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Gary North, RIP

Craig Bulkeley - February 26, 2022

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When Gary Kilgore North passed away on February 24, 2022, at the age of 80, he left behind a massive storehouse of Christian scholarship without parallel in the modern church. For nearly fifty-five straight and solid years he applied himself as a craftsman with single-minded devotion to researching, writing, and speaking about God's world from the perspective of God's Word. While he lived his work benefited his large readership around the world. For generations to come it will be of great use to the Church of his Lord Jesus Christ.

The Formative Years

North was born in 1942 to Peggy North, a homemaker, and Sam W. North, a World War II veteran and FBI Special Agent. In the idyllic "American Graffiti" era of 1950's southern California, he excelled in high school and developed skills in research, writing, public speaking, and photography. He served as president of the school's California Scholarship Federation chapter and was elected to the statewide office of "Superintendent of Public Instruction" at California's prestigious Boys State. In his senior year he was elected president of the student body of 2000 students. He also learned business and music working at the local record store. Under his father's influence, he developed a healthy sense of discipline and responsibility that he carried throughout life. North's experiences in his youth helped develop in him a sense of self-confidence. At the age of 18 he came to faith in Jesus Christ which led him at the age of 21 to devote his career to the development of biblical economics.

While a student at the University of California, Riverside, North became increasingly more aware of the essential connection between various social and academic ideologies and their foundational philosophical and theological principles. In the spring of 1962 he read R. J. Rushdoony's *Intellectual Schizophrenia: Culture, Crisis, and Education* (1961). It was a penetrating critique of public education and a systematic dismantling of the notion of academic neutrality. After corresponding they later met at an academic conference where Rushdoony was teaching on economics. The following year Rushdoony hired him as a summer intern with the newly formed Center for American Studies. North lived that summer and the next with the Rushdoony family. His job, for a good salary, was to read full-time. He read Murray Rothbard's *Man, Economy, and State* (Fall 1962), *The Panic of 1819* (1962), and *America's Great Depression* (Spring 1963). He learned the monetary and free market theory of Ludwig von Mises and Austrian economics. He also attended a conference that year where Mises was teaching.

Having completed his undergraduate work in history North did a year of graduate work at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. There he studied under Cornelius Van Til, the godfather of anti-neutrality. Rushdoony had shaped his books on education from Van Til's early essays on education.

North returned to UCLA in the fall of 1964 but within a month became disillusioned with the prevailing Keynesianism and Chicago School economics. In the spring of 1965 he transferred back to the University of California, Riverside, to study history, specializing in economic history and Puritan New England. His summer reading had prepared him for the work. He also studied Western intellectual history and social theory under Robert Nisbet who later held a distinguished chair at Columbia University. He completed his dissertation, *The Concept of Property in Puritan New England, 1630-1720*, and in 1972 received his Ph.D.

The Cultural Crisis

But North can be rightly understood only by understanding the times in which he lived. By the mid-1970's, now in his thirties, North saw clearly that America was far down the fast track of radical transformation and on its way to ruin. The tranquil 1950's had given way to the turbulent 1960's and been transformed into the full-blown chaos of the 1970's. Vietnam raged. Decades of Keynesianism and Socialism were crippling the economy. Nixon resigned in disgrace in 1974. While the U.S. Supreme Court had banned Bible reading and prayer from public schools in the early 1960's, in 1973 it doubled down, overturned state laws across the country, and legalized the killing of babies in the womb. Organizations like the National and the World Council of Churches were promoting "situational ethics" and an apostate "Christianity" throughout America's mainline churches. Having been taught not to bother polishing brass on a sinking ship, Bible-believing Christians and conservatives were watching the world they took for granted be dismantled before their eyes as they waited for the Rapture. Society's bedrock foundations were crumbling and the whole social structure with it. The rot was going to the roots and it was bearing very bad fruit.

