

# ARISE & BUILD

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## POLITICS AND THE MADNESS IN MEN'S HEARTS

BY MARTIN G. SELBREDE



While recently re-reading Dr. Rushdoony's *Salvation and Godly Rule*,<sup>1</sup> I was stunned at how often he ruled out

political solutions to our current problems. Political solutions merely inject more poison into our culture because our problems aren't political, *they're moral*. Yet we remain awash in hucksters promoting one political solution after another to "save" our nation. Far too many of these promoters claim to be Christians, even Christian leaders, whose rhetoric hides the fact that they're leading their disciples into the ditch with them.

It is worth our time to tease out these truths, to pop the hood on political posturing (both ancient and modern) to see it for what it truly is: a laundry list of expedients to further man's rebellion against His Creator, Lawgiver, Judge, King, and Savior.

### ADDICTED TO HAIR OF THE DOG SOLUTIONS

When I wrote about our nation's addiction crisis and the moving of the ancient landmark of sobriety to the lofty-sounding goal of harm reduction (see my eighteen articles on Chalcedon's website concerning Massachusetts physician Punyamurtula S. Kishore),

I noted that *hair of the dog* solutions are currently the "gold standard" for treatment (albeit fool's gold in this case). Opioid addiction is actually being "treated" *with more opioids*. This is madness. The end result is predictable despite being covered up by political misdirection and data laundering.

Does your economic system have problems due to governmental injection of funny money (fiat currency, debt monetization, fractional reserve banking, etc.)? The solution is always *more funny money*: add more sins to cover up the effect of earlier sins. Rob Peter to pay Paul only "works" until Peter becomes broke. Economic problems aren't rolled back by *hair of the dog* solutions: they only cause malinvestment to persist and worsen. Each new evasion of responsibility worsens the impact of the adjustments yet to come. We consume away our own future.

As Dr. Rushdoony said concerning the proverb *let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die*, its lesson is simple.

The economics of this proverb was an economy geared to quick consumption without concern for the future, and this meant the erosion of tomorrow ... It means an economy, in Roepke's words, in which it is "a virtue to contract debts and ... foolishness to save."<sup>2</sup>

Just as opioids cannot solve opioid

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addiction, and alcohol cannot cure a hangover, economics cannot solve economic problems:

A man, when free from the corruption of modern humanism, will work in terms of God's calling, and, under God, for his family, for the personal realization of his abilities, and more. These are essentially non-economic motives. Economies self-destruct when their motivating forces become essentially economic.<sup>3</sup>

Solomon foresaw this issue in Ecclesiastes 5:10 when he taught us that "an appetite for silver cannot be satisfied with silver." Economic issues cannot be solved through economics, because the root of economic problems is ethical and moral, *not economic*.

## POWER IS THE HAIR OF THE POLITICAL DOG

When the state usurps the function of savior over society, it begins to trade in the currency of power.

Man seeks *salvation in power*. As against the hovering demons of darkness and death, he has no protection except a fleeting assertion of power. Thus, every age of unbelief is also an era of power politics, tyranny, and brutal death.<sup>4</sup>

The inevitable failures that arise when political solutions to our problems are devised and implemented (see Eccl. 7:29) involve what Jeremiah called "healing the wound of the people lightly," i.e., political quackery (Jer. 6:14 and 8:11). As Rushdoony points out about these perpetual political crusades,

Every major effort has led to a costly failure. The failures are not surprising and are indeed inescapable. The efforts have been *political*, and their essential nature has been like Horace's hope. For these political efforts, salvation is not a new man, but a new beginning for man, not a change in man but a change in his politics.<sup>5</sup>

Predestination, like infallibility, is then *transferred from God to man*: statist man needs to exert control to insure that the promised salvation arrives on schedule. Things quickly go downhill from there:

The predestination of the state is brutal and coercive; it is on man's level, in man's time, and a pressure on man himself. The predestination of God is from all eternity, before time began; it does no violence to us.<sup>6</sup>

This arises as a result of the *nature* of political solutions as embodiments of humanistic predestination:

Predestination by man and/or by man's institutions and agencies is *immanent* predestination. It is inherent to the world and is from within the world ... Immanent predestination does violence to the will of man and it does destroy the liberty of second causes. Two powers cannot exercise equal and identical authority within the same area, yet this is precisely what immanent predestination involves.

When an agency within creation claims absolute powers, it must of necessity suppress and enslave all other agencies. For a second cause to claim to be the first cause means that it must war against all other second causes.<sup>7</sup>

Political solutions proceed on the premise that *political agencies are a first cause, not a second, derivative cause*. This is why political solutions inevitably fail in God's universe. This is precisely why all attempts to create heaven on earth result instead in actually releasing hell on earth:

When hell disappears from religion, it re-appears in politics and social morality. It becomes necessary then for ultimate moral judgments and dispositions to be made on earth, because there is no other court for a final reckoning.<sup>8</sup>

Such "ultimate moral judgments" now include boycotting individuals holding unacceptable views to the

point (at least in principle) of starving them to death. Humanistic “justice” is a harsh, self-righteous mistress.

