

ARISE & BUILD

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE CHALCEDON FOUNDATION* | JULY 2026

THE GREAT CHRISTIAN SURRENDER

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Chalcedon often posts trenchant insights by Dr. Rushdoony on social media. The reactions reveal more about the critic than about the idea Dr. Rushdoony was putting across. Let's look at the following posted comment taken from his sermons on Corinthians:

The church could not hope in time to rule the world if it could not rule itself.¹

The first respondent understood the point well, agreeing with Rushdoony's emphasis on the importance of self-government. But the next two responses, importing narrow conceptions of "church" and "power" into the picture, were aghast:

When did Jesus ever say "rule the world" with his disciples?

Where does the Bible ever even hint at the church ruling the world? What a bunch of malarkey.

Where to begin? We have here seriously defective definitions of the church, what it means to rule, and a dangerous view of what power is, and who (if anyone) should possess it. The priesthood of all believers shrinks to anemic proportions, with naysayers shoving that genie back into its bottle so that pagans can rule unchallenged in both church and state, all in the name of a misplaced sense of doctrinal purity.

How, precisely, will we be able to obey the following command issued in 2 Samuel 23:3?

The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.

This passage dovetails with Isaiah 32:1 and to the same effect. Do we arrive at either

scenario if the church (however we define it) is to be excluded on the grounds these critics have put forward? We expect pagans to seek the exclusion of Christians from culture and society but hearing similar ideas emanating from Christians buys us a ticket to disaster, giving the world a truly salt-free diet.

Before we venture farther, we should understand what Dr. Rushdoony means by the church, the priesthood of all believers, and our problematic obsession with power. We'll see what Herbert Schlossberg has to say about the idols of power and attempts to build utopia with a muzzled church.

DIFFERENT DOCTRINES OF POWER

In our last issue of *Arise & Build* we quoted Dr. Rushdoony concerning the matter of power:

John Cotton in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, with his faith in limited power and limited liberty, both under God, was able to give his thought a great scope of influence and power precisely because he did not aim at power but recognized the limitations of both power and thought and their relationship under God. Contemporary mythology to the contrary, faith has given thought its high and proper place, whereas modern society, with its power-worship, sees thought only in an instrumental sense, as a means to power over man and nature. The modern intellectual who plays at being god is not thereby asserting the values of intelligence but rather the primacy of power and his contempt of scholarship.²

The key point is that Cotton gave "his thought a great scope of influence and power *precisely because he did not aim at power* but recognized the limitations of both power and thought and their relationship under God."

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Tragically, the modern Christian salivates after power, much as the world at large does, insuring his continued impotence. The search for power leads to paralysis, choking out what remains of a culture or a people. Christians too easily absorb humanistic precedents and try to baptize them. If our critics are referring to something like this, we'd agree with that concern. Herbert Schlossberg explains the problem for us.

The paternalism of the state is that of the bad parent who wants his children dependent on him forever. ... The paternal state thrives on dependency. When the dependents free themselves, it loses power. It is, therefore, parasitic on the very persons whom it turns into parasites. Thus, the state and its dependents march symbiotically to destruction.³

The dependents free themselves through *Christian self-government*, thereby shrinking the power state. Christians ignored the fraudulent nature of the promise of power in political discourse, ignoring even our founding fathers:

"Power always thinks it has a great soul and vast views beyond the comprehension of the weak," wrote John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, "and that it is doing God's service when it is violating all His laws."⁴

Such salesmanship invites poorly informed Christians to be part of the general disorder of our times. "Political rivalry has always turned on the gaining and keeping of power."⁵ It is this idolatry of power that is so toxic, and so intoxicating, for many Christians.

Rushdoony warned that humanism, by rejecting the need for moral regeneration, insists instead on manipulating man's environment to secure its goals. This is not some misguided innovation on Rushdoony's part, as Schlossberg confirms: "The social democrats who have molded Swedish society for the better part of two generations have taken it as an article of faith that they could create new people by manipulating the environment."⁶ The problem is that the required control requires massive power over people. Christians who participate in extending Caesar's grip in these ways are sowing the wind (Hos. 8:7).

