

ChalcedonReport

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Why Socialism Needs an Enemy

When man's problem is blamed on society rather than sin, every failure demands another culprit.

Every social crisis eventually raises the same question: What is the source of man's problems? The answer matters because the diagnosis determines the cure. If man's fundamental problem is sin, then no amount of social engineering can regenerate him. But if man's problem is his environment—his economic condition, social structures, or circumstances—then changing those conditions becomes the means of changing man himself.

In a recent episode of the Chalcedon Podcast, Mark Rushdoony and Martin Selbrede offered insightful commentary on the current state of our political and social climates—particularly the incessant push for socialism which appears to be gaining ground during the “anything but Trump” era. But as you'll soon see, this is nothing new, and no better critique or solution is offered than the thinking of R. J. Rushdoony. In this episode, Mark and Martin discussed the chapter “Socialism as a Perpetual Civil War” from the small but potent volume *Law and Liberty* by Rushdoony, and the relevance is clear: socialism begins with a fundamentally different doctrine of man, sin, and salvation.

When Man Becomes Infallible

Mark Rushdoony explained that the issue ultimately begins with man's attempt to assume a position that belongs to God. Infallibility is inescapable because some authority must finally determine what is true, good, and right.

“If man denies infallibility to God,” Mark said, “he's going to put that infallibility effectively in another place,

and inevitably, a man is going to put it in himself at some level.”

This is why Mark connected socialism to humanism and ultimately to the temptation in Genesis: “Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” Humanism seeks to determine good and evil independently of God, and socialism becomes one expression of that rebellion. It does not merely propose an economic program. It presents a worldview—a comprehensive interpretation of reality to which society must conform.

Martin Selbrede took the argument one step further by pointing out that infallibility is properly an attribute of God. When man rejects the true God and magnifies himself through the state, the state assumes divine attributes.

“The god of socialism is what Rushdoony called man magnified,” Martin said. “We trust in man magnified.”

This creates an enormous problem whenever the state's policies fail. If the state represents the mechanism by which society is to be reordered, and its vision is presumed correct, then the failure cannot be attributed to the system itself. Someone else must be responsible.

“If there are problems in the society and the infallible god, the state, is operating things,” Martin explained, “then the blame must be placed not on the state, but on someone and something else.” Acting like the landowner in the parable of the sower, the only accusation from the infallible state is “an enemy hath done this” (Mt. 13:28). Only an outside enemy can disrupt their utopian harvest, but that enemy is also helpful to their propaganda.

The Doctrine of Selective Depravity

Rushdoony identified this blame-shifting as the doctrine of “selective depravity.” Biblical Christianity teaches the universality of sin. Humanistic systems instead locate evil within a particular portion of humanity.

Martin explained selective depravity as the belief “that only a certain sector of the society is the source of the problems,” whether that category is racial, religious, political, or economic. Once the guilty class is identified, society divides between those presumed to be responsible for the social injustice and those claiming the moral authority to correct it.

“We're the good guy because we're exposing the bad guy,” Martin said. “We're exposing that race, we're exposing that religion, we're exposing that ideology, that political party, whatever it might be.”

This is precisely where Rushdoony's description of socialism as perpetual civil war comes into focus. If sin is not the problem, then sinners do not need regeneration. Instead, society needs rearrangement. And when the rearrangement fails to produce the promised results, another obstacle must be discovered and removed. Social conflict therefore becomes essential to the system.

By contrast, Martin emphasized that the biblical doctrine of depravity puts all men under the judgment of God. “Total depravity” is a common inheritance rather than a defect assigned selectively to our opponents. Consequently, Christianity does not begin by locating society's evil somewhere outside ourselves. It begins with sin, repentance,

redemption, and regeneration.

This difference produces two radically different approaches to reconstruction.

Two Visions of Progress

The conflict becomes even clearer when we consider the word *progress*. Every worldview has some standard by which progress is measured, and Mark argued that Christians must recover an explicitly biblical one.

Jesus commanded His followers to “seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.” Therefore, Mark said, “We’re failing to the extent that our culture and our works are not advancing the cause of Christ and His righteousness, and that’s how we have to measure things.”

