

ARISE & BUILD

A BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE CHALCEDON FOUNDATION® | JANUARY 2020

“AS A RESULT...”

BY MARTIN G. SELBREDE



In 2008, Chalcedon published an article I wrote titled “The Problem That Chalcedon Poses” which examined an assessment of R. J. Rushdoony’s thinking by a scholar who was by no means a friend of Christian Reconstruction: Dr. Molly Worthen.¹ While her commitments are in stark opposition to Dr. Rushdoony’s, she was far more honest than her fellow critics, consequently reaching important insights missed by those pushing tribal agendas against a revitalized Biblical faith.

Dr. Worthen’s comments provide a useful introduction to some key points we wish to share here, and we cite her precisely because she is immune from the charge of being a Rushdoony sycophant.² We will enumerate her points first and then explain their significance (while ignoring the undiplomatic language).

When Rushdoony identified an intellectual crisis afoot in American Protestantism, he was right ... he also sought to impose upon conservative Christianity an intellectual consistency that it lacked.³

In general, Rushdoony’s disciples lack his intellectual confidence. They beat upon his favorite themes—North avows that there is “no such thing as neutrality” and manages to quote Cornelius Van Til in nearly every book—but without Rushdoony’s philosophical insight.⁴

Bahnsen is often held up by reconstructionists as the movement’s foremost scholar, and informed readers may wonder why I have given him short shrift here. I believe his reputation is ill deserved ... The motivating ideas of Christian reconstructionism ... are only superficially present in Bahnsen’s works. Those who argue for Bahnsen’s superiority imply that by snowing critics with proof texts, he somehow brought new respectability to the movement—but the current reputation of reconstructionism proves that he failed at that task. Rushdoony, there is no doubt, was the founder of the movement and the superior mind.⁵

The power of Rushdoony’s writings lay less in his strict imposition of Mosaic law on modern life than in the fact that he had a blueprint in the first place, and a philosophy of history to support it. Moreover, he spoke to the tough questions that American evangelical Christians faced. His answers were thought-provoking, to say the least. To ignore the moral complexities of the Old Testament is to commit the heresy of Marcion and deprive Christianity of its foundations; to set aside Christianity’s exclusive claims to truth and salvation may be polite, but it is intellectually dishonest.⁶

What Dr. Worthen is driving at here is that Dr. Rushdoony’s theology *possesses a formidable backbone*. There is something solid and substantial here, something (as Dr. Worthen notes elsewhere) intended to be world-transforming and designed to bear the weight of

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the Great Commission on its shoulders.

We want to examine one of the more distinctive, imposing pillars of the full-orbed faith for all of life that Dr. Rushdoony was directing our collective eyes toward. For suitable context, we turn briefly to a recent news article.

DISCONNECT NOTICE

On December 16, 2019, the *Washington Examiner* posted an article by Max Eden about Steven Wilson, the founder and CEO of a New York City charter school chain who was fired by his board for a blog post that, among other things, extolled an education structured to permit students to “experience the satisfaction of their intellect: *the heady delight in connecting ideas*, the pleasure of imagination, and the reward that follows mental struggle” (emphasis added). In today’s highly charged climate, to be protective of such values against ideologically intolerant litmus tests is regarded as inherently oppressive and racist. Among other tragedies embodied in such humanistic purges is the loss of *the heady delight in connecting ideas*: students will *not* organize ideas—this will be done for them so they don’t deviate from approved narratives.

Contrast Wilson’s promotion of *the heady delight in connecting ideas* with the indictments raised by the late John Taylor Gatto, who was New York State Teacher of the Year:

The first lesson I teach is confusion. Everything I teach is out of context. I teach the un-relating of everything. I teach dis-connections . . .

Even in the best schools a close examination of curriculum and its sequences turns up a lack of coherence, full of internal contradictions. Fortunately the children have no words to define the panic and anger they feel *at constant violations of natural order and sequence* fobbed off on them as quality in education.