A STRONGER DEFINITION OF "CHURCH"

Dr. Rushdoony's definition of the church is more expansive than the parochial, crabbed definitions that prevail today. As he notes in his *Systematic Theology*,

Thus the church is more than the local building and congregation. The term is closer in meaning to the Kingdom of God. It has reference to the called people of God in all their work together for the Lord.⁷

Of course, the Church is the true Zion as Hebrews 12:22-24 teaches. "Mount Zion" parallels "the heavenly Jerusalem" and "the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven..." This is why expositors find the multi-national character of Zion in Psalm 87 so remarkable: the inhabitants of Egypt (Rahab), Babylon, Philistia, Tyre, and Ethiopia are said to be born in Zion. Clearly, they were born in their respective nations of origin, but as Spurgeon proclaims, they are "twice born"⁸ — they've been born again, the second time, *in Zion*. Perhaps Christ reprimanded Nicodemus for failing to recognize that the second birth of Psalm 87 was the only way to enter the kingdom of heaven, to be a part of the Zion that the Psalmist here exalts. The passage should be literally translated this way:

I will announce Rahab (Egypt) and Babylon as knowers of Me. Behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; This man was born there. And of Zion it shall be said, Each and every man is born in her: and the Highest Himself shall establish her. The Lord shall count, when He writeth up the people, that this man was born there.

The Hebrew idiom "this man and that man" actually means "each and every man," and is translated this way, correctly, at Esther 1:8. Gentile enemies of Israel are declared to know the true God, and having "come unto mount Zion" they are "written in heaven" (Heb. 12:22-23) when "He writeth up the people" (Ps. 87:6). The future for the church of the firstborn, of mount Zion, is incomparably bright. And if everyone in the future is born in her, who will be ruling the world? Do we need to dig up some pagans to handle the dirty work?

THE GLORIOUSLY DISRUPTIVE POWER OF PURITANISM

The Puritans, building upon the foundation of the Reformation, pushed the faith into new areas, whereby application of the truth grew deeper and more vigorous (mirroring the growing river of Ezekiel 47:1-12). Consider the kind of dynamic described in Christopher Hill's 1964 study of Puritanism as it transformed God's people from the inside out:

The idea that a lawful minister must be a preacher encouraged individual parishioners to adopt a critical attitude, and increasingly so as the educational standards of leading laymen left those of the weaker clergy behind. In large towns at least, men could not be prevented from going away to other parish churches when they were dissatisfied with their own minister; or they would turn for spiritual sustenance to lecturers from outside the parish, or to lecturers of their own appointment, for whom they subscribed to preach against the parochial incumbent. Or men and women would simply stay away from church and worship God in their own way in the household. The emphasis on the repetition of sermons in the family thus also contributed to the atomizing process: the real religious experience might not be in church but in the household discussion afterwards, under the supervision not of the ecclesiastical authorities but of godly laymen.⁹

You can understand how Puritanism, drinking deep from the waters of God's Word, became a challenge to both church and state. This intensified as the priesthood of all believers developed even further.

AN AGGRESSIVE PRIESTHOOD!

The kind of "atomization" of those institutions trying to drive a wedge between the people and the Bible became even more blatant as the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers took root.

The Great Awakening, in fact, aroused more than a little hostility and distress because the laity now began to make religion their concern. They judged their pastors, civil authorities, and professors in terms of the requirement that *every man* manifest grace and the workings of

the Lord in his life. No longer was it the duty of the laity merely to listen silently and obey: they were now an aggressive priesthood.¹⁰

Can you imagine the impact of this *aggressive priesthood* on the nations? In contrast, we seem to have turned modern lay Christians into a miserable *passive-aggressive priesthood*. Warfield asserts that this happened because we've been long deprived of the strong discipline of the past. Recovery of that discipline, the unleashing of the whole counsel of God, will re-energize His people. Faithful churches will welcome this zeal for God's house, while the pew-warmers will assure their flocks that they are supposed to sit on the sidelines and remain disengaged. "The hand of the diligent shall bear rule, but the slothful shall be under tribute" (Prov. 12:24), but our critics might prefer that redeemed, regenerated men *be* under tribute, since having them bear rule appears to give them heartburn.

