies that the institutional church has a lawful claim on anyone's tithe. Melchizedek was the priest of Salem, and Abraham was under his ecclesiastical authority. It was from Melchizedek that Abraham received a meal of bread and wine (v. 18). The author of Hebrews traces the New Covenant priesthood back to Melchizedek (Heb. 7). Rushdoony traces it back to the Levites, as we shall see. This has major implications for his ecclesiology.

Rushdoony interprets Abraham in very different categories: personal faith, not tithing and communion. He discusses Abraham's faith under Section 2, “Faith and the Church.”³⁷ The problem is, his discussion does not exegetically tie Abraham's faith to ecclesiology. It could as easily be titled, “Faith and the Family,” “Faith and Civil Government,” or “Faith and the Kingdom.” What Rushdoony needed to do, but did not do, was to show how the faith of Abraham (and the others listed in Hebrews 11) was in some way uniquely and judicially tied to Rushdoony's definition of the church. Having failed even to attempt to make this connection, Rushdoony gratuitously concludes: “It is this faith which must mark the church. Too often the church identifies faith with itself, and faithfulness with loyalty to the institutional forms and practices. It then seeks *conformity rather*

35. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

37. *Systematic Theology*, pp. 671–75.

than faith.”³⁸ (Conformity, for example, in belonging to a local congregation and taking communion there, neither of which did Rushdoony do from the late 1960’s until he set up a house church in 1991.)³⁹ He had adopted pietism’s ecclesiology.

He wrote in the early 1980’s: “Thus, the traditional marks of the true church are good but limited.”⁴⁰ This was a halfway-house position. It did not survive his march into Anabaptism. In 1991, he delivered a lecture, “Reconstructing the Church,” to the Third International Conference on Christian Reconstruction, held in England. He briefly summarized the traditional Protestant and Reformed three-fold definition of the church: orthodox preaching, administering the sacraments, and disciplining. He called this definition “reductionism.”⁴¹ Its limitation, he said, is that it focuses on the institutional church, not the members and their responsibilities (i.e., *works*). He then quoted William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army – a worldwide parachurch organization that closely resembles a church but does not offer the sacraments. Rushdoony favorably cited Booth’s description of the late-nineteenth-century church in England as a “mummy factory.”⁴² His contempt showed.

What is extremely significant is this: in his earlier days, Rushdoony had forthrightly affirmed the familiar three-part definition of the church, defending all three points as crucial in the war against humanism. In his 1983 book, *Salvation and Godly Rule*, he included a chapter on “Outlaw Cultures.” The essay’s internal evidence indicates that it was written in 1972.⁴³ Rushdoony wrote eloquently and to the point that “the marks of a true church, i.e. a body of worshippers, have been defined for centuries as the faithful preaching of the word of God, the

38. *Ibid.*, p. 674.

39. North, *Tithing and the Church*, ch. 10.

40. *Systematic Theology*, p. 675.

41. “Reconstructing the Church,” *Calvinism Today*, II (July 1992), p. 24.

42. *Idem.*

43. See my discussion in *Tithing and the Church*, p. 118n.

faithful administration of the sacraments, and the application of Biblical discipline. Without these things, we are not talking about the church in any historical or theological sense. Instead, a purely humanistic ideal of a denatured church is given us. Such a church is simply a part of the City of Man and an out-law institution at war with the City of God."⁴⁴

I agree completely with this excellent summary of the marks of a true church and the humanistic implications of any denial of it. The problem is, nineteen years after he wrote it, eight years after he published it, Rushdoony openly repudiated it, and more than repudiated it; he became contemptuous of it, ridiculing it. The transformation of his theology during the 1980's was extensive – a fact not widely perceived by his followers or his critics. He ceased to be a Calvinist.

A Question of Jurisdiction

What Rushdoony has ignored since 1974 should be obvious to anyone with any familiarity with the West's judicial theology and Reformation history: Protestantism's definition of the church as an institution was a means of *identifying the church's lawful jurisdiction*. That is to say, the traditional Protestant definition places *judicial boundaries around the church* as an institution – a major goal of the Protestant Reformation, especially the limiting of the sacraments to baptism and the Lord's Supper. Like the U.S. Constitution's limitation of the national government's jurisdiction, this traditional Protestant definition was designed to place boundaries around what the institutional church could rightfully claim as its area of legitimate covenantal authority. It is no more meaningful to criticize the familiar three-fold definition of the institutional church – i.e., that this definition does not describe what church members should do – than it is to criticize the U.S. Constitution because it does not

44. Rushdoony, *Salvation and Godly Rule* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1983), p. 160.

specify what citizens are supposed to do. The judicial issue is this: *What is the institutional church authorized by God to do as His designated monopoly?* The issue is not what Christians should do.

It is therefore misleading – I would call it subversive – for a theologian of Rushdoony's stature to criticize the traditional Protestant definition of the institutional church on this basis: that it does not include works or faith. Faith is displayed publicly by confession and ethics. Any attempt to add something emotional or experiential to this definition is a move toward mysticism. At the same time, to require a list of responsibilities that define the church is a denial of Protestantism's doctrine of salvation by grace through faith. In the name of *anti-reductionism*, Rushdoony by 1991 had abandoned Reformed theology.

Having misled his readers on this point, Rushdoony in this same lecture on "Reconstructing the Church" went on to mislead them even more. He said that the church must perform the Great Commission: establish the crown rights of King Jesus, baptize nations, and teach them to obey God's word. Notice: *not one reference to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper*. While Matthew 28:18–20 mentions only baptism, the establishment of the church requires the Lord's Supper. Any theologically accurate discussion of the Great Commission must assume the accuracy of the three defining judicial marks of the institutional church. But if you have just ridiculed the institutional church as a mummy factory, your reader may not notice what you are really doing: *removing respect for the judicial authority of the institutional church as the sole legitimate source of the sacraments*. This error had begun in earnest in *Systematic Theology*.

The Sacraments

In *Systematic Theology*, he says that baptism is a family act: "Fourth, baptism is a family act, even as circumcision was a

family act."⁴⁵ Two comments: (1) circumcision was not a family act; (2) baptism is not circumcision. I will deal with the second comment first. Baptism involves water: the mark of cleansing. Calvin said the first thing to note about baptism is that it is "a token and proof of our cleansing; . . ."⁴⁶ In the Mosaic covenant, all but two of the water cleansings were administered by the individual on himself. The two exceptions were cleansing after a healing from leprosy, with the sprinkling performed by a priest (Lev. 14:5–6), and cleansing after contact with a dead body, with sprinkling performed by a second individual (Num. 19:16). John the Baptizer baptized people. On what judicial basis? He was the son of a priest (Luke 1:5) and acted in this capacity. The symbolism of the baptized person was either that of a formerly leprous person who was in need of priestly identification as judicially clean or someone who had been in contact with a dead body.⁴⁷ Probably it was the former: healing from spiritual leprosy. Leprosy was a judicial disease.⁴⁸ The priest had to slay one dove and let another one go free (Lev. 14:4–6). The Holy Spirit appeared at Christ's baptism as a dove (John 1:32). This indicates a symbolic connection with the rules governing leprosy: the free-flying dove was the public sign of a man's deliverance from judgment. In Christ's case, it represented redeemed mankind's deliverance from judgment. The point is, baptism is not a family rite; it is a church rite. *The priestly function is exclusively ecclesiastical in origin, not familial.*

But what about circumcision? What about Passover? Weren't these rites family rites? No. They were priestly rites, and the head of the household was a priest. Isn't this still true? Yes, but the structure of authority is still the same: a household priest is under the authority of a hierarchical priesthood. The priests

45. *Systematic Theology*, p. 677.

46. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV:xv:1, p. 1304.

47. James Jordan pointed this out to me.

48. Gary North, *Leviticus: An Economic Commentary* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994), ch. 9.

are ministerial, representative, and sanctions-bringers. But baptism is not circumcision, and the Lord's Supper is not Passover. The New Covenant brought a new priesthood and a new law (Heb. 7:12). History moves from the *Adamic family of man* in the garden of Eden toward the *adopted family of God* in the city of God, the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21; 22). Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as rites of the institutional church, announce the advent of the New Jerusalem: the holy commonwealth.

The Nucleus of Government

Rushdoony cites Exodus 18 to prove his contention that the family is the central institution. Exodus 18 established a hierarchical chain of appeals courts. The problem for Rushdoony's argument is that this was civil government. It did not apply explicitly to Aaron, the priest. It applied to the tribes. Rushdoony insists that "both the synagogue and the church were ruled by elders; obviously both saw this as God's requirement."⁴⁹ With no footnote, he infers from unnamed extra-biblical sources that only elders served as leaders of the synagogue. There is no biblical evidence about the synagogue, presumably a post-exilic institution. But even if this eldership was required, this does not lead to his conclusion, namely, "The office of elder was more than tribal: it originated in the family; the head of the family was its elder. God thus ordained that the family be the nucleus of government."⁵⁰ Where does it say in the Bible that only family heads may be civil rulers? Nowhere. Rushdoony did not cite a single biblical law to support his contention. Fact: *Samson was an unmarried civil judge for many years.*

What about the church? Here, there is biblical evidence that a man must be a successful ruler of his own household before being ordained by a church as a minister (I Tim. 3:1-11). This no more makes the family the nucleus of all government than

49. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, p. 680.