The hard realities of politics rest on the moral order of the people. Without that moral order, every politics becomes a *politics of disintegration*.<sup>9</sup>

Political solutions, by their very nature, restrict human liberty because they involve imposition of control, and such control is justified because of the underlying statist doctrine of man.

When men are seen as instruments of the state, they are very readily used, because it is the function of an instrument to be used.<sup>10</sup>

In all these things, man (through ostentatious words and actions) creates the illusion of dealing with societal problems forthrightly, but that blur of activity is a façade to hide the true problem from sight.

By failing to recognize his rebellion against the sovereign God as his essential problem as well as his sin, pagan man wants not salvation but escape. To admit the real problem, his sin, is to admit that there is no way of escape, only the way of salvation through God’s regenerating grace. Moreover, the failure of paganism to offer salvation is not accidental. It is a part of the pagan refusal to understand; it is a willful rejection of the truth of God.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, since the root cause of man’s problem cannot be resolved through politics, politics not only doesn’t resolve the issue, *it exacerbates it* in the same way that inaction allows a tumor to grow larger and more dangerous:

[When] the problem of sin is not dealt with ... it remains, to create problems afresh on another occasion.<sup>12</sup>

Amputating the left leg when the metastasizing tumor is on one’s right leg is worse than doing nothing. Further, to repeat the same steps over and over while expecting a different result is conventionally deemed to be insanity.

The Bible uses the word *madness* to describe this pathology.

## MADNESS IN THEIR HEARTS

Solomon gave an unremittingly honest description of himself and his fellow man:

The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live. (Eccl. 9:3)

It is this madness that politics ancient and modern is unable to heal: in fact, when politics seeks to institutionalize the rejection of God’s covenant, the madness in man only increases. The curses for violation of God’s law in Deuteronomy 28 list our modern symptoms as covenantal sanctions being inflicted upon us for our thoughts and actions.

The Lord shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart: And thou shalt grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness, and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways: and thou shalt be only oppressed and spoiled evermore, and no man shall save thee. (Deut. 28:28-29)

The last phrase is significant: despite statist man’s politics promising to save us, God assures the rebellious that “no man shall save thee.” Political candidates outshout each other that their plan and program *will* save us, but God says not a single one of them can save you. If “no man shall save thee,” then politics clearly *can solve nothing*. It only worsens our situation because it doesn’t deal with our root problem, it only papers it over.

The political refrain has ever been that “you are being oppressed and spoiled, *but I can save thee*,” or that “*our party can save thee*.” God contradicts all this madness: there is *no recourse* outside of obedience to His law. Only then shall He shall save thee, *and not man*. “Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: of what account is he?”

(Isa. 2:22). The politicians give glowing accounts of themselves, and caustic accounts of their competitors, but God says they are beneath contempt and are of no account whatsoever. *They are nobodies*. As J. A. Alexander says of Isaiah 2:22, God's final question "forcibly implies that man's protection cannot be relied upon."<sup>13</sup> Repeat: *cannot be relied upon*. We should therefore *let God be true, and every man a liar* (Rom. 3:4).

## A NECESSARY CONNECTION

In commenting on Orton's claim that "there is an interesting connection between the rise of direct democracy and the increasing centralization of power," Rushdoony asserts that "this is more than 'an interesting connection': *it is a necessary one*." The reason it is a necessary connection is simple:

Fallen man is the creature who wills to be god and therefore to govern and determine all things. By whatever agency he displaces God's government, man will thereby seek to establish his own ultimacy and absolute government.<sup>14</sup>

All political solutions proceed on the premise that man is right to "establish his own ultimacy" to displace God's ultimacy. Because this is God's universe, these attempts not only fail, they worsen the problems they were intended to solve. Why? Because man's fundamental problem is *his will to be his own ultimate authority*, and politics is the arena in which such usurpation of God's authority plays out most conspicuously, defying Him with a high hand.

Simply put: you cannot solve problems created as a result of breaking His law by breaking His law even more. Problems caused by disobedience aren't solved by more disobedience. Man likes to think his problems are political or economic (making him a victim) rather than moral (making him a perpetrator). But his rebellious preference doesn't alter the fact that political problems

are merely symptomatic of underlying moral problems. And in politics, gaining symptomatic relief only worsens the underlying moral condition of man. Because man's problems are moral and not political, *political cures are worse than the disease*.