Because of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, the hope of society was seen not in an established order imposed from above, but as an order created by the priests below.¹¹

Rule – the establishing of social order – as a priestly function penetrating society upward from the grassroots, is not how most people conceive of how power ought to flow. Too many Christians talk about "seizing the reins of power" when in fact the existing statist apparatus is approximately 11,000 times larger than Scripture permits.¹² Nation-states operate in violation of virtually every significant divine law constraining their scope. The answer to this is *Christian self-government*. This might sound as delusional as washing seven times in the Jordan, but when God is in the picture, expectations are shattered.

Prov. 16:32 alerts us that "he that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." As in our initial Rushdoony quote, the focus is on self-government: the man who rules over his passions and appetites is the one who is fit to rule others. Allen P. Ross shows us why:

Greenstone, 180, records the account from Nachmias about the pious man who said to the king, "You are the ser-

vant of my servant.” He meant by this, “You are the slave of your evil inclinations, while I am their master.”¹³

In this light, *who should rule the world?* The king enslaved to his passions? Or the man who rules over his own spirit? Is not Rushdoony saying how needful this mindset is? Why object to having the qualified ones bear rule?

The church (as the redeemed people of God) has Scriptural warrant to speak to the institutional church as much as to the state and to every other sphere.

Because Christianity sets forth a sovereign God who claims jurisdiction over every area of life, including the civil, it is necessary for the believer to assert the sovereign crown rights of Christ the King over church, state, and every other realm. The so-called civil millenarians were simply Christians rejoicing in a great step forward in the history of the faith as they saw it, the freedom of the church and state from controls of either one by the other, and the freedom of the Christian man to discharge his priestly, royal, and prophetic offices.¹⁴

The connection between this priesthood and power is not difficult to trace.

With the Great Awakening, there was a growing break with civil religion. Both church and state still had to be Christian, but the key was no longer a powered establishment but a priestly people transforming institutions and society by their own regeneration and progressive sanctification. Earlier, Pietism had called for withdrawal from an evil world. Pietism and Neoplatonism were later to infect and disarm the Puritan concepts of the priesthood of all believers and postmillennialism, but not before that priesthood had radically directed history.¹⁵

Note the departure from a “powered establishment” versus the more profound transformations effected by God’s people operating as priests and kings. When Rushdoony summarizes the transformations in God’s people documented in the year 1644, he notes that “‘The key of power’ is now to be shared by the priesthood of believers.”¹⁶ This would be the same priesthood that holds church and state, as institutions, accountable to the Word of God.

UTOPIAS NEEDS A WARNING LABEL

Herbert Schlossberg, in his seminal book *Idols for Destruction*, pinpoints a problem that is more pertinent now than ever. “Our own age propagates utopian ideologies in part because people have high expectations for technology.”¹⁷ Combine the idolizing of technology with political messianism, with the seizure of the state to secure humanist ends, and the dangers increase exponentially because of “the legions of political saviors who have infested the West for nearly two centuries.”¹⁸

Schlossberg sees the incompatibility of such utopian pretensions with Biblical faith, but his point is overlooked by opportunistic Christians wanting to exploit the existing levers of governance.

Although utopian thinking finds its way into the churches, as do the other idolatries, it is fundamentally hostile to Christian faith. It wishes to build a spurious kingdom of God on earth wholly out of manmade materials.¹⁹

Schlossberg disparaged the common man for his gullibility in failing “to understand that if he accepts passively [for example] Galbraith’s expertise [on the M1 money supply] he is also accepting his values. *There is no value-free expertise.*”²⁰ This “tyranny of the experts” is a snare, because the experts come with strings that uproot Christian morality, as the inescapable importation of the values of the experts contaminates everything, whether we notice it or not.