Humanistic progress must be measured differently because it begins with a different authority and destination. If certain people or institutions are believed to obstruct the desired social order, removing those obstacles can itself be presented as progress.

Martin pointed to the political purges associated with socialist regimes as the horrific historical expression of that idea. “We’re going to take this particular class or group and we’re going to remove them because once they’re removed, we will have progress.”

Scripture also demands a purge, Martin noted, but it is radically different. “In the biblical view, the purge is real, but it’s purging the sin out of man at the heart level.”

That process is sanctification. Instead of purging society of supposedly defective classes, Christians are called to put off the old man and increasingly conform themselves to God’s requirements. The biblical transformation of society therefore begins with the moral transformation of people.

Why Every Failure Becomes a Crisis

Once the state is expected to solve man’s problems, its failures generate another useful feature of modern politics: the perpetual crisis. Martin observed that crises and emergencies create

opportunities for expanded government action because fear makes people more willing to surrender responsibility and liberty to whoever promises protection.

“So fear engenders a bondage of some kind to whoever’s going to solve the problem,” he said.

The pattern becomes self-perpetuating. A social problem requires state intervention. Intervention fails to resolve the underlying problem because its diagnosis was wrong. The resulting failure becomes another crisis requiring additional intervention, spending, regulation, or authority.

“So we have all these emergencies,” Martin said, “and they’re always a pretext for what? State action that’s going to actually go beyond the bounds of the constitutional limits for our country.”

Yet the problem remains because the moral condition of man remains untouched. As Martin summarized it, “Crises multiply because the failures of the state multiply because it proceeds on false grounds.”

The alternative is not simply to replace one political program with another. That would leave the deeper assumption intact—that society is reconstructed primarily by controlling the machinery of civil government.

Reconstruction Begins Small

Near the conclusion of the discussion, Andrea Schwartz asked Martin whether the answer to this growing Leviathan was Christian Reconstruction—the application of God’s law to every area of life.

Martin contrasted the two approaches by emphasizing their radically different means. Socialism looks toward large institutions, centralized resources, and the levers of political power. Christian Reconstruction begins from the ground up.

“We proceed from the ground up,” he said. “Christian reconstruction is exactly that. It’s taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ step by step.”

This is not as dramatic as seizing political power. It means Christians faithfully reconstructing the areas

God has already placed under their responsibility. Martin described “the faithfulness of the Christian in his particular spheres of influence” as the means by which the future is shaped.

That can involve families, churches, education, charity, business, economics, and countless other spheres of life. This is something most of our readers are familiar with. Rather than waiting for a massive centralized solution, Christians begin with obedience and trust God for the increase.

“It’s the idea of the small changing the big that people have to stumble over,” Martin said.

Mark brought the discussion back to its fundamental point. Socialism itself is not the ultimate problem because socialism is another manifestation of something much older.

“Socialism is not the ultimate threat,” he said. “It’s our rebellion against God that is the ultimate threat that we have to address.”

That is also why political reform alone can never provide the primary answer. “Ultimately the answer is redemption and regeneration,” Mark continued. “Ultimately, we need the power of the Holy Spirit to change men.”

There are, then, two competing visions of reconstruction. One attempts to reconstruct man by reconstructing his circumstances. The other begins with God reconstructing man and then calls the redeemed man to reconstruct his world through faithful obedience.

Socialism must continually locate the problem somewhere outside man’s sinful heart. As a result, every failure requires a new explanation, another crisis, and eventually another enemy. Biblical Christianity begins somewhere much more difficult—with ourselves.

And from regenerated men, faithful families, Christian institutions, and obedience to God’s law can come something no state can manufacture: genuine reconstruction. This is why our message and mission continues but only with your support. 🙌

You can listen to the entire podcast discussion on our website at <https://tinyurl.com/ChalcedonPodcastEp69>

Publishing is Ministry

Two New Books on Thinking Biblically and Praying Faithfully

There are many ways to measure the work of a ministry. We can count books distributed, articles published, podcasts produced, and people reached. These numbers tell us something, but they do not explain why Chalcedon has remained committed to publishing for more than sixty years.