North (and Rushdoony) saw and understood the crisis and were on the leading edge of working not only to expose the unbiblical ideologies driving this transformation but, more importantly, to articulate the biblical foundations, principles and blueprints necessary for a revived social order. Rushdoony had already established the *Chalcedon Foundation* in 1965. In February 1967 North published his first article for pay. It appeared in *The Freeman*, the monthly magazine of the Foundation for Economic Education (FEE), the only libertarian think tank at the time. *The Freeman* was mailed to some 25,000 readers. It was the first of literally thousands and thousands of articles he would write over his career.

Other organizations were beginning to emerge in an effort to stand against the onslaught of the antagonist atheism. In 1972 Phyllis Schlafly founded *Eagle Forum*. In 1973 *The Heritage Foundation* was established by Ed Fuelner and Paul Weyrich. In 1974 Howard Phillips founded the *Conservative Caucus* and Weyrich started the *Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress*, later called the *Free Congress Foundation*. In 1976 Bill Richardson founded the *Gun Owners of America* and in 1977 the near century-old NRA redirected its focus to politics. In 1977 Pat Robertson launched the CBN cable network and Dr. James Dobson founded *Focus on the Family*. In 1978, Beverly LaHaye established *Concerned Women for America* (10 plus years behind the *National Organization of Women*, founded in 1966). In 1979 Falwell and Weyrich founded the *Moral Majority*. Not to be overlooked, in June of 1974 the remnant of Austrian school economists, including North, Rothbard, Henry Hazlitt, Milton Friedman and many others, met in Vermont. In the face of a relentless humanism, conservatives and Christians were beginning to organize and take action.

But the Christians had some limitations. Generally they had a common **goal**: live as lights in a dark world and pray "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done." They also generally shared a common **motive**: love of God and your fellow man, particularly by sharing the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. But in the area of content or **standards** they had little of real substance to offer. "The Bible has the answers for all of life," was the common refrain. But other than the general command to "love," the Christians had few if any specific biblical

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answers and solutions to offer for the myriad of specific problems facing society on so many fronts. Christians – the Church – had come to take for granted the predominantly Christian character of their culture and were almost wholly ignorant of the biblical principles on which it was built. More rigorous analysis and deeper study of the Bible had to be done in order to set forth those truths.

Rebuilding on Biblical Foundations

In September 1971, North joined the senior staff of FEE. When Leonard Reed, FEE's founder, informed him that any money he made writing or speaking would have to go to FEE, North decided he would not stay long.

In 1972 he married R. J. Rushdoony's daughter, Sharon. He would say that if it were not for her, "you probably would never have heard of me" and "the only reason that I was successful was that my wife was patient with this lifestyle." Understanding her father's intense academic lifestyle, she could adapt to and support North in his. In addition to being committed to their children and providing an excellent family environment, she was an excellent accountant and operations manager.

In March of 1973 Sharon suggested he write an economic commentary on the Bible, verse by verse. After 4 years of work on the project and believing the pace to be inadequate, he took a vow. To complete the work he would devote 10 hours a week, 50 weeks a year, until his 70th birthday. He was then 35 years old.

In the spring of 1974 he and Sharon also began publishing a newsletter at the suggestion of someone who heard him speak at a conference. They named it *Remnant Review*, a testimony to be faithful in the calling and trust in the promises of God. Around 1976 North founded the Institute for Christian Economics and began publishing through it. He handled the writing. Sharon handled production (subscriptions, printing, filling envelopes, mailing, and even running the mechanical dog tag stamping device for addresses). She did it until the mailing list approached 2,000 subscribers. She also kept track of the money, never losing a dime.

In 1977 North published his first direct-mail book. It was based on a compilation of *Remnant Review* issues. His ad for the book led to the sale of some 20,000-30,000 copies from 1977-79 at \$10 each (\$40 in 2022). Those sales led to 2,000 subscribers. In 1979 he wrote another ad. It grew the list from 2,000 to 22,000, at \$60 (\$245 in 2022) per subscriber. He had become one of the few economists (and historians) actually making "real money" from his knowledge of economics and history.

His newsletter led to a job in Washington on the staff of one of his subscribers, a medical doctor from Texas named Dr. Ron Paul who had been elected to Congress. He hired North. Later in 1976 Paul lost reelection by 268 votes out of 192,802. North helped close down his office at the end of what would be just the first of Dr. Paul's many terms in Congress.