The utopia-builders propose that it’s not merely their expertise that qualifies them, but their “social purpose.”

Combining social purpose with expertise sets the stage for a gnosticism in which only the special few have the key to the secrets of the universe. This is not something that can simply be learned from books, although the *cognoscenti* are almost invariably well-educated. They must also have the requisite “social purpose,” for the knowledge required to run society cannot simply be communicated rationally.²¹

As we all know, no utopia has ever been established by humanists. But their promises are fervent, despite being in mortal conflict with Isaiah 2:22 and Jeremiah 17:5 (“Cease ye from man, whose breath is in

his nostrils: of what account is he?” and “Cursed is the man who trusts in man, who makes flesh his arm.”) In the category of “pay no attention to the man behind the curtain,” Schlossberg puts his finger on the one non-negotiable: don’t question the architects of utopia.²²

Never ask the enlightened ones about their track record, which is a series of disguised disasters; just accept on faith that they have the secret to life.²³

Utopia’s architects see themselves in divine terms.

Mannheim also reveals here what we seldom see so plainly: the sociology of knowledge mystification that permits the elite to rise above their conditioning – “they can act not only for a limited group, but also for the whole society” – has its roots in a religious vision, the redeemer class achieving the salvation of society. Those divine pretensions, as Talmon has said, form the basis for the imposition of force.²⁴

Schlossberg describes how this justifies the use of force and intimidation, “ignoring the wishes of the people” and “without providing any occasion for complaints about the violation of liberty.”²⁵ In other words, it is perfectly acceptable to deploy absolute power to build a utopia. Power again comes to the fore. What is hiding behind the utopian visions? Schlossberg tells us:

Once the illusion of compassion and rationality are stripped away from the exercise of state power, there is nothing left to see but power itself. As O’Brien tells the hapless Winston Smith in *1984*, “Power is not a means; it is an end.”²⁶

THE FAILURE OF THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCHES

Our two critics desire to protect the church from wild goose chases and from taking false turns (viz., going on fool’s errands). We certainly agree that the institutional church needs none of these things, but it certainly is inundated with them anyway, self-serving claims notwithstanding. In the interest of avoiding an alleged sin of presumption without due consideration, it has upheld the status quo as the right and only path for the church. Any direction other than the current one is considered a dangerous detour.

In light of both history and scripture, it is today’s churches, with precious few exceptions, that have taken detours into the world of salt that has lost its savor. God’s people are too often taught to loosen the least of the commandments and to teach men so, making them the least in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:19). They cast their votes in defiance (often loudly and proudly) of scripture as they malign so-called “biblicists.” Unlike our Puritan forebears, they suffer from programitis: the more programs, the more “faithful” the church claims to be.

Ron Kronz perfectly indicts the litany of programs that today’s churches have put in place:

Unless these programs flood the world with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, forcing the hand of the world to hear and respond to the uncompromised lordship of Christ, they are little more than polite forms of failure.²⁷

The path to these “polite forms of failure” is often paved with carefully crafted discouragements, such as we saw in the critical responses to Rushdoony’s quote at the outset. We detect similar kinds of discouragements in the book of Nehemiah (from both God’s enemies *and* from God’s people), all designed to derail the work of reconstruction. We also see it in Haggai 1:2, when the people resent being inconvenienced with the task of rebuilding the temple: “It is not time to build the Lord’s house” they protest (but God notes that they certainly had plenty of time for building their *own* homes).

HARMONY BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE

Men often insist upon a conflict of interests between church and state, but this puts them at odds with the prediction of Zechariah concerning the relationship between priesthood and kingship. When this prophet proclaims that the One to come is a *priest upon His throne*, “and the counsel of peace shall be between them both” (Zech. 6:12-13), he undercuts all the division men try so hard to exploit between the civil and the ecclesiastical. In Christ (and in Him alone) is harmony between the two domains: He unites in His person what had been kept separate, genealogically, between

Judah (the lineage of kings) and Levi/Aaron (the lineage of priests).

