

Contemplations of Rev. Rushdoony

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The Political Illusion

It would be absurd to deny the importance of politics, but it is also very dangerous to over-rate it. One of the persistent problems of Christendom has been the tendency to over-rate both church and state. In Numbers 18:21-26, we see that God orders the tithe to be paid, not to the priests but to the Levites, whose varied functions included education. Thus, worship per se received mainly a tithe of the tithe. At the same time, the civil tax was limited to half a shekel for all males over 18, the same amount for all. As a result, both church and state in Scripture are, however important, restricted in size and power. The power-center is the covenant man and the family.

Michael Kammen, in *A Machine That Would Go of Itself, The Constitution in American Culture* (1986), has shown how modern men since Newton have seen their hope and salvation in machines. The universe was seen as a machine, and politics was seen also as an area where, if the proper machinery of government were once established, all would then go well. Constitutionalism was seen as such a mechanism; once properly established, it would ensure the orderly processes of government and justice. Machine imagery was used well into this century by men like Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Even the critics of the U. S. Constitution used the same language, saying, "the machinery of government under which we live is hopelessly antiquated (and) should be overhauled." After World War II, as colonies were granted independence, they were also given constitutions which had no meaning in terms of their cultures and laws. Not surprisingly, these constitutions soon became meaningless. Contrary to Western expectations, constitutions guaranteed nothing when the culture of a people was unrelated to the paper rules.

In the 1930's, the New Dealers added a biological character to the "mechanism" of the Constitution. After Darwin, they held that constitutions have also an organic character and thus must evolve into more advanced forms. This mechanistic and sometimes biological theory of law and constitutionalism was the first and major form of American (and, often, European) faith concerning political order.

The second, stemming from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, held to a belief in the will of the people as embodied in the general will. Philip S. Paludan, in *A Covenant with Death, The Constitution, Law, and Equality in the Civil War Era* (1975), has shown how the popular will came to outweigh law in many minds. Daly Crockett claimed that the heart of the common man was at least the equal of books and the learning of judges. He boasted of having never read a law book and of having based his decisions as a justice of the peace on "common sense and honesty" and of having "relied on natural born sense and not law learning." Thus, the certainty of the "mechanism" of the Constitution was giving way for many to the natural goodness of man's will. Such advocates of man's natural wisdom held that no law or constitution could outweigh the will of man.

Many, of course, tried to combine the idea of constitutions and laws as the mechanism of justice and government with the idea of supremacy of the popular will, the majority, or the democratic consensus. As a result of this union of the two ideas, it became commonplace to use the word "democracy" instead of "republic" in describing the United States. The U.S. Constitution was re-interpreted along democratic lines, as was the British constitution. Will and mechanism had become

a unity and an instrument whereby man's problems would be solved. Salvation was now on its way by means of the democratic process in and through civil government.

Church and state have often seen themselves as man's saviors. One of the premises of the states of the ancient world was that a stateless man was no longer a man, that outside the state there was no salvation. A like belief has at times been common to some churches. The Biblical faith, of course, is that there is no salvation outside of Christ. Peter declares: "neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Our Lord says plainly, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:16). (Ironically, I have been told by critics more than a few times that to believe in a salvation exclusively through Christ is bigotry. These same people will declare that there is neither hope nor future, no salvation, in other words, for men except through democracy. This is more than bigotry: it is pharisaic stupidity!)

Modern men believe earnestly that their hope of salvation is in and through politics, through the state. As a result, the capture of the state in order to institute their plan of salvation is an urgent matter to many men and their political parties. Some talk as though the world will come to an end if the opposition party wins the election!

Now, clearly, political parties can do some good, and much harm, but they cannot create the good society nor a new paradise on earth. Political change is coercive change, not moral transformation. Political power cannot regenerate men. All too often, politics is the art of turning a working society into a disaster. At its best, however, civil government cannot give to a people the character they do not have.

To expect social regeneration by means of politics is to believe in moral shortcuts. It is the belief that men and nations can be made new by legislation. Imperial Germany before and during World War I was very strongly socialistic; every area of life was regulated and controlled: it was an ordered society. After World War I, many liberals believed that freedom from socialist regulations would produce, automatically, a free, liberal economy and society. The result instead was the moral anarchy of the Weimar Republic: it was not productive as the liberals had hoped but was instead given to lawlessness. In voting for Hitler, many people were voting for a return to order, for a respite from lawlessness, only to find that an ordered society can be a radically lawless one.

Only a moral society can be a truly orderly one, and a moral society requires a regenerate people.

Too often, the churches have followed either one of two equally vain approaches to civil government. First, the social-gospel faith sees man's hope in terms of civil law. Hence, the control and use of the civil order becomes an essential step to social salvation. Instead of a personal moral commitment to charity and social responsibility, the social-gospel churches substantiated political commitment, they are now dying, because a century of social action has produced only minor goods and major ills.