North continued to produce. At the core were his convictions concerning certain fundamental truths.

First, man is God's creation and inescapably subject to his authority. He is in a covenantal relationship with his Creator and, therefore, the status of that relationship is of absolute and paramount importance. As a consequence of his sin, he became an enemy of God and a stranger in God's world. But based on Jesus's perfect life and on his death, burial and resurrection, God brought redemption to anyone who would call upon him in repentance and faith. Based on the finished work of Jesus Christ alone, God would declare a condemned sinner forgiven and righteous and renew his relationship with his Maker.

Second, God had made man free and designed him to fulfill the Creation Mandate: subdue the earth and have dominion over it. Though the "first Adam" and his posterity failed because of sin, the "second Adam," Jesus, would succeed. He would redeem his people, restore them to their created calling, and empower them by his Spirit to fulfill that mandate throughout the world on his behalf and to his glory ("Dominionism").

Third, North believed that Jesus gave his disciples the Great Commission to make disciples and teach throughout the world all that God had revealed. Jesus declared that he had "all authority" in heaven and earth and that he would build his church and even the gates of hell could not stop it. Based on his Word and promise, despite the conflicts and troubles in the world, the nations of the earth would eventually bow before the King of kings, and his kingdom would be realized in history in significant measure and on a vast scale before his return ("Postmillennialism").

Fourth, North believed that God's Word governed all of life and that mankind would either suffer or be blessed in rejecting or following it. Whether it concerned man in his psychology, sociology, economics, philosophy, history, science or any other area, the Bible was the absolute standard. No professor, politician or "public intellectual" knew better than the Bible. This applied even in the areas of the political order and the law ("Theonomy" – God's law).

Based on these truths, man was called to engage in the great task of working to see the fallen world reconstructed to God's glory according to the Bible ("Christian Reconstruction"). North was committed to this calling.

As North would work out these principles in his writing, chief among his influences were Cornelius VanTil (philosophy/theology), Rushdoony (law), Ludwig von Mises (economics), John Calvin and John Murray (theology), and Robert Nisbet (social theory). Each was an exceptional scholar and produced critical writings with tremendous insight. North would follow in their train and his production would be nothing less than astounding.

It is noteworthy that among those influences, neither Mises nor Nisbet were professing Christians. What concerned North was not whether one claimed to be a Christian; there was no shortage of ministers and so-called Christian academics promoting unbiblical teaching like evolution, Keynesianism, and socialism. What was critical was the quality of the scholarship and whether the ideas the individual taught were consistent with the Bible or provided valuable information and insight to help understand it. In so many areas the writings of Mises and Nisbet did this. The same could be said for scholars like Rothbard, Harold Berman, Jacques Barzun, Martin van Creveld, James Billington, Thomas Sowell, Walter Williams, and so many others whose work North admired.

North made great strides in laying out the biblical foundations, principles and blueprints for a revived social order.

As Marxism was becoming entrenched in American universities in the 1960's, North wrote *Marx's Religion of Revolution* in 1968. In 1972 he began to consolidate his views on economics and published *An Introduction to Christian Economics*. In 1976 he published and edited *The Foundations of Christian Scholarship: Essays in the Van Til Perspective*. It was a groundbreaking collection of essays by PhDs and experts in a variety of disciplines: economics, psychology, sociology, history, education, political science, mathematics, theology, and philosophy. Each had as its central focus the truth that the Bible, God's revelation, was the ultimate standard for understanding each field. No field was "neutral." None, ultimately, was even understandable apart from that revelation. Even when they did function in some measure, they had in fact borrowed and presumed biblical truths despite their formal antagonism to Christianity.

North continued to produce *Remnant Review* and eventually brought it under his website *GaryNorth.com* which he began in 2005. Over its 17 years North published four articles a day, six days a week, every week. The range of topics was encyclopedic and topics were treated in depth and detail. With his 23,000+ articles he was constantly trying to encourage his readers to excel in their jobs and callings, provide insights and

tools to help them do it, and give them a greater understanding of their relationship to the movement of history. His website also had active and robust forums where subscribers could and would engage with him and each other on how to apply the information to their individual circumstances.