50. *Ibid.*

a requirement that a man must be able to read in order to vote in a civil election makes literacy the nucleus of all government. The family is a training ground in learning how to govern. There is nothing revolutionary in this observation. The church is to use the family as a surrogate. If a man cannot rule well in his family, Paul said, do not make him a leader in the church. The odds are against his success. That this requirement governs ordination to the pastorate is clear to everyone except seminary professors and churches that ordain unmarried seminary graduates. They have substituted term papers for family rule as the screening criteria. This has been disastrous for the church.

First Timothy 3 does not make the family the nucleus of all government. *Self-government is the nucleus of all government.* This is why there will be a day of final judgment in which each person will be judged by God. God will not ask where your parents are, or your children, or your ministers, or your rulers. God will ask only what you thought of His son, Jesus. The reason why Paul specified the family as the screening institution is that family government makes visible a man's skills of self-government in the context of a nearly universal hierarchy. There are more heads of families than heads of civil government. If the family were the nucleus of all government, somewhere in the Bible there would be a law making marriage a requirement for civil office. Nowhere does such a law appear. But Rushdoony's commitment to patriarchalism is greater than his commitment to biblical law. Hence, he wrote in 1984: "The biblical form of government requires that men and the families be trained to govern. The basic government is on the family level, and all other forms of government rest thereon."⁵¹

In *Politics of Guilt and Pity* (1970), he wrote: "The basic government is man's self-government. Other governments of man include the family, the church, the school, his business, and

51. *Ibid.*, p. 681.

many private associations as well as public opinion.”⁵² This was the ideal of government that had attracted his early associates. In *Institutes of Biblical Law*, he also began with self-government under God. “Government means, first, self-government, then the family, church, state, school, calling, and private associations as well as much else.”⁵³ But much later in the book, and perhaps three years later in terms of when he wrote this passage, he began to modify his earlier position. “The basic government of man is the self-government of Christian man.”⁵⁴ But a hint of a shift in his perspective – a cloud no larger than a man’s hand – immediately followed: “The family is an important area of government also, and the basic one. The church is an area of government, and the school still another.” Notice: he used the word *basic* for both self-government and family government. This equality could not survive indefinitely. In *Systematic Theology*, he moved the family to first place. This represented a major shift away from his original theology. He now places an institution at the center of both his social theory and his theology; before, his social theory had rested on the principle of self-government under God’s law. This proposed central institution is not the church. It is the church’s oldest rival, the one Jesus had warned against most strongly.

He attempts to ground his patriarchal theology on grammar, but he offers no proof for his grammar. “The main office, that of *elder*, is the name of the head of a family.”⁵⁵ But there is no verse in the New Testament that refers to *elder* as the head of a family. Luke 15:25 refers to an older son. *Presbuteros* usually refers to a church office. Bauer’s definitive lexicon offers no example of *presbuteros* as a head of family, either in the New Testament or Greek literature. The word means what it means

52. Rushdoony, *Politics of Guilty and Pity* (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, [1970] 1978), p. 144.

53. *Institutes*, p. 240.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 772.

55. *Systematic Theology*, p. 683. In *Institutes*, he said it *could* mean this: p. 740.

in English: older.⁵⁶ This is also what Rushdoony wrote in the *Institutes* (p. 740). His 1973 grammatical assessment is supported by the long entry in Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (vol. VI, pp. 651–83). Rushdoony in 1984 rested his argument on an assertion for which there is no grammatical evidence. In the *Institutes*, he had not made this mistake.

He then compounds his error: "Another office, that of *deacon*, is the name for a family servant."⁵⁷ Not according to Bauer or Kittel, it isn't. It means simply *servant*. It usually refers in Greek literature to someone who waits on a table, just as its context indicates in Acts 6. The author in Kittel lists six general uses for the term in the New Testament: waiter at a meal, servant of a master, servant of a spiritual power, servant of Christ, servant of God, servant of the church. He offers no example of household servant (vol. II, pp. 88–89). It is always dangerous to base an important theological point on an appeal to grammar. It is sometimes legitimate, but risky. When you do this, make sure there is at least some grammatical evidence.

Rushdoony goes on: "Furthermore, the training for government in church, state, and other areas is in Scripture essentially within the family."⁵⁸ A statement of chronological fact is not a judicial standard for holding office. That we learn lots of things in our families is incontrovertible. This sociological fact has no judicial implications unless the Bible says it does. The Bible does not say what Rushdoony here says that it does.

Ministers

Rushdoony includes a section on ministers. One would expect this section to be on the church office to which men are

56. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, translated by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (4th ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1952] 1957), pp. 706–7.

57. *Systematic Theology*, p. 683.

58. *Ibid.*

ordained by a special rite. At first, church office seems to be his focus. He refers to two words which he says are translated "minister": *leitourgos* and *huperetes*. "The main word used, however, is a third one, *diakonos*, servant, deacon, minister, attendant."⁵⁹ This is very peculiar argument. The diaconate, founded in Acts 6, is usually classified as a separate ecclesiastical office under the authority of elders. Rushdoony says that this is the main word used for minister in the New Testament. That the ordained ruler in the institutional church is to minister to others is not a major grammatical breakthrough. We are all to minister to each other. This, too, is a common interpretation. The question still remains: What is the distinction between the ordained minister and the non-ordained church member? Both of them are supposed to minister to others. The difference is this: *one of them has been ordained by the laying on of hands*. He has received his authority from God through a judicial act. But Rushdoony prefers to avoid discussing judicial ecclesiastical acts.

He continues: "To restrict the *ministry* to the pastor, elders, or deacons is not warranted by Scripture, and is a form of Phariseeism."⁶⁰ I know of no Protestant theologian who has ever argued that the word *ministry* in the New Testament always refers to a judicial office. Usage and context determine the correct translation. Does Rushdoony mean by *ministry* the general priesthood of all believers? Or does he mean an ordained ministerial office? He refers here to mutual assistance. Fine, but what about the ordained office of minister which is established in Scripture by the laying on of hands? Paul wrote to Timothy: "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery" (I Tim. 4:14). Rushdoony does not discuss this in his section on ministers. He goes to section 12, presbyters.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 703.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 705.

There is a hidden agenda here. The use of “minister” in the New Testament usually refers to a specific officer, the office of elder. This has been its meaning in church history. People today think “church officer” or “preacher” when they hear the word “minister.” They have done so since the apostles’ time. Why confuse Christians at this late date? *Because he rejects church authority.* He says: “To make men ministers of the church is to make the church their master.”⁶¹ He says that nowhere in the New Testament is the phrase “minister of the church” ever used. Grammar again. But what is his theological point? He admits that the New Testament does use the phrase *minister of God*. He offers no citations, but thanks to my electronic concordance, I pinpointed two examples: I Thessalonians 3:2 (church) and Romans 13:4 (state). The latter is the significant one: it refers to the civil magistrate and his right to enforce order through sanctions. *The minister of God is the sanctions-bringer.* So, once again, we find that Rushdoony is being tricky, playing the role of an expert in Greek in order to deny the obvious: that an ordained minister of God in the church possesses lawful authority to impose sanctions, as surely as the anointed minister of God in the state does.

My knowledge of Greek is as good as Rushdoony’s, which is to say abysmal. I took Greek in college and seminary and forgot most of it thirty years ago. Rushdoony took Greek in seminary and forgot most of it fifty years ago. We are probably about even. (We are both far better at Greek than Hebrew.) But we can both use Strong’s numbers, an *Englishman’s Greek Concordance* (I use a computerized version), and academic New Testament dictionaries and lexicons. Beware of the theologian who introduces an innovative new interpretation through the use of tricky new grammatical interpretations.⁶² Make him prove his point apart from grammar.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 704.

62. I call this the “Thieme Temptation” or “Thiematic Illusion.”

Presbyters

He briefly discusses elders, presbyters, and bishops. Then he adds this comment: "Our concern here, however, is less with the *office* and more with the *function*. Our thinking is much too colored with the world of Greco-Roman thought and the priority of emphasis on *office*."⁶³ This is a rhetorical ploy: blaming pagan Greco-Roman thought for an idea that has its origins in the traditional, *universal* interpretation of the orthodox churches, i.e., that church office is the primary focus of the words *presbyter* and *bishop*. He is forthright: he is not very concerned about judicial office; he is extremely concerned with function. This is the heart of his ecclesiology: the substitution of broad kingdom functions for specific church office. Why? One reason is money. Once he switches from judicial office to function, *and persuades the reader that the sacraments are not a monopoly of the institutional church*, he then lays claim to the tithe.⁶⁴ The underlying practical issue is access to the tithe. He conceals this concern by what appears to be a legitimate concern over function.