Second, the pietistic churches want no involvement in either society or civil government. For them, the essence of the Gospel is, "Ye must be born again." They forget that this is the starting point, not the essence, for our Lord declares, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (or, justice)" (Matt. 6:33). Because of this misplaced emphasis, such churches produce at best usually only babes in Christ. They forget that a baby that never grows up is an idiot. It should not surprise us that such churches are marked by social impotence. People can attend them year in and year out and hear nothing either to offend or to challenge them. In effect, such churches give assent to the savior state by their unwillingness to confront it.

Salvation by political action is the ruling religion of our time. It is a form of humanism. It will destroy us in time, if we do not replace it with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and the wholeness of the word of God. We have as a people sought salvation through education, "social justice," and also politics. All have failed us. It is time to bring back the KING.

Rev. R.J. Rushdoony , Roots of Reconstruction , p. 401; Chalcedon Position Paper No. 96

Source: <https://chalcedon.edu/resources/articles/the-political-illusion>

The Fear of Freedom

E. R. Dodds, in his study of *The Greeks and the Irrational*, titles a chapter “The Fear of Freedom.” The whole of the ancient world was marked by this fear of freedom. Plato and Aristotle planned states in which freedom was to be denied to most men, and pagan rulers uniformly acted on this principle. Freedom was believed to be a dangerous thing, and only a handful of rulers could be trusted with it.

Through the centuries, men have noticed how fearful men are of freedom and how most men are unable to cope with it. T. H. Huxley said, “A man’s worst difficulties begin when he is able to do as he likes.”

Certainly, in our day most men pay lip service to freedom but in reality vote against it with their lives and their ballots. Our legislators assume that farmers and farm workers cannot be trusted with freedom, and capital and labor both assume that the less freedom for others, the better all will be.

Men do not like freedom because they themselves are not free by nature. The basic slavery, slavery to sin, is the nature of their being, and they show their slavery in every area of life.

Jesus declared, “Whosoever committeth sin is the servant [or slave] of sin ... If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:34, 36). The root of slavery is in the nature of man.

We are today surrounded by a slave people because they are by nature unregenerate. They are most at home in slavery, and most comfortable with it. They will vote for slavery because they are slaves. They dislike and fear freedom because they are at enmity with God. Give them freedom and they will vote it out of existence and work in every way to destroy it.

Men fear freedom, because it means life and responsibility under God. The appeal of slavery is that it offers a life free of responsibilities, and this is always the appeal of slavery. Some nations have in the past had as many as four-fifths living in actual slavery and content with it, because it took responsibility off their shoulders.

The flight from freedom is always first of all the flight from God, who created man to be responsible and to exercise dominion over the earth under Him. The choice is always God or slavery.

Rev. R.J. Rushdoony, *California Farmer* 242:3 (Feb. 1, 1975), p. 55.

Source: <https://chalcedon.edu/resources/articles/the-fear-of-freedom>

The Return to Barbarism

Her home is a lovely one, in a superior neighborhood. She prides herself on being a good parent, and she insists that her two teenage children bring in every kind of schoolmate, especially the ones who are regarded as socially unacceptable, more or less delinquent, and wild. As a good liberal, this woman holds that she can help people by being good to them.

Recently, she returned home to find her place burglarized. Police said the thieves obviously knew what was in the house and where to get it. Neighbors reported that some of the usual teenagers had been around the place, but the neighbors did not know that Mrs. B—— was gone.

The woman was not angry. In fact, she was more than a little thrilled and excited by it all. She was definitely not angry at whichever teenagers were guilty. Instead, she kept saying, What drove them to it? How terrible, she maintained, that our culture drives its greatest resource, youth, to such delinquency. We are all guilty, she held, and we must all somehow make it up to our underprivileged youth. If the thieves were caught, she would not prosecute. As each day passed, she developed a progressively more self-righteous glow over submitting to evil and then calling evil good.

The sad fact is that this is not an isolated case. I have run across three like situations recently. Worse than a thief is someone who justifies a thief and calls evil good. The teenage thieves took some valuable property. The woman struck at the moral foundations of society by denying personal responsibility.

To deny personal responsibility is to turn to paganism and barbarism. The savage witch doctor, in diagnosing a sick man's problem, held that someone had cast an evil spell on him, and whomever he named was killed. In this country, the Iroquois Indians killed many innocent Indians whenever a medicine man accused some tribal member of causing the illness of another. When liberals and sociologists blame society and our culture instead of the individual, they are turning the clock back to barbarism.

Our politicians are doing the same. They tell us society is to blame, or the parents, or our supposedly animal past, and so on. The language is supposedly scientific, but the meaning is the old barbarism of the witch doctor, of the days when a father was put to death for the crime of his son, and a child for the crime of his father. Sometimes a city was sentenced to death for the offense of one or two citizens.

As against this, the Bible declares emphatically, as law for men and nations, "every man shall be put to death [that is, suffer punishment] for his own sin" (Deut. 24:16); "every one shall die for his own iniquity" (Jer. 31:30); "[t]he fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers" (Deut. 24:16). To deny personal responsibility is to turn to paganism and barbarism.

Mrs. B—— feels that she is very enlightened and progressive. In reality, she might as well run around naked with a piece of bone through her nose. Her thinking is on the level of the savages.