Meaning, not disconnected facts, is what sane human beings seek . . .

I teach the un-relating of everything, an infinite fragmentation the opposite of cohesion.

In contrast, Dr. Rushdoony stood squarely upon the truth that “all things cohere in Christ” (Col. 1:17) so that there is not only an underlying unity, *there are connections between everything*.

Moreover, one can trace the crucial connections that Rushdoony makes throughout his writings by paying attention to the signposts that crisscross the published landscape. We don’t just mean obvious terms like *because*, or *thus*, or *consequently* that flag cause-and-effect relations. We mean one phrase in particular: *as a result*. When you encounter this term in Rushdoony’s writings or lectures, you are standing on the all-important connection that bridges the elements on either side of the phrase.

“AS A RESULT . . .”

How often does Rushdoony use the phrase “as a result”? I examined eight major works of his, and counted how often he connected ideas with this piercing phrase. In ascending order of occurrence, we have *A Christian Survey of World History Syllabus* (31), *Sovereignty* (47), *Salvation and Godly Rule* (51), *Institutes of Biblical Law, Volume 1* (83), *Institutes of Biblical Law, Volume 2: Law and Society* (97), *An Informed Faith* (122), *Systematic Theology* (134), and *Faith and Action* (215). That totals 780 occurrences in just eight works. There’d be well over a thousand if we sampled all his writings (and triple that amount if we included synonyms in the list).

What should we notice first and foremost when we encounter the phrase “as a result” in Rushdoony’s books? The phrase tells us that whatever follows those words *didn’t just arise in a vacuum*. There is an inexorable cause-

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and-effect connection with what came before. In Scripture we read that “the curse causeless shall not come” (Prov. 26:2). The situations we are in are not without a cause, the ideas dominating our mental horizons are not without a cause, but few are those who can properly trace the causes, and fewer yet are those who can see such causes at work today and who know what effects they will instigate.

Humans have no trouble grasping the concept of mechanical cause-and-effect: the cue ball strikes another billiard ball and the resulting trajectory is easily predicted. But our ability to discern cultural cause-and-effect, moral cause-and-effect, covenantal cause-and-effect,⁹ social cause-and-effect, logical cause-and-effect, educational cause-and-effect, etc., has been gravely weakened. We don't readily make these connections. We don't possess the framework necessary to do so. As Warfield said, we've been “long deprived of the strong discipline of the past.”

Our toehold on reality has atrophied until it has grown unfit to solidly anchor our understanding. When Warfield speaks of a matter “reducing to the stringency of a syllogism” (whereby you can draw a logical conclusion possessing absolute certainty) he is using terms—and ideas—essentially lost to our generation. Today's cutting-edge progressives would deride such terminology as being a tool of social oppression worthy only of scorn. Rushdoony, who never let his enemies set his agenda for him, nonetheless continued to build a coherent edifice while putting his finger on every key connection and faithfully teaching them to God's people.

A CASCADE OF IMPLICATIONS

Do not miss the other key point: the phrase *as a result* is, itself, laden with *meaning*: it presupposes meaning

and relationship and thus embodies an implicit *philosophy of history*. This brings us full circle to Dr. Worthen's earlier point (note the phrase that I've italicized below):

The power of Rushdoony's writings lay less in his strict imposition of Mosaic law on modern life than in the fact that he had a blueprint in the first place, *and a philosophy of history to support it*.

Dr. Worthen understands something that many Christians do not: a blueprint, even if it's the right blueprint, only gets you so far. Without an adequate infrastructure to support it, you build on sand because extending a project forward through time requires awareness of goals and purpose. Even communists knew enough to have an eschatology (albeit a warped one) upon which to anchor their statist blueprint.¹⁰

Without the ability to draw the connections within an unshakable philosophy of history, our works suffer like the seeds cast upon stony ground, lacking “deepness of earth” and so “having no root, they wither away” (Matt. 13:5-6). But the right blueprint *plus* the right philosophy of history is a blockbuster combination.