For Chalcedon, publishing has always been ministry. Ideas have consequences, and Christians cannot apply the faith to every area of life without first learning to think in terms of God's Word. Two current publishing projects illustrate this work particularly well.

Learning to Think Again

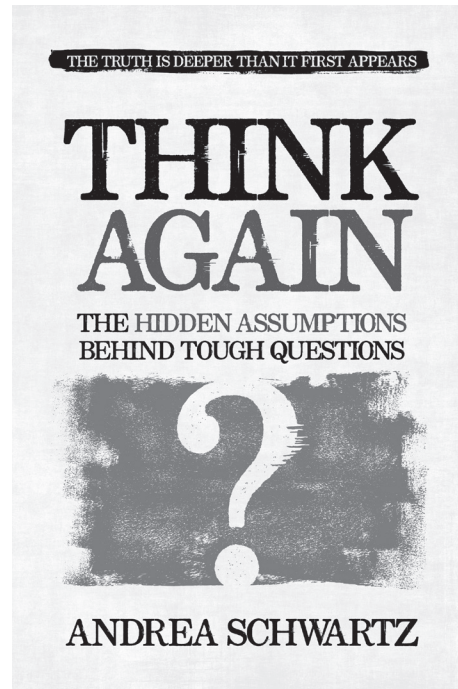
In August, Chalcedon published Andrea Schwartz's *Think Again: The Hidden Assumptions Behind Tough Questions*, a 163-page paperback developed from years of conversations on the *Out of the Question Podcast*.

The premise is simple: sometimes our difficulty finding the right answer begins with asking the wrong question.

As Schwartz writes, "We often spend our time debating answers without ever asking whether we began with the right question." Beneath familiar controversies are more fundamental questions concerning "God, man, authority, purpose, truth, and responsibility."

Think Again addresses subjects ranging from family and church life to medicine, economics, justice, and public responsibility. The objective is not to provide another collection of talking points. It is to encourage Christians to identify the assumptions beneath the arguments they encounter and bring those assumptions under the authority of Scripture.

As Schwartz concludes, "The issue is never whether men will live by a standard, but by whose standard." This book is currently available on our store: <https://tinyurl.com/ThinkAgainSchwartz>



Rediscovering a Life of Prayer

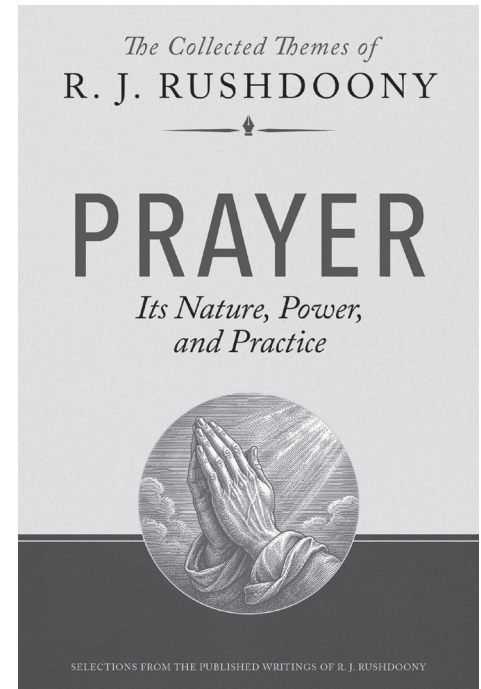
Our next publication approaches that same task differently. *Prayer: Its Nature, Power, and Practice* will be the first volume in a new series, *The Collected Themes of R. J. Rushdoony*. This 194-page paperback is in the final stages of editing and should soon go to press.

The new series gathers selections scattered throughout Rushdoony's enormous body of work and presents them together by subject. This first volume collects forty-seven selections on prayer.

What emerges is not another conventional manual on how to pray. Rushdoony was actually suspicious of such books. His concern was much more fundamental: prayer is communion with an ever-present God.

"But my concern is the prayer that is most basic, our talking to God," Rushdoony wrote. "By this I mean our one-sentence prayers all day long, by which we silently but continually communicate with God."