"In Scripture, both *office* and *function* are spoken of as God's calling."⁶⁵ So what? I have a calling. I do not have a claim on any Christian's tithe. He asks: Who is a bishop? Not a novice, he says.⁶⁶ A man of experience, he says.⁶⁷ A man of good reputation. But most of all, a teacher. "Such a function is assumed to be a task of the bishop or presbyter. What Paul here stresses is the aptitude and the ability to teach." So, a bishop is primarily a teacher. So is Rushdoony. (Think *tithe*.) Gone is the *Institutes'* discussion of the early church's bishop as a regional pastor to local presbyters (p. 745). What is glaringly absent is the suggestion that a presbyter or bishop is a *sanctions-bringer*.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 706.

64. For a critique, see North, *Tithing and the Church*, Part 2.

65. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, p. 707.

66. *Ibid.*

67. *Ibid.*, p. 708.

Finally, the sacraments. He refers back to the Passover. It had a teaching function. True enough. "Too often, of course, there is teaching in neither the sermon nor in the sacrament, but, properly, both are aspects of the teaching ministry."⁶⁸ True enough. But who possesses a monopolistic claim to this teaching ministry? The Bible is clear: church-ordained men.

There is something missing in Rushdoony's exposition. You should know what it is by now: *a discussion of church discipline in relation to the sacraments*. Rushdoony in 1984 still accepted the three marks of the church: preaching, sacraments, and discipline. But where is his discussion of the last function, an ecclesiastical responsibility? Absent. He had by 1984 totally abandoned Calvin's doctrine of the church – and almost everyone else's.

Rituals

He then moves to ritual. He returns to his familiar theme: Greek thought vs. the Bible. "As we have seen, the distinction between the word and the sacraments is, from the perspective of Scripture, an invalid one. It rests on a humanistic distinction with rationalistic roots."⁶⁹ Wrong! *The distinction between word and sacrament is the distinction between stipulations and sanctions*. The preached word declares God's requirements for man; the sacraments apply God's sanctions to church members. But why such concern over a supposedly false distinction between word and sacrament? Next, he introduces a supposed distinction between ritual and ceremony.⁷⁰ Why? He offers no examples, no footnotes. Who makes this distinction? What relevance does it have for a discussion of the sacraments? This is all a jumble.

He moves to philosophy: form vs. matter. What has this to do with the sacraments as being the same as the word? Then he gets to the point. A ritual is a good thing. For example, "it is a

68. *Ibid.*, p. 709.

69. *Ibid.*

70. *Ibid.*, p. 710.

ritual for a man to kiss his wife before leaving for work. . . ."⁷¹ This is "a minor humanistic ritual," as he says. But God requires rituals, he says. "Baptism and communion are thus clearly rituals. . . . Furthermore, ritual cannot be limited to the sacraments. All worship involves ritual. Grace said before and after meals is a ritual."⁷² Yes, yes, yes, but so what? *Judicially speaking, so what?* The theological question is: In what way is a sacrament not the same as kissing your wife in the morning? Even more important for someone who argues, as Rushdoony does, that the sacrament of baptism and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper are family rites, *how are these sacraments different from the ritual of sex?* This is the problem of familism and **fertility cult religion**. Judicial distinctions between common rituals and the sacraments are not "Greco-Roman"; they are biblical.

What is missing in Rushdoony's discussion of ritual is the crucial covenantal mark: *an oath*. There are lots of rituals, but only certain ones possess the unique judicial character of being *oath signs*. Baptism is one; the Lord's Supper is the other. They are rituals; they are also judicially distinct from all other New Covenant rituals. They have eternal judicial authority. Other church rituals do not. But Rushdoony does not so much as hint at these judicial distinctions, yet Rushdoony is known for his commitment to biblical law. There is a hidden agenda here.

Hands and Wallets

Under the section on "The Laying on of Hands," Rushdoony writes: "The sacraments are unique and exclusive ordinances of the Lord."⁷³ Notice what he does *not* say: that they are unique and exclusive ordinances of *the institutional church*. This calculated omission makes a huge difference for theology.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 711.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 712.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 716.

Who is the officer who can lawfully include and exclude people from the Lord's Table? *He who has had hands laid on him in ordination.* Rushdoony knows this, but in a discussion of the laying on of hands, he refers back to Numbers 8, where the children of Israel laid hands on the Levites. The Levites then laid hands on bullocks. The bullocks were then killed. He concludes: "The Christian pastor is a Levite; his task is a continuation of that office, and hence the laying on of hands was retained in the New Testament, and in Christendom."⁷⁴ (False.)

The error in this argument is two-fold. First, in the New Testament era, laymen do not lay hands on would-be ministers; other ministers do. (In 1973, Rushdoony insisted that pastors in no way derive their authority from laymen.)⁷⁵ Second, and far more important, pastors are not Levites today. Through Jesus Christ, the high priest, they are priests after the order of Melchizedek. The New Testament is adamant about this:

And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him. If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec (Heb. 7:9-17).

74. *Ibid.*, p. 717.

75. *Institutes*, p. 748. He called the church a monarchy, not a democracy.

Central to Rushdoony's ecclesiology is the question of the tithe. He argues that the Levites performed social services. (True.) This was their claim to the tithe. (False; guarding the temple was: Numbers 18:22-24.) So, those Christians who also provide social services today have a lawful claim on men's tithes. (False.) He argues that the Levites performed many social services, "providing godly education, music, welfare, and necessary godly assistance to civil authorities."⁷⁶ (True.) Thus, he concludes, it was their provision of these social services that justified their collection of the tithe. (False.) The Levites did not possess a legal claim on the tithe. (False.) If they failed to provide these cultural services, Israelite church members had an obligation to cut them off financially. (False.) We still have this obligation. (False.) "Since the tithe is 'holy unto the Lord', it is our duty as tithers to judge that church, mission group, or Christian agency which is most clearly 'holy unto the Lord'."⁷⁷ As a Christian, I judge which church I should belong to; once I join and am under its authority, I owe it my tithe. I no longer possess authority over this money. It belongs to the church.

He writes: "This tithe belongs to God, not to the church, nor to the producer."⁷⁸ This observation is irrelevant for any discussion about allocating the tithe. Of course the tithe belongs to God; everything belongs to God (Ps. 50:10). The question is this: What *institution* possesses the God-given monopolistic authority to collect the tithe from covenant-keepers? That is, which *institution* possesses the God-given authority and responsibility to pronounce God's negative sanctions against someone who refuses to pay? The biblical answer is obvious: *the church*. Rushdoony disagrees with this answer. He wants to remove from the institutional church any legal claim to the tithe.

76. Rushdoony, "The Foundation of Christian Reconstruction," in Rushdoony and Edward Powell, *Tithing and Dominion* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1979), p. 9.

77. Rushdoony, "To Whom Do We Tithe?" *ibid.*, p. 30.

78. Rushdoony, "Tithing and Christian Reconstruction," *ibid.*, p. 3.

Authority

Then what about church discipline? This is the missing piece of the puzzle in Rushdoony's ecclesiology. He denies that the Mosaic priests ever possessed such authority. "A careful examination of the Old Testament gives no evidence of any governing power over men by the priests of Israel; that such a power developed later, is an aberration, not an aspect of Biblical law. Authority did exist among priests, some ruling over others, because authority is common to every realm. It is not a specific attribute of any one realm."⁷⁹

This is fishy – six days in the pantry in summer fishy. If the priesthood had no authority, then who was it who cut people off for their rebellion? The phrase, *cut off from their people*, appears over and over in the Mosaic law. This sanction was not imposed by the civil magistrate. It refers to excommunication. It was imposed by the ecclesiastical government. The following were not capital offenses. The state had no authority to impose sanctions in these cases. Perhaps God might; the state did not.

Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel (Ex. 12:15).

Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses: for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a stranger, or born in the land (Ex. 12:19).

But the soul that eateth of the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings, that pertain unto the LORD, having his uncleanness upon him, even that soul shall be cut off from his people (Lev. 7:20).

79. *Systematic Theology*, p. 725.

For whosoever eateth the fat of the beast, of which men offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD, even the soul that eateth it shall be cut off from his people (Lev. 7:25).

And if a man shall take his sister, his father's daughter, or his mother's daughter, and see her nakedness, and she see his nakedness; it is a wicked thing; and they shall be cut off in the sight of their people: he hath uncovered his sister's nakedness; he shall bear his iniquity (Lev. 20:17).

And if a man shall lie with a woman having her sickness, and shall uncover her nakedness; he hath discovered her fountain, and she hath uncovered the fountain of her blood: and both of them shall be cut off from among their people (Lev. 20:18).⁸⁰

But the man that is clean, and is not in a journey, and forbearcth to keep the passover, even the same soul shall be cut off from among his people: because he brought not the offering of the LORD in his appointed season, that man shall bear his sin (Num. 9:13).

Rushdoony's thesis regarding the non-authority of the priests is incorrect. But why did he make this particular error? We are back to the third mark of the church, discipline. Rushdoony's ecclesiology rests on a near-silence regarding excommunication. This silence is intentional.