This is what makes Rushdoony's Biblical worldview formidable. “Worldview” doesn't merely mean possessing a set of disparate Biblical factoids in a jumble inside one's mind. A worldview includes the ligaments that tie everything together systematically, such as the kind of connections Rushdoony continually marks out with that trenchant phrase, *as a result*. Rushdoony goes beyond the words of T. S. Eliot (“So this is this and that is that”) to explain *how and why this leads to that*. This massively-extended network of meaning across multiple disciplines can be accessed by the serious Christian reader whenever he reads Rushdoony. But there's more.

STEPS TOWARD UNDERSTANDING

Of course, one can always “study” Rushdoony to try to emulate his thinking, but this isn’t actually necessary. When you read him with even moderate care, subliminal changes occur in your thinking because your mind responds to meaning almost by osmosis whenever it is cogently presented. You begin to see the connections between things and events. You start to see more clearly how reality is framed within a Biblical context, and how God’s Hand moves upon His world. Just as giving heed to Scripture can lead to thinking more Biblically, reading someone like Rushdoony can lead to greater depth and understanding in how we see the world and our place in it.

To get to that point, we must walk in His ways, on the straight paths He has set our feet upon. In God’s grace we might then arrive at the blessings announced in Psalm 111:10: “a good understanding have all they that do His commandments.”¹¹ A faith grounded on a foundation of total meaning will inexorably lead to stronger convictions and more courageous action.

Rushdoony excelled in meaningfully tying all reality together within a Biblical philosophy of history, attracting the attention of observers like Dr. Worthen. The playing out of that Biblical framework is exemplified beautifully in Rushdoony’s output every time he uses those three modest words: *as a result*. We in turn learn key lessons whenever we cross each of his literary bridges, those connections between ideas,¹² better grasping how cause leads to effect in God’s creation, and how results flow from thoughts, faith, and action.

We may even realize that Rushdoony’s writings seem to reach across time to speak to our situation precisely because he never ceased tying causes and effects together, edifying future generations with each of his trailblazing

volumes. When we see how causation and meaning meet, faith and action in our own lives will soon operate in greater harmony. 🙏

1. <https://chalcedon.edu/magazine/the-problem-that-chalcedon-poses>
2. Worthen was a doctoral candidate at Yale when I originally wrote my article in 2008, but was subsequently awarded her doctorate in American religious history in 2011.
3. Molly Worthen, “The Chalcedon Problem: Rousas John Rushdoony and the Origins of Christian Reconstructionism,” *Church History* 77:2 (June 2008), p. 435.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 430.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 430, n116.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 434-435.
7. [https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/do-charter-school-leaders-still-believe-in-education?](https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/do-charter-school-leaders-still-believe-in-education?hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main-charter-schools%3Aeducation%3Ahomepage%2Fstory)
8. John Taylor Gatto, *Dumbing Us Down* (Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers, 1992), pp. 2-4.
9. A weakness in discerning covenantal cause-and-effect explains why so many generations of Christians, upon looking at the erosion of their society, erroneously gravitated to Matthew 24 as the underlying cause rather than Deuteronomy 28.
10. Francis Nigel Lee, *Communist Eschatology* (Philadelphia, PA: The Craig Press, 1974).
11. We should not omit the powerful promise of Psalm 119:99: “I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation.” Perhaps David’s point here helps explain how the children of Issachar “understood the signs of the times and what Israel ought to do” (1 Chron. 12:32).
12. It is worth noting that when the humanist historian of science, James Burke, released his PBS series *Connections* in 1978 (which primarily traced technological connections), he didn’t provide a particularly robust philosophy of history to unify the series. Burke, an entertaining, well-informed, and engaging guide, narrated the proceedings authoritatively enough to suggest there must be some meaning behind each step in the ladder of progress he documented, but I doubt that there is any world-transforming power in that television series when compared to the kind of connections that Dr. Rushdoony makes throughout his works. Burke’s goals and Rushdoony’s goals have superficial similarities, but it is Rushdoony who better understands “what makes men tick.”