Prayer, therefore, is not something confined to church, mealtimes, or morning devotions. It should fill the



Christian's day with requests for wisdom, expressions of gratitude, confessions of dependence, and appeals for grace. Rushdoony puts it memorably: "Continual sentence prayers are simply Christian breathing. They keep us alive and strong."

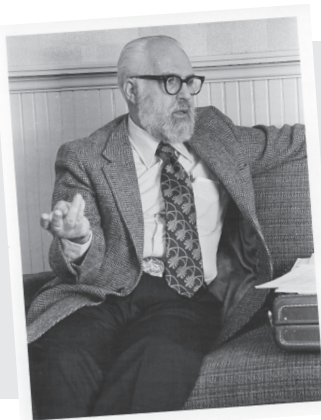
Making This Work Possible

These books are very different, but they represent the same ministry. One brings contemporary questions into Biblical focus. The other gathers Rushdoony's writings so an important theme can be studied as a unified whole.

You were probably first introduced to Chalcedon through one of R. J. Rushdoony's books, and your financial support enables us to continue that work—editing, publishing, preserving our existing library, and developing new material for another generation.

When you support Chalcedon, you help us keep publishing. And when we publish, we continue doing what this ministry has always sought to do: move Christians from Biblical understanding to faithful action. Together we keep this mission and vision ongoing. 🙏

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"If there is no law, then there is no crime, and anything goes." ~ R. J. Rushdoony

The Great Subversion by R. J. Rushdoony

A Word In Season: Daily Messages on the Faith for All of Life, Volume 6, pp. 4-6

In Rome, during the Second Punic War (218–201 B.C.), a secret and very powerful movement was accidentally discovered just in time to save Rome from a violent revolution and destruction. Most of Rome's leadership had been marked for death. This cult or revolutionary movement, Bacchanalia, had a simple creed: "The holiest article of their faith was to think nothing a crime." Members proved their faith by committing all kinds of sexual crimes.

Similar movements have appeared over and over again in history, and many that are centuries apart are still closely connected. Many such movements were student movements. During the later Middle Ages, wandering students, who went from university to university without ever really

graduating, were known as goliards. These goliards were what we would call folksingers, and their music had a continual hostility to Christian morality and law. These students were more interested in destroying civilization than in studying, and many rarely saw a classroom.

In nineteenth-century Russia, the Nihilists, who believed in nothing but revolutionary socialism, were the radical students of the day. The men wore their hair very long, and the women cut their hair very short. Blue spectacles were often worn as a kind of badge. Everything about their appearance and conduct was calculated to be offensive and to show their contempt for and indifference to Christian faith and morality. The intellectuals of the day were very much in sympathy with these students.

We have such students with us again. But, more than that, we now have universities dedicated to creating such students. In early May 1965, the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions held a conference for 1400 college presidents, deans, professors, and trustees in Los Angeles. The speakers included Robert M. Hutchins, Walter Lippmann, U.S. Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, and U.C. President Clark Kerr. The feeling of the conference was that the university should spend less time on research and more on influencing voters and remaking the country. And English educator Sir Eric Ashby emphasized as the first purpose of any university revolution: "The true function of a university is not to preserve and consolidate the social status quo but to question and disrupt it." The real purpose of education is thus continual revolution!

The roots of this movement go back to Eden. Satan's temptation was, "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). In other words, every man shall be his own god and his own law, knowing or deciding for himself what is good and evil. If there is no sovereign God over all creation, then there is no absolute law over all. If there is no law, then there is no crime, and anything goes. This is the simple foundation of all these movements: no God means no law and no crime; therefore, everything goes! All these movements have a grimly uniform history: they destroy themselves, and whoever stands with them. For the world is under God's law, and St. Paul's warning still stands: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). 🌩️

The mission and message of Chalcedon are as vital today as they were when we began in 1965—even more so.

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Donate Financially: Your financial support is vital for us to continue our work. Regular donations help us to plan and execute projects more effectively, including publishing new materials and maintaining our online presence. Consider setting up a recurring donation to provide steady support.

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