There is a way out, but statist man has no interest in it, preferring to rule in hell than serve in heaven. As Rushdoony pointed out,

Man is not frustrated nor constrained because God is God but only when man plays at being god.<sup>15</sup>

But "men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). Rather than admit that political problems cannot be solved politically, men double down on their rebellion. Against this trend, regenerate men (who will enjoy the covenantal blessings of God) must continue to apply God's solutions, for healing will not proceed out of the world of statist politics. Healing will spread over the world when it proceeds from "such as keep His covenant, and to those that remember His commandments to do them" (Psalm 103:18). 🏰

1. R. J. Rushdoony, *Salvation and Godly Rule* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1983 [first edition]).

2. *ibid*, p. 211.

3. R. J. Rushdoony, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2 (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1994), p. 1045.

4. *Salvation and Godly Rule*, p. 62.

5. *ibid*, p. 70.

6. *ibid*, p. 53.

7. *ibid*, p. 348.

8. *ibid*, p. 249.

9. *ibid*, p. 71.

10. *ibid*, p. 244.

11. *ibid*, p. 4.

12. *ibid*, p. 300.

13. Joseph Addison Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1953 ed.), p. 107.

14. *Salvation and Godly Rule*, p. 346.

15. *ibid*, p. 347.

# WE CAN'T GO BACK TO THE FUTURE

BY MARK R. RUSHDOONY



My father often used the term “future-oriented” to describe what he saw as the necessary mindset of the believer. He believed in working in terms of faith in the certain advance of the Kingdom of God.

My father’s postmillennialism was the eschatology behind his future-oriented thinking. He saw pessimistic theology completely dominate Christianity after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. The belief that the imminent return of Jesus would result in His miraculous initiation of the “millennial” reign paralyzed Christians’ understanding of their responsibilities for generations, a condition from which the church has still not recovered.

One of the most famous ministers of the twentieth century began a work that was notably successful and influential. His vision of it extended far into the future. His forward-thinking vision was so inconsistent with his doom-and-gloom “don’t polish brass on a sinking ship” eschatology that something had to give. A man who worked with him told me he stopped preaching about eschatology. He did not repudiate his eschatology (or he would lose his financial base) but he went silent on what he must have realized was a perspective counterproductive to the success of his ministry.

Twentieth-century Christianity was dominated by an eschatology that saw miraculous events ending the current age and beginning a new one. Planning for a future in the present age was, at

best, a waste of time and, at worst, a rejection of what was believed were the certain promises of God. The emphasis was on the *present*, getting as many as possible “saved” before the rapture. That emphasis on the present led to a neglect of Kingdom work that produced a future in which we now find ourselves.

## PAST BOUND?

As bad as neglecting the future to live in the present is viewing the future in terms of a return to the past. This is often a problem with those who believe they are future-oriented; they seek the future by returning to the past. This is perhaps more debilitating than a present orientation. We cannot see the future, so we tend to look nostalgically at some past period and desire its revival. Christians tend to idealize some previous time because they associate it (correctly or incorrectly) with better times. Various periods are seen as a model: the post-Pentecost church in Jerusalem, the “early church” in general, the Reformation, later Puritanism, some period of American history, agrarian society, and so on.

When the first Jews returned from the Babylonian Captivity to rebuild the temple, they quickly progressed to laying its foundation, but then a sense of discouragement set in. It was small, and it was not going to be the showplace Solomon’s temple had been. God’s message through Zerubbabel was, “For who hath despised the day of small things?” (Zech. 4:10). They could not have Solomon’s wonder back again, but they did have the privilege of

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making progress as a covenant people, an honor for which names are recorded in the book of Ezra. The future would come by tackling the hard work ahead, not by looking at the past.

### WHAT FUTURE DO WE SEEK?

When I was young, we would visit my widowed grandmother in Kingsburg, California, which had a sizable population of Armenians, most of whose families had immigrated between the 1890s and the aftermath of World War I. There was an elderly Armenian woman who would walk to the market past my grandmother's bungalow who often stopped to talk to Grandma in Armenian. She spoke no English; she had never learned the language and was now increasingly isolated. She had lived in the past and never invested in the future.

What kind of future do you envision? Is it merely a nostalgic return to something in the past that appears to have qualities you desire? Perhaps I should take that question a step further. What sort of world do you envision when the fullness of the Kingdom of God is approached?

When the dynamic structures and forces of our culture are controlled by forces unfriendly to Christian faith, there is a tendency to retreat to those areas they have abandoned, to claim the ghettos as our own. Rather, we should see all that the ungodly build as the eventual inheritance of the Kingdom.

