

ChalcedonReport

MINISTRY NEWS FROM THE CHALCEDON FOUNDATION DECEMBER 2018

The Finger of God

by Martin G. Selbrede



The focus of the *Chalcedon Report* is the ministry work of the Chalcedon Foundation. It's the publication where we communicate with our supporters about the work we're pursuing to equip the saints for advancing the Kingdom of God. While this article is no exception (we'll be discussing recent past events as well as on-going and future projects further down), it would be useful, as the year is ending, to take stock of the purpose behind Chalcedon's work. This accounts for the title I've chosen ... a title you'd expect to find in *Arise & Build* but not in the *Chalcedon Report*.

In short, it would be valuable to get our bearings, to see where we're positioned in the flow of history and God's purpose in it, and what forces continue to shape our work. The better we understand the Kingdom and how it advances, the more wisely we'll undertake the task of equipping the saints for the work before them.

The Advance of Christ's Kingdom

In a recent on-line dialogue, the view was put forward that various miraculous works ought to be accompanying the Kingdom as it advances. Miraculous healings, the casting out of demons, etc., were being heralded as essential evidences indicating that the Kingdom of God was present and moving forcefully in our midst.

The absence of such overt manifestations of the miraculous was regarded as evidence that our Kingdom efforts today fall woefully short of God's



Mark Rushdoony addressing the Future of Christendom conference attendees in Reading, PA.

marching orders. In the opinion of the well-meaning critic, we've lost faith in a supernatural God, and this hobbles and cripples the Kingdom because we focus upon the mundane and exclude the supernatural. Our faith, as it were, is supposedly secularized and thus cramped. The logical conclusion of such reasoning is that God is not working through us as He otherwise might because we've ruled out the primary ways in which He manifests His power to advance His Kingdom.

The argument reduces to this: (1) Miracles always accompany the advance

of His Kingdom. (2) Such miracles don't accompany Chalcedon's work. Therefore, (3) Chalcedon's work doesn't truly advance the Kingdom, but some lesser, arguably compromised agenda.

The fascinating thing is that this critic is right, but not for the reasons he thinks. The fault doesn't lie in the logic, which is impeccable, but in the definitions, which are weak and beggarly.

The God Who Works

Before we reach the heart of the argument, we would do well to consider the assumptions it comes clothed in. For example, one point urged by my well-meaning critic is the sharp line between the mundane (the everyday world) and the supernatural (where the signs of the Kingdom's advance are to be manifested). And the vigor with which he promoted this sharp distinction suggests that it undergirds his critique: if this line were to be blurred, then the objections start to lose their force.

We tend to forget that the mundane, the everyday world we live in, doesn't just happen to exist as some brute fact. In a sense, it is being forced to exist—continually. Christ is "upholding all things by the word of His power" (Heb. 1:3). Without God's providence, the creation would unravel: He is intimately involved in its governance. This is why creation and providence are two sides to the same coin: they lean upon one another. To the extent we lose sight of this fact, we can drift inadvertently into deism and the idea of the Absentee Landlord.

Warfield used to illustrate this

issue by considering a window made of glass. One way to look at the window is to examine its dimensions, physical properties, chemical composition, and transparency. This, Warfield points out, is the scientific way to look at the window. But the other way is to look *through* the window to the world beyond it. The window doesn't exist for its own sake, but to be looked through. And so too the world itself: you can look at it scientifically, or you can look through the world, beyond it, to the Hand of the Creator whose glory it reveals. An exclusive focus on the scientific way inflicts a partial blindness upon us that stands to cripple our appraisal of reality.

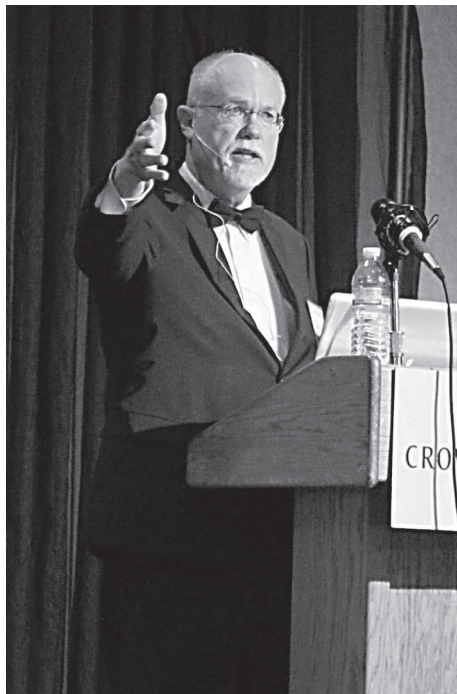
In other words, we are prone to underappreciate God's work in the sphere of the mundane. The flipside to that misperception is to over-appreciate the externally spectacular. Elijah himself had to learn that God was not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire, stunning though those phenomena doubtless were (1 Kings 19:11–12).