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ACTIONS VS. ACADEMICS

BY MARK R. RUSHDOONY



I have been asked several times over the years to what historically analogous period of Hebrew history I would compare the church today. That question itself reveals the limited validity of any such comparison, because it compares the course of God's providence between the old Hebrew covenant and the new covenant in Christ's blood. In the old covenant the membership was small, and several times appeared to be near extinction. We can take the hard-won lessons of those old covenant believers to heart, but our context is far different in "these last days" (Heb. 1:2) because of the victory that was accomplished by Jesus. His resurrection was the turning point of human history and we, the covenant people in His blood, are now operating in His Kingdom, the increase of which will not end (Isa. 9:7).

Simply put, the decisive battle of the war has been won. We are, as the people of the King, advancing as His Kingdom goes from victory to victory, and we are told the gates of hell will fall to it (Matt. 16:18). Therefore, Paul could write from Corinth, a center of pagan tradition and immorality, that even though the world considers believers "sheep for the slaughter," they are, in fact "more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Rom. 8:37).

That said, there is a problem in the church today that is comparable to one repeatedly identified in Hebrew history, disobedience. This is not analogous to a historical period; it is simply man's recurring sin. The prophets over several generations reminded the people of the old covenant of their disobedience.

First Israel, then Judah devolved into Baalism, the worship of fertility gods. Altars, images, and shrines proliferated, even in Jerusalem. Worship involved sexual acts and, at times, even child sacrifice. One would think such practices would be enough witness to their ungodliness, yet the prophets repeatedly referenced their disobedience to God's laws in such "lesser" matters as treatment of the poor and widows, land use, money, and business practices. Why?

The covenant was governed by a covenant law which had been consistently ignored in one area after another. The prophets were testifying, witnessing to the people's abandonment of the covenant in their day-to-day life. Neither Israel nor Judah ever officially repudiated Jehovah. They both claimed Him and His promises, yet added false gods, much like modernists refer to the "many sources of truth" or "paths that lead to God." They could play a semantic game and claim Jehovah, but they could not deny the specific ways in which they ignored His laws. They could argue theology, but the prophets declared their society was evidence of their violation of the covenant. Professed belief must be backed up by obedience. "If you love me, keep my commandments," Jesus said (John 14:15).

FAITH AND ACTION

The Christian Reconstruction movement began with my father's work and his principal mouthpiece was the *Chalcedon Report*, which was first published in 1965. It was his essays in that publication which developed what he called in the first issue "a counter-measure to the prevailing trend" (October

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1, 1965). Not too many newsletter essays are published as anthologies, but these essays are so important we did just that in a three-volume set we titled *Faith and Action*.

“Faith and action” was a term my father used repeatedly, because so much of the modern church talks of faith but not action, the activity of our faith. My father, on the contrary, saw theology as our understanding or explanation of our faith, but wanted to emphasize our responsibility to act in terms of it. Faith must result in faithfulness, yet the sum of much modern Christianity is talk about the faith or its “spiritual” meaning rather than its application.

REFORMED VS. REFORMING

My father claimed the Protestant Reformation as his theological heritage, but was not content to live in its past, as though a rehearsal of its battles represents a gain for the Kingdom. The Reformation advanced the Kingdom of God by correcting errors evidenced in practice. In the sixteenth century its theological battles had immediate practical application while rehashing them is today often little more than an academic exercise. There are many churchmen today who are *Reformed* in the sense that they are in agreement with the theology of the Reformation but who do precious little *reforming* today.