Christians should embrace the forward movement of history even while acknowledging its failures and shortcomings. The term *reconstruction*, which we use as an analogy for the Christian's duty, was never meant to imply that total *demolition* was always, or even usually, necessary. If that was the case, then we would be little more than anarchistic revolutionaries. Whatever man builds that cannot be shaken

will remain and be part of the Kingdom (Heb. 12:27).

### THE PATH TO THE FUTURE

Look at the technological progress that has occurred in your lifetime. I believe the future holds more such development, and I believe this will be part of the maturing Kingdom of God. The future Kingdom will be a complex culture, one with technologies that are beyond our imaginations. These advances will revolutionize science, medicine, transportation, and more. In one area alone, a breakthrough could transform world economies, offset the damage done by inflation and debt, and open entirely new realms of advances—*energy*. Over forty years ago I recall an industrialist describing his confidence in the free market. He said someday automobiles would be sold with a lifetime of fuel built into them, not because he knew how, but because men, left free, would continue to innovate.

Progress only comes by moving forward, so our perspective should be oriented towards the future and our (admittedly small) role in it. There is no value in being tied to the past, which is, at best, only instructive, and never a blueprint. The future will not be found by retracing our steps; we will not return on the road on which we came.

### OVERCOMING

Like an eschatology that waits for God to miraculously fix everything, a mindset that is past bound avoids the problems in the world. Being future-oriented means we have a mindset that envisions the overcoming of evil by the advancing Kingdom. After all, no group of men could have been more discouraged at the evil around them and the implausibility of advancing the Kingdom than the apostles after the ascension of Jesus. They had to preach the message of a Jew, killed by His own

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people, to non-Jews. They preached the Kingdom of Heaven at the peak of the Roman Empire's strength. It was a seemingly hopeless task, but one that was empowered at Pentecost by the Holy Spirit, and so guaranteed success.

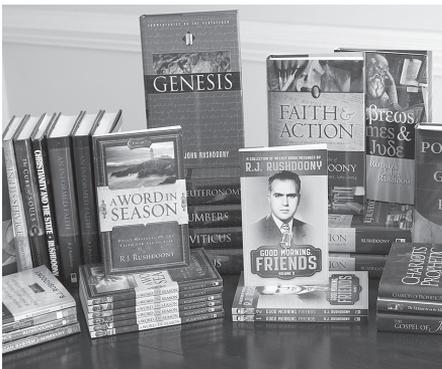
God has given us an outline of the future, though not its details. His Kingdom will advance and cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. That process is being powered by the Holy Spirit. He overcomes and we are overcomers as the citizen-laborers in the Kingdom He advances.

We cannot put history on rewind, nor should we want to as we would only revive the errors of the past and end up where we are today. We envision a future when every knee is bowed and every tongue confessing Jesus is Lord; we work, through the enabling of the Spirit, to erect a future on a new foundation. We don't try to go back to any past. If the present is failing, it means a pioneering work will have some effect, at best a probing towards the next step forward, one productive of a more blessed future. There will be missteps and miscalculations along the way, but that does not mean such steps are fruitless. The heyday of the Christian day school was brief. Most such schools have since closed because they were hurriedly developed on the public-school model which was subsidized and hence economically difficult to maintain. The failure of those efforts was not a defeat, but a steppingstone,

and Christian education itself is alive and well. Homeschooling has expanded and built on the foundation of the early day schools, and there are likely many changes ahead. Lives have been changed, families solidified in covenant awareness, and Christian communities edified by a maturity they lacked a half-century ago, all successes, evidence of progress. Hard work is not, by definition, easy. Sometimes progress is hard to discern when you have yet to crest the hill and see a new horizon.

## OUR OPPORTUNITY

Like the minister I mentioned, many churches have quietly stopped emphasizing the eschatology they once made prominent, often to the exclusion of all else. Even the abandonment of error is progress. Defeatist eschatology is quietly being given a back seat in many churches. The eschatology has, because of its own date-setting, been embarrassed too often. No new eschatology has been adopted, interestingly. Those churches are lacking in vision and are ripe for a new eschatology that will transform their thinking and action. Hopefully, what replaces the old will have a future-oriented perspective, one that develops a new generation of believers to plow through our troubles because God's future for His Kingdom is a glorious one, and our halting efforts in terms of its certainty in the timing and power of the Spirit are sure to be blessed. 🙌



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Our objective is to help equip Christians to “take back” government from the state by means of Biblical self-government and to apply their faith to every sphere of life and thought. We’ve already

gained significant ground through helping to restore Christian education, but it’s time to move into other spheres by God’s grace, law, and power.

We desperately need your help to continue this mission, so please take a few moments today to prayerfully consider supporting Chalcedon with your tax-deductible giving. We’ve enclosed a self-addressed, postage-paid envelope to make it easy, and you can also donate online at:

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