He immediately moves from the supposed lack of a unique, God-given judicial authority of the special priesthood to the topic of the priesthood of all believers.⁸¹ This evasive action is necessary because he has just denied the unique authority possessed by men ordained as special priests, as distinguished from general, born-again priests. If authority is common to every realm, then the special priest is not uniquely authorized

80. Rushdoony's explanation of this verse is especially interesting: *Institutes*, pp. 427-30. He connects menstruation, ovulation, and living water.

81. *Systematic Theology*, p. 725.

by God to bring unique judicial sanctions – *covenantal sanctions* – against general priests. This is a very important thesis for Rushdoony's later ecclesiology: *no judicially valid excommunication of general household priests by special ecclesiastical priests*. Furthermore, if public excommunication is not a valid threat, then neither is *self-excommunication*, such as personally abstaining from the Lord's Supper in a local church for over two decades.

Persuading people of this has been one of Rushdoony's hidden agendas for ecclesiology since the early 1970's. Only as time passed did this agenda become less hidden.

Baptism

Rushdoony begins his discussion of baptism with a sneer against the church: "The subject of baptism is a highly controversial one, and, unhappily, an area of thinking where the church has suffered from hardening of the arteries."⁸² The imagery of old age is obvious: the poor, doddering old church, sclerotic, hard of hearing, tired all day long, and probably getting up twice during the night to relieve its bladder. But Rushdoony has forgotten his postmillennialism: the church advances as it grows older. Rushdoony's rhetoric is the rhetoric of a man who has contempt for the development of every theology other than his own. When a man challenges the entire history of orthodox theology, as Rushdoony does with respect to baptism, he should do so in fear and trepidation.

He sees Baptism as a covenant sign, which it is. But affirming covenant in general is not sufficient. *A covenant sign must be administered*. Which institution has been granted this monopoly by God: church, state, or family? For two almost thousand years, the church's answer has been clear: the church. This opinion, Rushdoony says, is a sign of the hardening of the church's arteries. "Baptism is a covenant fact. The church has

82. *Ibid.*, p. 730.

converted it into an ecclesiastical fact. Circumcision in the Old Testament is a family rite, because the family is the primary covenant institution; the family gives birth to and rears the child."⁸³ *But physical birth is Adamic; Adam's sons need adoption.*

Was circumcision a family rite? No; it was an ecclesiastical, priestly rite. The head of a household may have administered this rite as a household priest in a nation of priests (Ex. 19:6). If so, was this done in his judicial office of father or priest? The issue here is covenantal authorization. The question of covenantal authority is easy to decide. Answer this question: *Who possessed the sole authority to annul the rite of circumcision by the excommunication of covenant-breakers?* The answer is obvious: a Levitical priest, not the father. Covenant-breakers were to be cut off. The phrase, "to cut off," as we have seen, refers to formal excommunication. This phrase is graphically related to circumcision. It is surely also related judicially.

How do we know that the father did not possess this authority? Because *excommunication* mandated family *disinheritance*. But a father had no authority to disinherit his son. "If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the first-born son be hers that was hated: Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn: But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his" (Deut. 21:15-17). If he could not disinherit the hated wife's son, surely he could not disinherit the loved wife's son. Rushdoony commented on this passage several times in *Institutes of Biblical Law*, but he failed to make the judicial connection linking circumcision, excommunication, and disinheritance. All were exclusively priestly acts.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 732.

As a household priest, the father may have circumcised his sons. We are not told this specifically regarding the Mosaic era. Surely, without specific revelation, we should not draw revolutionary ecclesiastical conclusions from the mere possibility that the father circumcised his son. But if he did, he did so a delegated agent of the Levitical priesthood. He did not retain the authority to excommunicate, i.e., judicially revoke the covenant. This points to the two-fold judicial reality of circumcision. It was priestly in two senses: general and special. First, the father representatively invoked the covenant oath in the name of his son through the rite of circumcision. He had a lawful role as a father: a general Israelite priest (Ex. 19:6). Second, in invoking the covenant oath, he affirmed the law of the covenant. As a general priest, perhaps he could lawfully do this. But a special priest of the tribe of Levi, not the head of the household, would determine whether the circumcised son met the stipulations of the covenant: confession of faith and outward obedience to God's law. This identifies both sacraments as ecclesiastical.

Having defied the entire history of the church by proclaiming baptism as a family rite, Rushdoony then condescendingly announces: "Having said all this, let me add that much of the church's teachings on baptism are [*sic*] very important. The error has been to limit its implications to the society of the church, and membership therein."⁸⁴ This is as persuasive as a statement from some dedicated socialist: "Having said all this, let me add that much of the Austrian School economists' teachings on the free market is very important. Their error has been to ground their system on the idea of private property."

Communion

Having announced the transfer of the authority to baptize from the church to the marital family, he immediately moves to a discussion of the Lord's Supper. He begins: "As we have seen,

84. *Ibid.*, p. 734.

baptism is in to [*sic*; he means *into*] the covenant of our God."⁸⁵ This was never a matter of dispute. What is a matter of dispute is which covenantal agency possesses the right to baptize. This is a dispute between Rushdoony and (in round numbers) all the theologians in the history of the church.

He writes: "Like baptism, the Lord's Table or communion is rooted in the Old Testament, in the Passover."⁸⁶ He appeals to Jesus: "Our Lord's institution of this rite came with the Passover celebration and with His interpretation of the meaning of Passover as fulfilled in Himself."

Let us pursue this assertion for a moment. The move from Passover to the Lord's Supper came in the upper room on the night before Jesus' crucifixion, as Rushdoony affirms in *Institutes of Biblical Law*.⁸⁷ Let me ask an obvious question: Where were the wives and children of the apostles? Peter had a mother-in-law (Matt. 8:14); presumably, he also had a wife. His wife was not in the upper room, nor was his mother-in-law, who dwelt in his household. Unless Rushdoony is ready to affirm the celibacy of the apostles, he faces a monumental problem: *Passover was in no way a family rite in the sense of a marital family*. The Head of a new household of faith administered the rite that night. This household was *confessional*. Something radical had taken place in the exterior form of Passover that night, but not judicially. *Jesus did not violate the Mosaic Passover*.

Unless the Lord's Table was a judicially radical break with Passover – which Rushdoony denies – then this change in outward form points to an inescapable conclusion: the judicial-covenantal agency of final authority over the Passover was never the marital family. To the extent that the family administered certain aspects of this rite, it did so, as in the case of baptism, under authority delegated from the priesthood. The

85. *Ibid.*, p. 735.

86. *Ibid.*

87. *Institutes*, p. 46.

Lord's Supper honors this judicial fact. The special priesthood of the institutional church still possesses authority over the rite; the general priesthood is still subordinate. This was always the case judicially in Mosaic Israel; the Lord's Supper makes this judicial reality visible to all. But some people refuse to see.

Rushdoony has remained silent about the implications of this transformation of outward celebration. Had he ever discussed the change in celebration, he could not readily have come to this conclusion: "As we examine the Lord's Table or eucharist from the perspective of Scripture, we must recognize that it is the Christian Passover. The Passover of Exodus is a family rite; it was oriented to admitting the smallest child able to speak and understand into the joy of salvation and the meaning of salvation (Ex. 12:21-27). It is no less a family celebration in the New Testament; the family is now Christ's family."⁸⁸

Judicially, this statement is correct, but it proves the opposite. The Lord's Supper is no less a family celebration than Passover was under Mosaic law because, judicially speaking, *Passover never was a rite under the authority of a marital family*. It was always a rite of **God's adopted family**: the institutional church. This is why all the families of Israel had to journey to a central location to celebrate Passover (Deut. 16:6-7). Passover in Israel was never celebrated at home. It was celebrated outside the geographical jurisdiction of a family's tribe because it was celebrated under another tribe's authority. This authority was national because it was Levitical: the tribe of Levi. *It was therefore under the authority of the special priesthood*. The eleven non-priestly tribes could not claim any originating authority over Passover. This means that the general priesthood of Israel, i.e., members of the eleven non-Levitical tribes, could not lawfully administer Passover apart from the presence of the special priesthood: the Levites. Like King Jeroboam (I Ki. 12:25-33), Rushdoony ignores this. Jeroboam, however, was not a familist.

88. *Systematic Theology*, p. 736. In *Institutes*, he called it a family service (p. 752).

We return to the question of excommunication. No one who had been excommunicated could lawfully attend Passover. The physical mark of circumcision was judicially irrelevant; the officially declared judicial status of the excommunicate was the only relevant legal issue. Only the Levitical priesthood had the authority to excommunicate. Furthermore, the father or other household head did not have the authority to invite an excommunicated son or daughter to celebrate the Passover. The excommunicate was considered covenantally dead. (Orthodox Jewish sects continue to this day to have public burials of those sons who have converted to a rival religion.)