Rev. R.J. Rushdoony, CA Farmer 238:1 (Jan. 6, 1973), p. 19

Source: <https://chalcedon.edu/resources/articles/the-return-to-barbarism>

Thieves' Paradise

Supposing we want to create a social order for the welfare of thieves and for their security, how shall we do it? The world must be made safe for stealing and for thieves, of course. We must therefore create a social order in which the thieves can steal but where no one can rob a thief. Next, we must make stealing respectable. Simple, obvious, and direct theft involves robbing a victim personally. Indirect theft means hiring someone else to do it. Legalized theft is getting civil government to do it for us, and this has the most respectability and prestige, so our thieves' paradise must have it.

To make matters all the better, our legalized theft must have the prestige of approval from economists and experts, and what can better qualify than a managed money which is debased and inflated? Inflation is a simple process: it is what happens when a dishonest farmer adds water to the milk. Past a certain point, it ceases to be even watered milk; it is simply milky water. But, fortunately, the inflation of money is respectable and legal in our thieves' paradise, because the thieves are in charge, not the farmers.

Another highly respectable device in our thieves' paradise is taxation. God, of course, is content with only a tithe, but any self-respecting thief knows that a sucker must be taken all the way. Is taxation past forty percent? Well, the chicken is far from plucked!

In our thieves' paradise, respectability is important, and so the churches, schools, and colleges are important. These institutions can tell the people how moral stealing is, and how welfare must precede property, and human rights are more important than property rights. Is there anything more wonderful for a thief than a world in which the good people are persuaded that it is their duty to be plucked? Moreover, why not add to this new morality of a thieves' paradise the idea of a world union of thieves to avoid wasteful competition? After all, it is the duty of all good thieves to concentrate on plundering the people. This is a common faith all thieves can unite on. Why not unite then into one grand world order dedicated to the promotion of plunder on a world scale?

Of course, one big roadblock remains. God, somehow, has not caught up with the times and is hopelessly out of date. He still insists, "Thou shalt not steal." Such an obsolete and antiquated morality, and this very dated God, must be gently done away with. If we say, "Thou shalt not steal," it applies only to the citizens, who must not steal from the thieves. The thieves' state is beyond this law, and, as for God, we can declare Him dead. All problems are now taken care of except one. As Pilate and the Sanhedrin found out once before, God is very uncooperative: He won't stay dead! And He does make trouble for all self-respecting thieves. Times have changed, but God hasn't. It makes for quite a problem (but not for God!).

Rev. R.J. Rushdoony, *Bread Upon the Waters: Columns From The California Farmer* [Fairfax, VA: Thoburn Press, 1974]

Source: <https://chalcedon.edu/resources/articles/thieves-paradise>

Vision

She was a very modern, attractive young woman in her twenties. While in bed with her lover, her husband came home unexpectedly, thrashed the adulterer soundly, and threw him out. Meanwhile, the young woman called the police, and, when they arrived, demanded that they arrest her husband. Why? Because, she said, he had violated her privacy and her “rights”! She was outraged when the police refused to do anything, and she wondered what the world was coming to.

Surprised? You should not be. Proverbs 29:18, in the Berkeley Version, reads, “Where there is no vision the people run wild; but happy is he who keeps the law.” The meaning of “vision” is prophetic ministry which faithfully preaches the Word of God, so that the people, by means of God’s law, have a lamp and a light for their way, and therefore vision. That vision is now gone with countless people, and, like this young adulteress, their ideas of “rights” are governed by sin rather than the law of God.

The young woman became very angry and bitter about what she regarded as the failure of the police. To her, something was wrong with a social order which failed to protect the “freedom” of someone like herself. The social order was “repressive” and hostile to freedom, she felt.

She is not alone. Millions agree with her. As a result, people are running wild, and the social order is perishing, because there is no vision. And there can only be vision if the Word of God is faithfully preached, and faithfully heeded.

There are many voices speaking today, and many things to listen to. Are you listening to the Word of God? Or are you, like that young woman, without vision, deliberately blinding yourself by neglecting the Word of God?

Rev. R.J. Rushdoony , CA Farmer 244:6 (Mar. 20, 1976), p. 39.

Source: <https://chalcedon.edu/resources/articles/vision>

About Rev. R.J. Rushdoony

Rev. R.J. Rushdoony (1916–2001), was a leading theologian, church/state expert, and author of numerous works on the application of Biblical law to society. He started the Chalcedon Foundation in 1965. His Institutes of Biblical Law (1973) began the contemporary theonomy movement which posits the validity of Biblical law as God’s standard of obedience for all. He therefore saw God’s law as the basis of the modern Christian response to the cultural decline, one he attributed to the church’s false view of God’s law being opposed to His grace. This broad Christian response he described as “Christian Reconstruction.” He is credited with igniting the modern Christian school and homeschooling movements in the mid to late 20th century. He also traveled extensively lecturing and serving as an expert witness in numerous court cases regarding religious liberty. Many ministry and educational efforts that continue today, took their philosophical and Biblical roots from his lectures and books.

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