But even if today's Christian should grant this union of attributes in Christ, he will deny it to Christ's people, doing so in flagrant disregard of Revelation's claim that Christians are both kings and priests (Rev. 1:5-6) who are to reign on earth as kings and priests (Rev. 5:10). Even Isaiah 32:1-2 discloses a time when princes rule justly and men act ministerially. Ephesians 1:22-23 speaks of a spiritual unity of the head and body of Christ, but our critics have divided them asunder: the body of Christ has no part to play (they imply, and often outright say) concerning the things that are put under Christ's feet. Christ in this picture is a disembodied head, perhaps with feet attached to His chin.

The final verses of Zechariah 14 teach that the domain of holiness will extend over everything. Hengstenberg²⁸ and Moore²⁹ both speak of God erasing the distinction between the profane and holy, by finally making everything holy. Once those distinctions disappear, and there's no more Canaanite in the house of the Lord (Zech. 14:21), where will we find Canaanites to rule the world for us? We've spoken of the new birth extending to all people in all nations in Psalm 87 (taken in its proper, literal sense). This fact has consequences and bears upon the opening quote from Rushdoony.

Faithfulness in little things means being made "ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matt. 25:21). One wonders where our critics propose this verse should be fulfilled. If they're consistent, they'd insist that you first should die before being given this blessing: it isn't intended for this world.

TRUE STRENGTH AND POWER

As Motyer points out regarding Isa. 40:31, God's people "are promised renewed strength, literally, 'keep putting on fresh strength,' and different strength, a strength that is not natural, as if people should grow wings (cf. Ps. 103:5)."³⁰ In the immediately following chapter (Isaiah 41), "Isaiah is discussing principles, in this case, the principle of initiation and direction in world history."³¹ To this end, when God addresses

the peoples/nations in the next verse (Isa. 41:1), he *repeats the exact phrase* just used of Israel.

Renew their strength are the same words as Isa. 40:31, not only forming a "domino" link between the passages but also offering the Gentiles the same strength that is Israel's privilege. This is the point of the call, which will be developed further...³²

Spurgeon's comment here is to the point: "A man is nothing, but with God in him he makes hell tremble."³³ If hell trembles when the church (using Rushdoony's wider definition) learns to rule properly, why settle instead for hell rejoicing because we've deliberately excluded the redeemed from such tasks?

We then encounter what Motyer calls "the transformed worm," whereby God transforms Jacob's weakness so completely that it levels massive obstacles. Motyer notes that there are several stages of the transformation, but they all stun the imagination. The hapless worm of Isaiah 41:14 becomes something extraordinary, and the broad context would include Gentiles in the picture by natural extension.

THE MASTER OF TEETH

The weak worm doesn't merely become a stronger worm; he becomes something fitted to chew up and spit out mountains.

The Lord will act in transformation. First, the *worm* becomes a *threshing-sledge*. This was a heavy wooden platform fitted underneath with sharp stones and pieces of metal which was dragged over the crop to chop the straw in preparation for winnowing. Secondly, this particular sledge is (literally) "sharpened" (i.e., prepared for the task), *new* (in prime condition) and has *many teeth* (literally, is a "master of teeth," i.e., has notably efficient teeth). It is capable of threshing *mountains*, seemingly insurmountable obstacles (cf. Zech. 4:7).³⁴

The worm's next transformation (verse 16) is into a winnowing fan, one aided not by the usual gentle breeze but driven by a gale (KJV: whirlwind) sufficient to remove all traces of the mountain being leveled.