Blood Covenants and Sacramental Marriage

In his chapter on the covenant, Rushdoony affirms: "Because of God's covenant law, blood is central to the doctrine of the covenant."⁸⁹ This is an accurate statement. The question is: *Whose blood and whose covenant?*

At long last, we come to the heart of Rushdoony's new theology, which is a variation of a very old theology. It may be the second oldest theology in history. It is **a theology of blood**, as all of Christianity's meaningful rival religions must be. Historically, there have been two forms of self-conscious, explicit blood covenants: biblical religion and patriarchalism-familism. Biblical religion affirms the necessity of shedding the blood of a judicially clean representative sacrifice: the sovereign mediator. Patriarchalism-familism also affirms the judicial authority of a sovereign mediator: the head of the household. It places family blood ties over all other bonds. You are about to read the most dangerous and misleading sentence in Rushdoony's career.

The family is a blood tie; communion celebrates the body and blood which makes us one family.⁹⁰

89. *Ibid.*, I, p. 386.

90. *Ibid.*, II, p. 737.

Recall what he wrote in preparation for this announcement. He asserted the authority of the marital family over the two covenant oath signs: baptism and communion. He transferred the locus of authority over the covenant signs from the institutional church to the marital family, in which husband and wife seek to produce a blood line (procreation). He self-consciously and explicitly challenged the church's entire history regarding the sacraments. He did not cite a single creed, confession, or theologian to defend his position. He forthrightly announced the centrality of the marital family as the covenantal institution on which the other two rest. Now he invokes the language of a blood covenant. *But the judicial context of the marital family is sexual bonding!* Therein lies the enormous theological danger.

This is not a product of theological confusion on his part. He has been thinking about this for years. He is not some backwoods preacher who has never read a treatise on theology or a history of ancient religion. He has self-consciously transferred the covenantal authority based on the blood of Christ from the institutional church to the original Adamic bloodline: the marital family. He does define the Christian church in terms of the blood of Christ, but then he identifies the administrative agent of the church's covenantal signs: the marital family.

Amazingly, he then invokes Calvin's authority: "Calvin, in discussing 'the Lord's Supper and Its Advantages,' declared it to be a family rite: . . ."⁹¹ He quotes Calvin's *Institutes*, Book IV, Chapter vxii, Section 1: "After God once received us into his family . . . he also undertakes to sustain and nourish us as long as we live. . . ." Rushdoony is clever. He is also wrong.

Rushdoony is being tricky with words again, but this time in English. The word *family* is the same, but the judicial content of the word is different in Calvin's system. Rushdoony is speaking of a family which is defined by a marriage oath. Calvin is also speaking of a family, but one defined by a confessional oath.

91. *Ibid.*

The question is: *How are the two oaths confirmed?* The marriage oath is confirmed one time only: by physical consummation of the partners. The church's oath is also confirmed one time only: by baptism. This is the heart of Calvin's judicial theology of baptism. But Rushdoony has denied the authority of the institutional church to seal the ecclesiastical oath, yet only by baptism can the church's oath be sealed. In Rushdoony's patriarchalism, the institutional church is stripped of its judicial authority to bind its members by oath. This authority belongs to the head of the marital family's household. But if there is no way to bind an oath, on what basis can any covenantal institution legally impose its sanctions? Here is the dilemma: *no sanctions – no oath. The institutional church becomes impotent.*

Another point is crucial: there is no judicial means of renewing a marriage covenant. This is what distinguishes the family judicially from both church and state. In the state covenant, there is covenant renewal by confirming a new ruler, e.g., voting. In the church covenant, there is renewal through formal worship – specifically, by taking the Lord's Supper. *But there is no biblical method of renewal for the marital covenant.* This is because families are temporary and temporal. A family covenant is broken through death of one spouse, either physical death or covenantal death. There is no permanent covenant bond between parents and children, which is why children are instructed to leave their families in order to establish new families (Gen. 2:24). The biblical family is a nuclear family.

Rushdoony's system denies that there is no means of covenant renewal for families, for in his system, the Lord's Supper is a family rite. By stripping the institutional church of its rite of covenant renewal, Rushdoony transfers it to the family. This is the judicial basis of his patriarchalism-familism. This is why his doctrine of the church is in fact a doctrine of the patriarchal family, a revival of the very worldview that Jesus warned against (Matt. 10:35–37). But this monumental theological error is not readily apparent to those who do not think covenantally.

Rushdoony traces the priesthood to Abraham. He then ignores what Abraham did with respect to his own authority. After Abraham had transferred the family inheritance to Isaac when Isaac married Rebecca – symbolized by Isaac’s possession of his mother’s tent (Gen. 24:67) – he departed forever (Gen. 25:6). He married and started a new family (Gen. 25:1–4), but these heirs were outside the covenant established by God (Gen. 15–17). Abraham gave Isaac everything (Gen. 26:5). It should be obvious what was going on: a transfer of the promised inheritance to the promised covenant line. Abraham’s blood did not secure an inheritance for Ishmael or the sons of Keturah. He had served lawfully as a household priest under Melchizedek, but only with respect to the covenant of promise. Circumcision secured nothing for Ishmael or the sons of Keturah.

The Lord’s Supper is indeed a family rite, but the designated family is the institutional church. (This was also true of Passover in the Mosaic era.) It is a rite for adopted sons and daughters who have been removed, by God’s grace, out of the family of Adam and into the family of Jesus Christ. The blood covenant of every human family other than the family known as the institutional church of Jesus Christ is an Adamic covenant, a covenant of judicially cursed blood. To be excommunicated by the institutional church – the marital family possesses no such authority, and never has – is to be sent out of the family of Jesus Christ back into the family of Adam: from life to death.

In this context – Rushdoony’s assertion of the family as the administrator of the sacraments – read his statement again: “The family is a blood tie; communion celebrates the body and blood which makes us one family.” This is disastrous. With the institutional church stripped of its authority over baptism and communion, *this statement opens the door to paganism*. Rushdoony’s theology of the **sacramental marital family** substitutes a blood covenant whose oath is confirmed by sexual union in place of a blood covenant whose oath is confirmed by priestly baptism.

Rushdoony is no longer a Calvinist, but he has read Calvin. He acted for over two decades as though he fully understood and believed Calvin's warning about being present at the communion table but refusing to participate. Calvin wrote: "Whoever does not partake of the mysteries is wicked and shameless to be present there. I beg of you, if anyone, invited, comes to a banquet, washes his hands, reclines at table, and seems to get ready to eat, and then tastes nothing – does he not dishonor both the banquet and the host?"⁹² Rushdoony apparently took these words to heart, for he removed himself from any local congregation for over two decades prior to 1991. He ceased taking the Lord's Supper. But in late 1991, he declared a new home church and began serving communion to his family and employees, including the divorce-seeking Dolly Thoburn.⁹³

Excommunication

We have now arrived at the place where the theological rubber meets the ecclesiastical road. Every lawful covenantal institution is authorized by God to require an oath as the basis of membership. This oath invokes God's blessings and cursings. God lawfully brings blessings and cursings on whomever He chooses, as the Book of Job teaches. It was this book that made Rushdoony a Calvinist, he informed us in his first book.⁹⁴ But through His covenants – individual, ecclesiastical, familial, and civil – God establishes regularity: generally predictable blessings for obedience, cursings for rebellion.

All three institutional covenants are hierarchical. Members are under the jurisdiction of officers. The question of institutional authority is this: *Who has the authority to impose which sanctions in terms of which rules?* If there are no sanctions, there is no

92. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV:vii:45, p. 1423.

93. North, *Tithing and the Church*, pp. 156–60.

94. Rushdoony, *By What Standard? An Analysis of the Philosophy of Cornelius Van Til* (Tyler, Texas: Thoburn Press, [1959] 1983), p. 189.

covenant, for every covenantal oath invokes sanctions. To deny the presence of sanctions is to deny the covenant.

What is the institutional church's final sanction? Excommunication. But Rushdoony has already identified the family as the judicially authoritative administrator of the sacraments. He has denied church sanctions for non-attendance. *Then what authority remains to the institutional church?* His patriarchal theology makes this question inescapable, but he steadfastly refuses to answer it. He finished *Systematic Theology* in 1984, but he has yet to publish anything that would even hint at how this question could be answered within an orthodox theological framework.

The Keys of the Kingdom

Jesus said: "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:18-19). Here is Rushdoony's theological challenge: explaining the institutional church's possession of the keys without admitting that the institutional church possesses the sole authority to baptize, admit people to the Lord's Supper, and excommunicate.

He takes a clever but futile approach: defining the keys in terms of the authority to interpret the Bible rather than law-enforcement through excommunication. "*Fourth*, Our Lord spoke of the *keys of the kingdom*. The keys are an old Hebraic symbol for the power to interpret Scripture. . . . *Fifth*, the binding and loosening power is not legislative but ministerial."⁹⁵ But in the *Institutes*, he wrote of ministerial authority as the authority to excommunicate (pp. 768-69). He has changed.

95. *Systematic Theology*, p. 756.

Judicial authority in history flows to those who participate in the Lord's Supper. Jesus made it clear in his discussion of the Lord's Supper that by participating in this communal meal, the participants would eventually judge Israel. Yet access to rulership within the church is by service. Jesus linked three things: service to the church, participation in the Lord's Supper, and the authority to render judgment, *which means imposing sanctions*.