The result is that Reformed thought is often characterized as primarily an intellectual approach. That is generally unfair, but to the extent anything is reduced to a *primarily* scholarly or academic defense it becomes rationalistic and cold. Being Reformed must be about more than sixteenth-century battles; it must be a reforming movement now and moving forward. If the primary criteria of being Reformed is about having the best understanding of theology, it will

do nothing. That is the “faith” James condemned as “dead” because it was without “works,” that is, action or application (James 2:14-20). The word James used to refer to *works* means *toil* or physical activity, not to describe a *works salvation* but a *working faith*. Even the devils believed, James said; knowing the truth in the Christian sense is to live in terms of it, to apply it. To be Reformed means we believe in the *reforming* power of the Word and the Spirit, so we boldly act in terms of the claims of the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the certain advance of His Kingdom.

The old covenant prophets rarely mention what the people or priests believed; their preaching was about obedience. Theology must be the basis for action. If theology only results in academic thought and debate it is no longer seed being sown that it might grow and multiply. When it became necessary that charitable work be given increased attention, the apostles anointed men to do so while they continued to devote themselves to “prayers, and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). Both theology and application, faith and action, were necessary and neither ought to be ignored.

My father had great respect for men who were *doers*, men of action. He once commented that many people were Reconstructionists without realizing it, or even if they repudiated the terminology. Those who do the work of the Kingdom (like faithful servants, as Jesus illustrated in several parables) are engaged in the work of reconstruction. An active faith is one of self-conscious faithfulness that does not end with academic discussion. We study the Word to understand how to serve the Lord. We are reforming because our faith empowers our faithfulness. 🙌

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HOW DARE YOU?

BY ANDREA SCHWARTZ



What does it mean to dare someone? Well, Noah Webster's definition sums it up well:

To challenge; to provoke; to defy; as, to dare a man to fight.

I have noticed of late that our culture seems to be working overtime, daring Christians to put up or shut up. Whether it is mandating medical procedures and practices antithetical to the Christian faith, or limiting the free expression in the public square of those who proclaim the rule and reign of Jesus Christ, the message seems to be, "Show me what you've got!"

Many professing believers seem to think the highest good is to be nice, blend in, and do not make waves. Rather than win people to the cause of Christ, such attitudes embolden them to continue to see how far they can take things. From drag queen story hours, to boycotting businesses that support Biblical principles, to establishing civil jurisdictions where people are forbidden to use certain words that are offensive to tyrants, those who hate the Lord, and refuse to be ruled by Him, continue their attempts to transform our nation 180 degrees opposite from its origins and foundations.

This reminds me of the account in 1 Samuel when Goliath mocked the Israelites because they were too afraid to challenge him. It is noteworthy that the one who felled the giant was not someone with great political power or impressive physical stature. Nor was he content with the enemies of God setting the rules of engagement. No, David, the shepherd boy, livid that anyone would dare to challenge the living God,

took the tools that were right before him and used them to fell the giant.

While David gathered smooth stones, and only needed one, we also have very effective weapons to deal with God's enemies. Psalm 127 identifies these as the children of believing families. These arrows must be sharpened and prepared for use. Thus, the primary arena for this preparation is the Christian family where an education centered on the law-word of God is the focus and priority.

I don't know about you, but I am sick and tired of the dares that continue to be thrown at the people of God. Chalcedon is committed to turn the tables on such arrogance and equip self-governing Christians to stand up to the despotic bullies of our day. By educating ourselves, our offspring, and those the Lord places in our path, to fear God and keep His commandments, we will put our opponents on notice that we don't find their authority legitimate, and as far as our households are concerned, we will serve the Lord. To paraphrase our David, our forebear in the faith who stood against the giant of his day,

You come against us with laws and oppressive mandates to silence and marginalize us, but we come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into our hands, and we'll strike you down and cut off your head ... All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands. 🏰

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Since 1965, the Chalcedon Foundation has served as the founding and leading ministry for the message of Christian Reconstruction, which is simply the mission of advancing the Kingdom of God in every area of life. Now, fifty-four years later, the need for this message and ministry is greater.

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.

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