

THE INSTITUTES OF BIBLICAL LAW by Rousas John Rushdoony. The Craig Press, Nutley, N.J. 897 pp.\$18.00 **Reviewed by the Rev. Francis Nigel Lee**, scholar in residence, Christian Studies Center, Memphis, Tenn.

This latest book by one of America's most prolific Calvinist writers is not only the fruit of years of painstaking research and the crowning glory and logical capstone of his many previous stimulating though lesser works, but it is also of very great value to the Church in our own present age of confusion because it gives us clear directives as to how to live the Christian life successfully in both the private and public spheres of life.

One of the greatest needs of God's people today is surely the necessity to develop a viable program for the extension of Christianity in the Church, the family, government, economics, and indeed on all other fronts too. Rev. Rushdoony's book would meet this need, with its detailed application of the Ten Commandments to all of these areas.

It convincingly argues that the Decalogue was by no means "nailed to the cross," but is still God's unchangeable moral law for all people of all religions and for all times. His detailed discussion of the binding nature of the law in the case of the woman taken in adultery (John 8), for example, is superb.

A most thought-provoking feature of the book is the author's constant incorporation of almost all the Mosaic laws into his New Testament program by subsuming them under the various branches of the Decalogue. Thus the jubilee (Lev. 25) is again advocated in terms of the fourth commandment; the condemnation of the state's eminent domain (Exo. 19) in terms of the eighth commandment; and trial by ordeal (Num. 5) in terms of the ninth commandment.

Not all readers will agree with Rushdoony's New Testament advocacy of the Old Testament dietary laws, the dowry, and the Levirate, etc. Nor will there be general agreement with his statements that Rahab's lying in order to save lives was devoid of sin; that covenantal infants should be admitted to the Lord's Supper; that the Church of Armenia was correct in sacrificing animals after the pattern of the Old Testament laws; and that the eldership is all-embracing and not just limited to ecclesiastical affairs.

But it cannot be gainsaid that his attempts to develop a future-oriented program for victorious Christian living in every area of life here and now on this present earth from the Mosaic laws rather than from "natural law" or from "general revelation," does have the great merit of being objectively verifiable in terms of (Mosaic) Scripture.

As such, Rushdoony's views in this book are relatively free from the personal subjectivity that so often characterizes attempts to construct a Christian life and worldview by analyzing the structure of sin-cursed "creation" (that is, nature) rather than by seeking to derive it from sinless Scripture.

The author is sometimes rather harsh in his differences with Luther and Calvin, the Westminster Standards and modern Reformed scholars and Churches. He is sometimes also rather too uncritical in his not sufficiently qualified praises of the Talmud and of Judaism. His treatment of the second commandment neglects all mention of the Romish use of images and the mass in Churches.

His chapter on the fourth commandment denies the observance of the Sabbath before the Exodus—thus undermining that institution’s foundation as a creation ordinance for all men everywhere—while an appendix (by his son-in-law Gary North) on “the Economics of Sabbath-Keeping” is frankly somewhat antinomian.

Rushdoony’s book, although perhaps the best modern book we have yet seen on the socio-politico-economic implication of the Ten Commandments in English, is not quite of the doctrinal caliber of the similar standard works of Geesink and Smeenk. Nevertheless, the book is highly important.

Although nearly always silent on pre-Mosaic Biblical principles of conduct, it seeks to uphold God’s permanent moral law most courageously in our modern world and its social life. The book unquestionably proceeds from a very high regard for the abiding didactic value of all the Scriptures in general and of the Mosaic law in particular. Now for the first time, the Christian is offered a positive program for victory here and now in this present world of ours and on all fronts. Highly recommended!