And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is **chief**, as he that doth **serve**. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth. Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may **eat and drink at my table** in my kingdom, and sit on thrones **judging the twelve tribes of Israel** (Luke 22:25-30; emphasis added).

Rushdoony understands the meaning of sanctions. He prefers not to emphasize them, but he cannot avoid the topic. He quotes Matthew 18:15-20 as a unit. If they are a unit, they are a unit in terms of a *judicial unity*: the institutional church. This removes the possibility of patriarchalism. But if this unity is denied in order to make possible patriarchalism, then everything after "Again I say" loses its character as judicially binding.

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on

earth shall be loosed in heaven. **Again I say unto you**, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them (emphasis added).

He asserts that this passage “is normally wrenched out of its context.”⁹⁶ He offers no citation to anyone who has wrenched these verses out of context. He continues: “The vv. 15–20 are usually seen as the classic text on church ‘discipline,’ and, unhappily, by discipline men usually mean punishment or chastisement. The key concept in the word *discipline* is disciple, a very different idea.”⁹⁷ Here he does it again: he bases his theology on a fine point of grammar – a non-existent point.

According to Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, the Greek word for disciple indicates a master-servant relationship, either philosophically or religiously. New Testament usage indicates a highly personal relationship (vol. IV, pp. 441–42). The disciple was a man under authority. Simple.

Because they were under Christ’s absolute authority, the disciples were given power over the supernatural: “And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease” (Matt. 10:1). Imposing negative sanctions against demons and positive sanctions on the physically afflicted was Jesus’ way to persuade them and others of the authority that God gave to them. Since they were all under the threat of eternal judgment – as Judas discovered (Luke 22:22) – they were given power to impose sanctions. But Rushdoony does his best to avoid the obvious conclusion: *discipline* and *disciple* are linked biblically in terms of *sanctions*. The disciples were under covenantal sanctions, so they

96. *Ibid.*, p. 757.

97. *Ibid.*, pp. 757–58.

could bring visible sanctions, which served as public confirmation of their covenantal authority under God.

Rushdoony protests – against whom, he does not say: “It is much wiser to see this chapter as a whole in terms of a mandate to effect *restoration*, and, failing that, to proceed with *separation*.”⁹⁸ This is a conventional interpretation of church discipline, as Matthew 18 indicates: at every step of the process, the goal is restoration. But the final earthly incentive for church members to restore relations between each other always rests on the church’s possession of sanctions: the keys of the kingdom. Christians cannot escape from the church’s sanctions.

The fundamental covenantal question is this: *Does the institutional church possess these keys exclusively?* Matthew 18:15–18 emphatically says *yes*. Rushdoony refuses to say one way or the other in this section: “*Fourth*, separation is excommunication, separation from the table of the Lord and from its fellowship.”⁹⁹ This is correct, obvious, and partial. *Who imposes this sanction?* At this point, he returns to his early assertion of the unity of verses 15–20. He invokes verses 19–20: “Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” But if there is *textual unity*, it must be a *judicial unity*.

Who Are We?

Pay very close attention to what has to be the trickiest sleight-of-word trick in Rushdoony’s long career. He adds the key word, *we*. “*Fifth*, in terms of these ministerial powers, we have great authority, of binding and loosing. If two or three gathered together in Christ’s name, either as a church court or as simple believers, agree on something in faithfulness to Scrip-

98. *Ibid.*, p. 758.

99. *Ibid.*

ture, we can bind and loose men.”¹⁰⁰ A hierarchical ecclesiastical appeals court system in Matthew 18:15–18 has now become two or three people – which could include women – handing down binding judicial pronouncements.

I ask: To whom? On what judicial basis? Ordained by what judicial court? With what further appeals court above them? With the authority to exclude from whose communion table?

Rushdoony’s assertion is so bizarre that he feels compelled to add: “Now normally this is a function of church authorities.”¹⁰¹ Normally? Do I understand by this that occasionally a couple of people can get together and hand down binding judicial pronouncements? This is what he says.

To measure the degree of absurdity here, consider his interpretation in terms of a civil court. There must be a trial. In whose court? In terms of whose law books? By which precedents? Interpreted by what judge? And who will impose the sanctions? A couple of citizens who get together in society’s name? Apart from radical anarchism, who would propose such a judicial system? It would lead to warlordism: the triumph of the most powerful group. *Warlordism is patriarchalism in the civil realm*. But he affirms patriarchalism in the ecclesiastical realm.

It gets worse: “There is a ministerial binding and loosing required of all of us. We cannot refuse to excommunicate someone because we are attached to them [*sic*].”¹⁰² We? Who are we? His words are clear: “all of us.” He adds: “If two men have this power, how much more the church?” But two men – and on what basis could he here exclude women? – do not have this declaratory power. Church members are not allowed to go around handing down excommunications apart from a church trial. Neither are family members.

100. *Ibid.*, pp. 758–59.

101. *Ibid.*, p. 759.

102. *Ibid.*

He asserts a judicial unity: the keys are possessed by small groups. Because he places the authority to offer the sacraments in the family, he envisions tens of millions of little groups meeting together as churches. But if there is unity between the two passages – verses 16 to 18 (keys) and verses 19 and 20 (small groups) – then this unity has to be sacramental and unique to the institutional church. Without the authority to administer the sacraments, the little group of two people cannot possess the authority to bind or loose anyone, for it does not possess the keys of the kingdom. It is merely a sort of prayer group.

He is evading the ultimate judicial question: *Which court constitutes the authorized court that represents the broader church as a kingdom?* He has said that we – “all of us” – have the right to excommunicate people. He has also said that the family administers the sacraments. But then the two or three people have to be bound by a marital oath. How can three people be bound by a marital oath? So, the two or three people cannot refer to a family. But he has already said that the family administers the sacraments. On what judicial basis, other than delegated authority from a church? But then the family is under the institutional church. Yet if the family is under the institutional church, and the church does not possess the right to administer the sacraments, on what basis does the institutional church excommunicate anyone? Rushdoony’s ecclesiology is a jumble.

What is **ordination** in Rushdoony’s theology? It does not appear in the index of *Systematic Theology* (or *Institutes*). In the section on “The Laying on of Hands,” he discusses Levitical sacrifices. He does not mention the exclusivity of church office. In *Institutes*, he said ordination is for every calling (p. 742).

Those of us who worked for Chalcedon early in our careers were far too tolerant of this weakness in his theology. Toward the end of his *Institutes* (1973), after he had resigned from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (1970), he announced his new ecclesiology, but only in a brief passage: “It is the law of God, not the church, which binds or looses men, and only as the

church faithfully declares the law is there any true binding or loosing."¹⁰³ But he would not identify what he meant by *church*. He had ceased attending any local church by this time, and he had ceased taking the Lord's Supper. The ultimate church sanction, excommunication, he had voluntarily imposed on himself. He was outside the local body of Christ.

He identified in the *Institutes* two infractions that are worthy of excommunication: failure to support your family financially and fornication.¹⁰⁴ Both are assaults against the family. But what about false doctrine? All he said in 1973 was that we are to avoid such people.¹⁰⁵ He did not mention formal excommunication. We should have seen what was brewing: patriarchalism. His 1973 view of church sanctions was a significant departure from his 1968 book on the creeds, *Foundations of Social Order*, in which he repeatedly praised anathemas by the church: "The modern distaste for anathemas is a disavowal of the faith. No man can affirm a faith if he affirms its opposite, nor can he defend a faith without waging war against its enemies. No unbeliever or heretic can be converted unless he be first recognized as an unbeliever rather than a brother under the skin. The anathemas are thus basic to creedalism."¹⁰⁶ He ceased to talk this way after he ceased talking the Lord's Supper. Perhaps he will return to his praise of anathemas now that he is receiving communion again: from himself.

Too Many Excommunications

In Chapter 18, "Authority," he returns briefly to excommunication. He doesn't like it very much. The modern church excommunicates too many people. (How many people has your

103. *Institutes*, p. 619.

104. *Ibid.*, pp. 771-72.

105. *Ibid.*, p. 772.

106. Rushdoony, *Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, [1968] 1978), p. 26.

church publicly excommunicated in the last, say, two decades?) Reminder: Rushdoony has spent his entire career attacking mercilessly (and justly) the modern church's apostasy. Now he writes: "By contrast, let us look at the over-governing church, the church whose gospel is excommunication."¹⁰⁷ Got that? *The over-governing Protestant church in the late twentieth century*. He then returns to the non-existent grammatical difference between discipline and disciple: "Excommunication has its place in the life of the church, but not as a substitute for discipling."¹⁰⁸ He announces a law I cannot seem to find in the Bible: a church that frequently excommunicates people is a weak church. "Indeed, a heavy use of excommunication indicates commonly the lack of a sound teaching ministry. Coercion replaces teaching and covers up the failure of the ministry. Coercion not only replaces teaching but also the Holy Spirit."¹⁰⁹ (Covenant-breakers in the church will applaud this!) "For the church to take the same coercive route is to despise its teaching ministry and to treat with contempt the power of the Holy Ghost. Authority is *not* gained by putting on a garb or by the fiats of a consistory[,] session, presbytery, or board but by putting on Christ, by being under his authority."¹¹⁰

If this were true – and there is nothing in the Bible to indicate that it is true, nor does he cite any other author in this section ("Man's Relationship to Authority") – it would still not answer the crucial question: *Which agency possesses the exclusive authority to excommunicate?* If there is no exclusivity, then every time two or three people are gathered together in Christ's name, someone's right to the Lord's Table could be at risk. But such sporadic gatherings confer no authority to make judicial pronouncements. The attempt by any little prayer group to do

107. *Systematic Theology*, p. 1141.