The text presses forward into chapter

42, where we read of the Messiah that “he shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law” (verse 4). “Setting judgment” parallels what Moses did; the term “is used in Deuteronomy 4:44 of Moses ‘setting’ the Lord’s law before Israel. What had hitherto been the privilege of the few will become the possession *of the earth*, the emphasized word in this final justice statement.”³⁵

Do you suppose humanists will wait for God’s law and apply it so that “the government shall be upon His shoulders”? Or do you recognize this as what God’s people are to do? Christian laymen may well be worms as men measure strength, but the Scripture promises that “to those who have no strength, He increaseth might” (Isa. 40:29). In fact, where mountains of obstacles persist, God transforms every worm into a *master of teeth* to accelerate the shaking of all things so that only the unshakeable will remain.

Are *you* ready to outdo the Puritans in leveling mountains? 🏔️

1. R. J. Rushdoony, *Sermons on First and Second Corinthians* (Vallecito, CA: Chalcedon/Ross House Books, 2021), 3-4.
2. R. J. Rushdoony, *Subversive Man* (Vallecito, CA: Chalcedon/Ross House Books, 2026), 57.
3. Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: The Conflict of Christian Faith and American Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 184.
4. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (New York, NY: Scribner’s, 1952), 2, quoted in Schlossberg, 192.
5. Schlossberg, 192.
6. Schlossberg, 189.
7. R. J. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1994), vol. 2, 670.
8. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2019), vol. 2, 479.
9. Christopher Hill, *Society & Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1964, 1967), 486.
10. R. J. Rushdoony, “The Priesthood of All Believers,” *Journal of Christian Reconstruction* 6:1 (Vallecito, CA: Chalcedon Foundation, 1979), 23.
11. Rushdoony, 24.
12. <https://chalcedon.edu/resources/articles/reinventing-leadership>
13. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2008), vol. 6, 152.
14. Rushdoony, 25.
15. Rushdoony, 25-26.
16. Rushdoony, 19. He is referring to Goodwin and Nye’s introduction to a work by John Cotton, which

- states in part: “The Saints (in these knowing times) finding that the key of knowledge hath so far opened their hearts that they see with their own eyes into the substantial of godliness, and that, through the instruction and guidance of their teachers, they are enabled to understand for themselves such other things as they are to join in the practice of, they do therefore further (many of them) begin more to suspect that some share in the key of power should likewise appertain unto them.” See Rushdoony, 19, footnote 7.
17. Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: The Conflict of Christian Faith and American Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 188.
 18. Schlossberg, 192.
 19. Schlossberg, 191.
 20. Schlossberg, 194.
 21. Schlossberg, 194-195.
 22. <https://chalcedon.edu/resources/articles/architects-of-disorder-framing-mischief-by-statute>
 23. Schlossberg, 194-195.
 24. Schlossberg, 196.
 25. Ibid.
 26. Schlossberg, 197.
 27. Ron Kronz, *Fighting to Win (and other things I didn’t learn in Sunday School)* (n.p.: self-published, 2020), 157.
 28. Ernst W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament* (Mac Dill AFB, FL: MacDonald Publishing, n.d.), vol. 2, 1179.
 29. Thomas V. Moore, *A Commentary on Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979 [1856]), 320-21.
 30. J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993), 308.
 31. Ibid., 308-309.
 32. Ibid., 309.
 33. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *C H Spurgeon’s Forgotten Expositions of Isaiah* (Leominster, UK: Day One Publications, 2017), 168.
 34. Motyer, 313.
 35. Ibid, 320.

There is no solution other than the long-term mission of Christian Reconstruction.

Rushdoony predicted the times in which we live which is why he focused the mission of Chalcedon on the great work of Christian Reconstruction. The only remedy to what we face is a return to Christian faith, character, and obedience.

Rushdoony wrote, "The Biblical doctrine of theocracy means the self-government of the Christian man," (*Sovereignty*, p. 31) which means the Christian most needs the resources to equip him for Biblical self-government.

The Chalcedon Foundation is a "think-tank for the self-governing Christian," and our mission is to equip Christian families and churches to apply the faith to every area of life and cultivate faithfulness to God's law and covenant in order that Christ's Kingdom might increase.

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