And it was doubtless unnerving to the people when God declared “not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit” (Zech. 4:6) and further informed them that His seven eyes were all upon the tin stone on a string used by Zerubbabel as a plumb line to insure the temple stones were assembled properly. What men regarded as the cheapest tool in their toolkit, God openly focuses upon and actively rejoices in (Zech. 4:10). If Christ says of His Words that “they are spirit” (John 6:63) and every Scripture is “God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16), then we should take care that we don't dethrone God from the mundane.

God, as often as not, uses modest means: the weak to confound the strong, the rejected stone to become the head of the corner, the foolishness of preaching rather than signs or wisdom to embody “the power of God unto salvation.” Which brings us to our main point.

The Bible and the Finger of God

While it is common to set the miraculous or supernatural over against the everyday world of the mundane, there is one respect in which Scripture



In Reading, Martin Selbrede traced the deep roots of our current educational crisis AND the correct shape that future Biblical solutions needed to take.

puts them on the same level. This peculiar circumstance arises once we weigh the law of God in the balance. When we do so, we can then see a glorious symmetry that has gone unnoticed by most observers.

The phrase “the finger of God” occurs four times in Scripture. In two of those instances, a supernatural miracle is the focus. In Exodus 8:19, the magicians of Egypt concede to Pharaoh that the latest miracle wrought through Moses was by “the finger of God.” In Luke 11:20, Christ informs His enemies that if He casts out demons by “the finger of God,” then the Kingdom of God has indeed come upon them.

In short, the *finger of God* is evidence of an extraordinary working of the Almighty, and was present when Moses delivered his people out of physical bondage, and when Christ delivered His people out of spiritual bondage.

But what of the other two times that Scripture speaks of the finger of God? In Exodus 31:18 and Deut. 9:10 we learn that the law of God on the tables of stone was written by the finger of God. God even wrote them a second time (Deut. 10:4) since Moses destroyed the first pair of stone tables.

Half of the Biblical references to “the finger of God” refer to openly supernatural occurrences, and the other half refer to the law of God and its revelation to us in writing.

It would be an error, then, to hold supernatural miracles as alone properly manifesting the finger of God. We should, in fact, be in as much awe of the “tables of the covenant” as Pharaoh's magicians were of what God had wrought in their midst. The delivery of God's commandments has as much a claim upon us as Christ's actions had upon His enemies.

Under the New Covenant, the finger of God writes the law upon the heart of the redeemed. One's standing in the Kingdom of Heaven isn't based on how many miracles we perform (Matt. 7:22 bears witness against that error) but rather upon whether we teach and do even the least of the commandments (Matt. 5:19). Faithfulness matters.

Behind Chalcedon's teaching and doing of God's commandments lies the reality that our work is framed entirely by the finger of God. There can be no sense, then, in which laboring to teach and do the law of God is somehow less a manifestation of the finger of God than a supernatural miracle is. While you should not read too much into the four places where “finger of God” appears in Scripture, you must not dismiss it either.

One consequence of the finger of God is that it marks the presence of the Kingdom of God in action (this is made explicit in Luke 11:20 by Christ Himself). It means the King Himself is at work (as Pharaoh's magicians were compelled to admit). But how many of us see the King and His Kingdom when He gives us His law? How many see His finger behind the Ten Commandments, and esteem His law in that blinding light, knowing that a high view of the law leads to the highest possible view of the gospel?

The four offices that God holds are laid out in Isaiah 33:22—Judge, Lawgiver, King, and Savior. We easily recognize the supernatural element in three of these offices, but we give

Lawgiver short shrift, as if the list were Judge, Calligrapher, King, and Savior. When we're confronted by His Law, we're confronted by the finger of God. He is no less our Lawgiver for being King, Judge, or Savior. The Kingdom of God is present when the Lawgiver's law is being taught and obeyed.

Recall another circumstance that accompanies the manifestation of the finger of God: in both Exodus 8 and Luke 11, the response to the finger of God was not a positive one! Pharaoh hardened his heart while the majority of Israel's leaders only became more murderously hostile toward Christ. Are we seeing a similar reaction to the other two cases where the finger of God is mentioned? How many hearts are hardened against the law of God when its light shines into darkness?

Less Than Nothing

We read God's own assessment of the nations in Isaiah 40:15 and 17: "Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing ... All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity." If the nations are counted as *less than nothing*, then their national law systems (to the extent they deviate from the law written with God's finger) are equally vacuous, framing mischief at best (Ps. 94:20). The more that mankind attempts to legislate utopia into existence, the more confused the results and the more the law of unintended consequences kicks in to confound those efforts.

All things are connected because they all cohere in Christ: all aspects of God's creation are, in a sense, entangled: you can't change one thing without altering other things in its wake. This is why God's law alone provides order and stability, because His law is alone competent to navigate all the myriad interrelationships that comprise our world. The laws of today's humanist master planners invariably create more problems, requiring more laws, *ad infinitum*.

One controversial example of humanistic arrogance might illustrate just



Mark Rushdoony reconnected with Dr. Kishore at the Future of Christendom conference.

such a connection. Consider this recent assessment of contemporary American gun violence by Philip Terzian (who explicitly characterizes the following chain as an example of "unintended consequences"):

...The Community Mental Health Act of 1963, a signature achievement of the Kennedy administration ... was to replace the big, bad state hospitals with thousands of smaller, community-based "mental health centers" to which patients could commute for periodic medication and therapy.