108. *Ibid.*

109. *Ibid.*, p. 1142.

110. *Ibid.*

so would lead to their participants' excommunication for abusing their authority and misusing Christ's name: a violation of the Third Commandment.

Then who possesses this authority? Rushdoony devotes pages 669 to 783 to the doctrine of the church, but he refuses to address this problem. It is obvious why: to have followed the logic of his position – the family as the lawful administrator of the sacraments – he would have been compelled to reveal in great detail the judicial implications of his patriarchalism. He was not ready to do this in 1984. I doubt that he is ready to do it today. He should. His followers deserve to know these details.

The Inferior Sort

Then what of his own ministry? If numerous excommunications are, as he says, evidence of a ministry's contempt for the power of the Holy Ghost, then what of Chalcedon's long list of former writers? What of me, Greg Bahnsen, James Jordan, David Chilton, Edward Powell, and Gary Moes, all of whom left Chalcedon just as we arrived: fired with enthusiasm. Perhaps it was this anomaly that Rushdoony was addressing in the June, 1994 issue of *Chalcedon Report*:

Someone wrote to ask how I chose our Chalcedon scholars. (I wish I had the funds to hire many more.) I only want men who are in their fields as good or *better* than I am in mine. The persons I have had problems with have proven to be inferior *and* prone to run the lives of all the rest of us!¹¹¹

First, Chalcedon employs full time only one other man recognized as a scholar, Otto Scott. Second, there were other "inferiors": his audiotape producers, David Graves and then Chuck Wagoner. (Rushdoony's daughter now runs this business.) Cora Mae Melby ran Chalcedon's day school. (His son

111. Rushdoony, "Random Notes, 35," *Chalcedon Report* (June 1994), p. 40.

now runs the school.) There is a pattern of replacement here, one consistent with his patriarchal ecclesiology.

There is another way to explain the departure of Chalcedon's underpaid scholars. (I was paid \$12,000 a year in 1975 and had no benefits – retirement, health care.) He seeks out theologians or men with theological insights, but such men are almost always church members. Otto Scott has been the only exception. There is an inevitable tension between a committed church member and an employer who insists on a formal Calvinist orthodoxy on the part of his senior staff, but who does not attend church and who has abandoned the Lord's Table.

Function Without Judicial Authority

What Rushdoony despises is the suggestion that the institutional church possesses binding judicial authority. In the final paragraph of his chapter on the church, he lashes out against the very concept of church offices. "We tend to speak of church *offices*, and we ascribe dignities and honors to these offices, in plain violation of our Lord's words (Matt. 20:25–28). What we call church offices are rather callings to a function in the workings of Christ's church. The emphasis in *office-holding* is on *status*, whereas the emphasis in Scripture on *callings* in the church is on *service and action in Christ*. The difference is a very great one. The church as an institution stresses office and status; the church as the Lord's property stresses faithfulness, service, and praise."¹¹² Problem: this difference does not exist. Rushdoony relies far too often on arguments based on unsupported either/or distinctions that only he has perceived.

A church officer has a calling, serves the church ("feed my sheep"), possesses authority to impose sanctions, and has status. Paul warned: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and

112. *Systematic Theology*, p. 782.

doctrine" (I Tim. 5:17). It could not be clearer. It takes a hidden agenda to blind someone's eyes to this. The Bible is clear: *he who lawfully administers the sacraments possesses both office and status*. Where control over the sacraments is concerned, status is an inescapable concept. The question is: Who lawfully possesses this status? Second, how is the office attained, through marriage or through the laying on of hands by church officers?

The covenantal question is judicial: Are there God-ordained officers in the institutional church who possess the exclusive authority to baptize, serve communion, and excommunicate? Rushdoony answers *no*. He transfers this authority to heads of households – presumably men, but not necessarily. While he never discusses it, his patriarchal theology inescapably authorizes the ordination of women, i.e., widows and divorcees.

He says that his concern is with function, not institutions. "It should be apparent by now that our concern is less with the church as an institution and more with the church as the witness to and the evidence of the life and the work of the triune God in history."¹¹³ This seems like a strange statement in a book titled, *Systematic Theology*, in a chapter titled, "The Doctrine of the Church." But it is not strange at all. Rushdoony has for almost forty years refused to present a covenantal theology of the institutional church. From the day of his divorce in 1956 until the present, Rushdoony has been unwilling to put into print his view of the *judicial* basis of the institutional church, its covenantal oaths, its exclusive authority over the administration of the sacraments, its power to excommunicate, and its offices.

Self-Excommunication

Rushdoony's view of the church has affected his doctrine of the sacraments. He neglects – and his exposition necessarily denies – the sacramental basis of the local church's authority to

113. *Ibid.*, p. 777.

collect the tithe and enforce discipline. Holy communion in his ecclesiology becomes a mere fellowship meal, and a household meal at that. "As against an empty rite, Christian fellowship in Christ's calling, around a table, is closer to the meaning of the sacrament."¹¹⁴ But if the judicial rite of the Lord's Supper is not backed up (sanctioned by) the promise of eternal sanctions, both positive and negative, then it is truly an empty rite: *judicially* empty.

Rushdoony's post-1973 published view of the institutional church is non-covenantal: the local church as a fellowship without judicial sanctions rather than an institution possessing the judicial keys of the kingdom. He has even insisted that a church has no lawful authority to discipline those members who refuse to attend its worship services: "We are urged not to forsake 'the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is' (Heb. 10:25), but the church is *not* given authority to punish those who do."¹¹⁵ Then who is? Only God, apparently. There is supposedly no appeal beyond the individual's conscience: *the "divine right" of a non-attending church member.*

Then what judicial authority does the institutional church possess? In Rushdoony's latest view, none. What meaning does church membership have for Rushdoony? Less than membership in a local social club, which at least can require the payment of dues for full membership. In Rushdoony's theology, a local flower arrangement society possesses more authority over its members than a local church possesses over its members.

Rushdoony's view of church discipline represents a fundamental break from the history of the church, including the theology of the Protestant reformers and especially Calvin. Rushdoony insists (without any citations from the Bible) that a Christian has the God-given authority to remove himself indefinitely from a local congregation and cease taking the Lord's

114. Rushdoony, *Law and Society* (Vallecito: Ross House, 1982), p. 129.

115. Rushdoony, "The Nature of the Church," *Calvinism Today* (Oct. 1991), p. 3.

Supper, but without ecclesiastical judicial consequences to himself. This necessarily implies that *self-excommunication*, a form of excommunication, is not an actionable offense within the church. He has long practiced personally what he has now begun to preach publicly. He knows exactly what he is saying.

But there are no covenantal vacuums. *He has replaced the sacramental church with the sacramental family.* He has replaced Calvin's theology – adoption into Christ's covenantal family, mediated sacramentally by the institutional church – with what he claims is the same covenantal family, but mediated through sacraments administered by the marital family.

By transferring authority over the sacraments from the institutional church to the marital family, Rushdoony has abandoned Christian orthodoxy and has reverted to the theology of ancient patriarchalism. He has sought to baptize patriarchy by arrogating to the head of the household the right to baptize and serve communion as an agent of the family rather than as an agent of the institutional church. But the covenantal oath of the marriage bond is legally confirmed only through the physical act of consummation. This is the judicial basis of marriage. Rushdoony makes marriage the legal basis of the lawful administration of the sacraments. To put it bluntly but quite accurately, *Rushdoony's ecclesiology substitutes the physical act of sexual consummation for the physical act of the laying on of hands.*

The conquest of Canaan by Israel was God's way of demonstrating to all mankind His total rejection of the cult of the family. Rushdoony's attempt to transfer authority over the sacraments from the institutional church to the marital family is heretical. He has imported the covenantal categories of the cult of the family. Van Til warned against any attempt to join Jerusalem with Athens. Even more outlandish is any attempt to join Jerusalem with Jericho. The cult of the family and the biblical doctrine of the church are alien categories, but Rushdoony's ecclesiology attempts to mix them. It is doomed.

As one example of the inevitable confusion that such a covenantal mixture produces, consider a very real possibility that Rushdoony never mentions. If the head of the household can lawfully administer the sacraments, what if she is a widow with only minor sons? Because primary authority in Rushdoony's system is based on biological eldership within a marital family, the husband's death transfers his judicial office to his wife. *Rushdoony's version of patriarchy can become matriarchy.* If the vision of a household priestess administering the sacramental rites seems suspiciously similar to Canaan and its cults, there is a valid theological reason for this suspicion.