Amazon's *Alexa* service ranks the popularity of websites, of which there are estimated to be over 200,600,000 that are active. The lower the number the more popular the website. Ranked lower than 500,000 (top .25%), the website has some influence. Lower than 200,000 (top .1%), it is significant. Lower than 100,000 (top .05%), it is widely read and influential. Before North's illness bore down on him, his website ranked around 36,000 (top .018%). No website for any evangelical news magazine, news site, theological seminary, church denomination, or publisher was even close. Only John McArthur and John Piper, now established in well-staffed and promoted organizations (*Grace to You* and *Desiring God*), had similar web traffic. Among web magazines, only the 66-year old socially liberal and marginally evangelical *Christianity Today* had similar web traffic. *Ligonier Ministries* ranked around 80,000. Few were ranked lower than 150,000, and most, far higher, some near 2,000,000. As to time spent by visitors on the websites, the numbers are not even close. Readers of North's website spent five to seven times more time on his than readers did on any of the others.

In addition to his newsletter and website, North published almost 100 books, half of which he wrote. Most he financed with his own money. The vast majority of what he published he has provided to the public free of charge at *Free Christian Educational Resources*, <https://www.garynorth.com/freebooks/>.

In 2012, after nearly 40 years of work on the project, North fulfilled the vow he had taken in 1977 and completed his 31 volume economic commentary on the Bible. It was a remarkable achievement, accomplished only with resolute commitment. He then synthesized his years of economic study into six volumes: *The Covenantal Structure of Christian Economics* (2015, 2018), and a four volume series titled *Christian Economics: Vol. 1: Student Edition* (2017, 2020), *Vol. 2: Teacher's Edition* (2017, 2020), *Vol. 3: Activist's Edition* (2017, 2020), and *Vol. 4 (in 2 volumes): Scholar's Edition* (2020). His books just on economics can be found here: <https://www.garynorth.com/public/departments180.cfm>.

North also wrote extensively on history. Among his many books was the masterpiece *Crossed Fingers* (1996), a 1000-page detailed account of deceit used by theological liberals to capture the northern Presbyterian Church during the 20th Century. Ever a lover of footnotes North provides over 900 in just the first 300 pages.

To beat it all, North was a superb writer in every respect and a treat to read.

With his practical understanding of Austrian and Keynesian economics, North also knew how to interpret and benefit from market conditions. Just one example will suffice. When between 1999 and 2002 England's worst Chancellor of the Exchequer in a thousand years persuaded the nation to systematically sell off 401 tonnes of its 715-tonne gold supply for an average price of \$275 per ounce, North told his subscribers to buy. They bought. By the time of his death, gold was over \$1,900.

North was also a frequent contributor to the two primary organizations that promoted Austrian economics and libertarian ideas. He provided many articles for the popular website *LewRockwell.com* and was a frequent speaker at the Mises Institute, particularly for its gathering of young scholars. His lectures on Mises, Keynes, and Rothbard alone were exceptional. The increasingly higher profile of the Mises Institute and Lew Rockwell's website encouraged North that it was only a matter of time before defective ideas would fail and sound ideas would prevail.

Aware of the dismal condition of public education, North was also concerned that young people have access to top quality curriculum. After Ron Paul ended his service in government and his final campaign for President of the United States, he and North reunited to establish *The Ron Paul Curriculum*. Paul had spoken to massive crowds and received over 2,000,000 votes in the 2012 presidential primary. Families across the country would be eager to have their children educated consistent with the fundamental biblical principles Paul was articulating. North could create the material and organization to provide that education. Recruiting the teachers, preparing his own courses, and running the institution, North created an online K-12 school that has trained thousands of students across the country.

North's interest in educational curriculum was not limited to grade school. Even up to his final months, he was working on plans to create a free seminary curriculum designed particularly for pastors working in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa.

North was also concerned about evangelism. His 2005 website *Sustained Revival: A Comprehensive Plan for a Comprehensive Christian Revival*, provided material focusing on that work. <https://www.garynorth.com/public/departments132.cfm>.