...the signature achievements of Kennedy's successor Lyndon Johnson—the War on Poverty and the Vietnam war—drained the supply of available funds for community centers along with any mechanism ensuring that patients get routine treatment. Successive closures of state hospitals, along with the failure to construct most of the proposed community-based centers, effectively stranded America's mentally ill ... The [later] explosion in America's homeless population was no coincidence, but cause and effect.¹

Terzian, of course, sees most mass shooting tragedies as cases where mental illness and guns meet, so he bemoans that "a disturbing number of people fall through the cracks," being "unintended victims of a well-intentioned reform."

Setting aside the dubious Biblical merits of the 1963 "signature achievement," note that had the nation observed the Biblical laws governing war and the poor tithe rather than adopting Johnson's substitutes, the earmarked funds for the Kennedy-era legislation would not have been drained away. The state hospitals were closed without the new replacements having come on line,² and Terzian traces today's mass shootings to that unintended consequence (while we would trace the chain of legislative errors even further back).

Terzian's causal chain halts short of acknowledging the upfront deviation from Biblical law, but we know better: those who operate without Biblical law imagine a vain thing. The moral fabric of the universe is built so that God's law alone can balance all the contending priorities. When we spurn the finger of God reflected in His law, we choose instead the ham-fisted hand of man and dig ever deeper holes for ourselves.

The Feet that Bring Good News

Therefore, we take our work at Chalcedon seriously, shining the light of God's Word wherever it is needed. We bring the good news arising out of what God's finger has written, to the end that more saints would teach and do even the least commandments and strive thus to be great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Our live video and audio programs serve to connect us to those hungry for the truth. These include *Homeschooling Help* with Andrea Schwartz and Nancy Wilk, our *Out of the Question* podcasts, the *Book of the Month Club* interactive audiocasts, and Mark Rushdoony's weekly Sunday sermons from Chalcedon Chapel followed up by the *Chalcedon Q&A* video broadcasts I host from Central Texas (all available at our website for those without, or avoiding, Facebook).

In October I was a plenary session speaker at the Future of Christendom Conference in Reading, Pennsylvania.³ Mark Rushdoony was a special guest of the conference, and Dr. Punyamurtula S. Kishore was also present to give a short, impromptu presentation at the conference.

In regard to the ongoing work of Dr. Kishore, he has been bootstrapping new community clinics in Maine and elsewhere (the legendary phoenix has nothing on him). Perhaps more significantly, economist Dr. Feler Bose (professor at Indiana University East) flew to Boston to collaborate with Dr. Kishore on the analysis of the 2011 government shutdown of his addiction clinics—we're expecting several landmark



Dr. Feler Bose with Dr. Kishore at the Harvard Medical School, November 2018. Prof. Bose, a Chalcedon supporter, learned of Dr. Kishore's reconstruction of addiction medicine in *Faith for All of Life*.

academic papers to arise out of Dr. Bose's work that will challenge the "oppositions of science falsely so called" (I Tim. 6:20). In the meantime, the *Hero in America* movie project is continuing to move through the tedious postproduction process toward completion.

Chalcedon's ongoing publication effort remains the heart of the ministry's work, and in God's providence our project list now includes the newly typeset and multi-indexed edition of the first volume of *Institutes of Biblical Law* being released in 2019.

In all these ways and more, we continue to strive to teach and do even the least of the commandments, so that the whole counsel—everything revealed by the finger of God—is ultimately manifested in thought and action among His people, that they take hold of their responsibilities, duties, and privileges

under the glorious New Covenant.

How important, then, is the word written by the finger of God? Important enough to compare to supernatural miracles? Yes, absolutely yes. But there's more. What He wrote was important enough for the psalmist to cry out, "Thou hast magnified thy Word above all thy name!" (Ps. 138:2)

And *that* is the greatest miracle of all. 🙏

Martin Selbrede is the Vice-President of the Chalcedon Foundation and is the senior researcher for Chalcedon's ongoing work of Christian scholarship, along with being the senior editor for Chalcedon's publications. He is considered a foremost expert in the thinking of R.J. Rushdoony. A sought-after speaker, Martin travels extensively and lectures on behalf of Christian Reconstruction and the Chalcedon Foundation. He is also an accomplished musician and composer.

1. Philip Terzian, "Is there really nothing we can do about mass shootings?" *The Weekly Standard*, Nov. 12, 2018, pp. 13–14.
2. Dr. Rushdoony always warned that you can't do away with illicit state support systems until the Biblical alternatives that God requires are up and running and able to carry the weight. This simple lesson was lost on our civil rulers a half century ago, and Christians must not make the same mistake. First the ear (Mark 4:28)!
3. The Mid-Atlantic Reformation Society (MARS) sponsors this annual conference, which in 2018 focused on education. Controversy over the speaker roster is prompting development of a Chalcedon position paper on the topic of complicity, contrasting the Biblical and humanistic definitions and approaches to this urgent question.



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