There are many hidden agendas in Rushdoony's doctrine of the church, but the one that has been the most hidden is also the oldest one: the ecclesiastical implications of his divorce and the voluntary departure of his three older children with their mother in 1956. His pastorate never fully recovered; he quit in 1962 to write full-time. That the Orthodox Presbyterian Church allowed him to retain his ordination after 1956 is not relevant to his formal ecclesiology. After he left the OPC, he dismissed the "Orthodox Pharisees Church" (OPC) for its "endless nit-picking about trifles."¹¹⁶ What is relevant for his ecclesiology is his insistence that I Timothy 3 must govern ordination to the eldership, which is a family office in his system. Somewhere in his writings there needs to be a discussion of the consequences for ordination of a divorce and the open rebellion of half of a man's children. This is not too much to ask of someone who has publicly dismissed the church's teaching on baptism as proof of the church's "hardening of the arteries."

Rushdoony's failure to answer this crucial judicial question reflects his inability to deal with it personally. Decade by decade, his refusal to face this problem undermined both his ministry and his theology. The result is his *Systematic Theology*.

116. Rushdoony, *God's Program for Victory* (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, 1977), p. 9.

Sanctions Applied

God defends His church. Rushdoony attacked it after 1973. There were immediate sanctions. Pick up a copy of one of his early books. Read a chapter. You will be impressed by its clarity, its comprehensive, wide-ranging documentation, and the power of his logic. I recommend *The Messianic Character of American Education* and *Freud* as the best examples of his abilities as an essayist. Read *Institutes of Biblical Law*. The footnotes are impressive; so are the number of new insights per page.

Then pick up anything he published after 1973: *Law and Society* or *Salvation and Godly Rule* or *Systematic Theology*. The chapters are short. ("Short" hardly does justice to *Law and Society*, which is subtitled *Volume II of the Institutes of Biblical Law*. The book's text is 726 pages. There are 160 chapters and 11 appendixes: four pages per essay.) The footnotes in the later books are sparse, and they invoke non-scholarly sources compared to the sources cited in his early books: a handful of Bible commentaries and religious encyclopedias. The vast reading he has done over the years is not reflected in anything he published after 1973. Rather than a series of tightly knit scholarly essays, which his early books were, his chapters after 1973 are loosely joined paragraphs connected far too often by unsupported assertions, such as his undocumented appeals to what he claims are fine points of Greek grammar.

He used to write about history: *This Independent Republic*, *The Nature of the American System*, and *World History Notes*. He no longer does. The closest thing to a history book after 1973 was his Australian lecture series, *The "Atheism" of the Early Church* (1983), a 100-page pocket book.

He used to write about the philosophy of education. Compare *Messianic Character* (1963) with *The Philosophy of Christian Curriculum* (1981), which features a slide rule on the cover (a great collector's item these days: technologically outmoded by the hand-held calculator after 1972).

He used to write about political theory: *Politics of Guilt and Pity* (1970) and *The One and the Many*. Today he writes brief *Chalcedon Report* essays against this or that government disaster.

He used to write about theology. Compare *The Foundations of Social Order* (1968) to *Systematic Theology*.

He quit the OPC in 1970. He was given an ecclesiastical umbrella by a tiny Episcopal denomination in 1974. The quality of his writing immediately began a long descent. I believe this decline was a visible sanction: a terrible price that he paid for his refusal to submit to the discipline of local church membership and his refusal to take the Lord's Supper. I believe this visible sanction was applied to the very heart of his ministry: his ability to write. His errors regarding the doctrine of the church got much worse after 1973. His rhetoric against the institutional church became confrontational, culminating with the church as a mummy factory (1991). His books and articles became more and more disjointed. Those of us who were attracted by the power of his insights before 1974 have watched in horror as his published materials have deteriorated year after year.

Some reader may think that I am exaggerating. I challenge the skeptic: compare any Rushdoony book published prior to 1973 with any book published after. Read two chapters in each book. Then decide.

It is not a matter of IQ or not working hard. He is as smart and as active a reader as ever. Age, perhaps? The decline began by 1974 when he was 58 years old. I conclude: sanctions.

Conclusion

Here is a my recommendation: go to church, tithe to it, and take the Lord's Supper. Not too radical a conclusion, is it? Warning: don't start your own home church. Don't ordain yourself. Above all, don't serve communion to yourself.

I write this in response to a brand-new newsletter, *Our Home Church* (Spring 1994), issue #1, which was begun with Mr. Rushdoony's blessing by the Emmaus Project of Friends of

Chalcedon. Specifically, I am writing in response to his essay, "The Reason for This Newsletter." It reveals, once again, his move from Calvinism to Anabaptism. His essay never actually mentions ordination or the sacraments in his essay, but a church has to have sacraments to be a church. If there are no sacraments, it is not a home church; it is a Bible study.

Start a home church, he says, even if you already belong to a local church, because the clergy and church agencies have failed. "In some instances, where the groups are still tied to their church, their efforts are welcomed as a revitalization of the church; in other cases, the classes are resented. In any case, they are growing, and they are an evidence of a major development: the work of Christ's kingdom is seen as the responsibility of every Christian, not something to be relegated to the clergy and to the church agencies."

Rushdoony has taken a traditional Protestant doctrine – *every redeemed man a priest* – and has made it pastoral: every redeemed man – if he is the head of household – a pastor. (And every redeemed widow, too? If not, why not?) When two or three are gathered together, etc. Of course, these will be very, very tiny churches: approximately one per household.

I think Rushdoony has been consumed by his contempt for the clergy. I think this process of internal self-immolation began in 1956: the day his wife departed from his jurisdiction with half of his children. He did not resign from the ministry on that day, despite Paul's clear warning: "For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" (I Tim. 3:5). He has never spoken publicly about this event, but I contend that his writings on the church have constituted one long self-justification for his decision to remain officially an ordained pastor: after 1974, in a distant two-congregation Episcopal denomination. He refused to join a local congregation or take communion. It was in 1956 that he began his progressive self-excommunication – his functional excommunication of the entire institutional church. No local

church has been able to meet his rigorous standards since 1965. All of them have been, to quote him in another context, "inferior *and* prone to run the lives of all the rest of us!"

This may be an oversimplified explanation of the historical origin of his doctrine of the patriarchal home church, but at least it rests on a biblical standard (I Tim. 3:5). One thing is sure: the origin of his doctrine of the patriarchal home church cannot be found in anything written by an orthodox theologian, as his footnotes (or absence thereof) surely testify. Except for a handful of Anabaptists, the entire church stands against him. He wisely chose not to cite Anabaptists as his authorities.

In the *Institutes*, Rushdoony discussed the eldership in much the same way as he has since then, but his patriarchalism was very muted. He recommended that an elder use "his home as a center for a study group, a little home-church, as a nucleus for a new congregation."¹¹⁷ This sounded legitimate, rather like the small group meetings that have proven successful in building churches and leaders. But when you do not view the eldership as a unique ecclesiastical office conveying the right to administer the sacraments, the concept of a Bible study (Chalcedon's 11 a.m. Sunday meetings, 1968 to 1991) can become a patriarchal home church (serving the sacraments after 1991). A home church is judicial, not merely functional, but Rushdoony today refuses to discuss the institutional church in terms of judicial categories; always he seeks to reduce the ecclesiastical to the merely functional. This is *reductionism*, but with a purpose: to undermine the institutional church and its offices and to transfer the church's sacramental authority to the family.

I close this book with a pair of comments on Hebrews 10:25, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." First, Rushdoony's comments: "We are urged not to forsake 'the assembling of

117. *Institutes*, p. 750.

ourselves together, as the manner of some is' (Heb. 10:25), but the church is *not* given authority to punish those who do."¹¹⁸ Second, Calvin's comments:

It hence appears that the origin of all schisms was, that proud men, despising others, pleased themselves too much. But when we hear that there were faithless men even in the age of the Apostles, who departed from the Church, we ought to be less shocked and disturbed by similar instances of defection which we may see in the present day. It is indeed no light offence when men who had given some evidence of piety and professed the same faith with us, fall away from the living God; but as it is no new thing, we ought, as I have already said, to be less disturbed by such an event. But the Apostle introduced this clause to shew that he did not speak without a cause, but in order to apply a remedy to a disease that was making progress.¹¹⁹

I agree with Calvin. Needless to say, I do not agree with Rushdoony. Concerning the doctrine of the church, it is impossible to agree with both of them. You have to decide which one you will honor. You cannot honor them both. But many of Rushdoony's disciples will try. The cult of the family still has great appeal in an era in which the family is under assault from the messianic state and covenant-breaking society.

The cult of the family has a weak link: the family's covenant, unlike the institutional church's covenant, cannot be renewed. Children depart to establish new families (Gen. 2:24), which ends the patriarch's covenantal authority over them (Gen. 26:1-6). *The family cannot be made sacramental without making it a cult, a substitute for the institutional church.* For those who refuse to abandon home communion, there are sanctions in history (I Cor. 11:30). These sanctions are real. They will be applied.

118. "The Nature of the Church," *Calvinism Today* (Oct. 1991), p. 3.

119. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, [1549] 1979), p. 241.

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