North was also concerned to help those in financial trouble. For people wanting to get out from under the weight of debt he developed the website *Deliverance from Debt*, <https://deliverancefromdebt.wordpress.com/>. While he lived in the areas of Tyler, Texas and Memphis, Tennessee, he worked with *Kairos Prison Ministry International*. Some prisoners were soon to be released. Others would never be released. He taught them the gospel and that wherever they might be God had valuable work for them to do and they could serve him anywhere. During that same period he worked with a ministry that helped people learn how to get and keep a job.

Advice for the Future

North followed some important principles that enabled him to stick to his knitting, stay out of trouble, and be as productive as he was. At least 11 are worth mentioning. They are applicable to everyone.

First, a person must know his life's calling: the most important thing he can do in which he would be most difficult to replace. North settled on his early: developing the field of biblical economics.

Second, remember the prophets. Isaiah's job was to speak even when people would not listen and the work appeared fruitless. Elijah's job was to speak even when he seemed to be the only one left. Jeremiah's job was to speak but still conduct business (buy the land) knowing God's plan for the future will prevail.

Third, forget trying to be in the "Inner Ring," as C.S. Lewis called it. Do not yearn to be in the "in" group. There really isn't any inner ring.

Fourth, stick to your knitting. Do not get sidetracked. Press on.

Fifth, work to serve. Meet a need. Provide or do something useful. If someone will pay you for it, better still. Provide it for free if needs be, particularly if it's consistent with your calling.

Sixth, discipline your time. It is the one resource that cannot be replaced. Once it's gone, it cannot be recovered.

Seventh, strive to be the best, but don't worry if you are not No. 1. There is plenty of room at the top for success and every expectation that you will surpass your peers if you simply apply yourself wisely and stick to your knitting.

Eighth, understand that you can't fight something with nothing. Christians cannot just curse the darkness. They must pursue a positive biblical understanding and plan. When the world, suffering and at its wits end, asks Christians for help, they should be able to give biblical answers of substance.

Ninth, don't pay too much attention to your critics. Some of North's critics accused him over the years of having a poison pen, of being uncharitable, sharp and harsh. North's piercing critiques, however, were usually reserved for those who held themselves out to be experts in a field, "teachers of the law," so to speak. As they sought to persuade and lead others, he would challenge them if he thought they were leading people into error and trouble. If their work was shoddy or suspect, North was likely to expose it and in colorful terms. Some took the lead and criticized his work first. In addition to lacking depth and rigor in general, his opponents were generally short on historical background and real world understanding. When the exchange ended they were likely to find themselves on the losing side and unable to respond; they slipped quietly away. His most disingenuous critics simply misrepresented his positions and raised straw man arguments, the most uncharitable kind of all.

Tenth, be confident in God's power and his plan to change the world. God's kingdom would not likely come in a single generation. Nor would it come from some sudden political takeover, a centralized government, or vigilante violence. It would not come from the top down. But it would come. It would come gradually, over time, from the bottom up, as God moved in people's hearts and they embraced a biblical worldview and system of law.

Eleventh, pay your tithe. It reminds a person that he owes everything to God.

Finally, North hoped his work would help lay a solid foundation, not be the final answer. He hoped others would take up where he left off and improve on his work. As he concluded his *Christian Economics: Scholar's Edition* (2020), he wrote: "Finally, count the cost. If you then decide to become a Christian economics scholar as a calling, I offer this strategy. Correct my errors, extend my breakthroughs, write several monographs, produce videos, recruit and train followers, and do not become sidetracked. It is easy to become sidetracked, especially by money. Also, if someone asks you what kind of economist you are, never say 'Northian.' 'Northist' is even worse. Say that you are a covenantalist. Now, find your calling and get to work." <https://www.garynorth.com/public/20635.cfm>

May there be many who will pursue their own callings as North did his. The world will be a better place for it.

His work is done. His rest has begun.

North was preceded in death by his son Caleb who suffered from a rare illness. He is survived by Sharon, his wife of 50 years, and their other children Darcy North, Scott North and his wife, Angela, and Lori McDurmon and her husband, Joel, and eight grandchildren.



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