

ARISE & BUILD

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THE MISSING INGREDIENT OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

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Like fish in water, we're steeped in a status quo that has dictated our approach to virtually everything, including how the Kingdom of God is to advance in our world.

There's a reason why churches hire financial planning experts, church growth experts, etc., to put their plans into effect. Their thinking is constrained to the box they've always assumed would frame their efforts.

To borrow the title of a recent book, we can say that we've been living under *The Tyranny of Experts*.¹ Our range of experts extends from academia to spin doctors to focus groups comprised of our peers. Not even chronic failures can discredit such received wisdom, because we're too invested in the narratives we've chosen to buy into.

There must not only be a *rethinking* of how we implement God's will on earth as it is in heaven, there must also be a *re-doing*: a shift from established patterns to new approaches. Existing approaches may have familiarity in their favor, but they also bring baggage. They double down on the nontheistic worldviews in countless ways, and this is precisely what needs to change.

For ease of reading, numbers in parentheses below refer to pages in the second volume of Rushdoony's *Institutes of Biblical Law*.²

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

I've been intentionally cryptic at the outset for a purpose, which will become manifest as we proceed. But it'd be worthwhile to consider ways in which we adopt positions that steer our minds away from what's possible in God's world.

When we consider resolution of poverty, too many of us look for institutional resolution of the problem, leading to a statist solution. The chronic failures in this arena don't trigger a re-thinking, but rather demands for higher taxes to throw more money at the problem. It is assumed that a big problem requires solutions on a massive scale. These commitments only worsen the problem. As Rushdoony pointed out, "men are prone to trust that which is immediate and obvious, namely, the state, or princes (Ps. 146:1-4)." (231)

This is doubly true for the educational system in most nations. Educational failures are treated as proof that we not only need to spend more money on these failed institutions, but we also need to destroy any competitive systems (Christian schools, homeschools) that cast the public schools in a negative light. The success of homeschools is urged as a reason why public schools are failing (although such pretexts are disingenuous).³ The hidden baggage here is implicit acceptance of *credentialism*, where all are expected to admit the validity of accreditation and reject anything not accredited.

For virtually every social need, we can find a social institution chartered to allegedly meet it. We may smirk at the crudity of Ebenezer Scrooge's confidence in England's institutional resources for poverty (e.g., workhouses) but we've simply sanitized the modern equivalents to comfort our conscience. What we've not done is consider God's provision for poverty by way of the poor tithe – and if we reject God's poor tithe, then we're stuck with humanism's growing failure in this area. We fail to consider how Israel conquered poverty

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in the Maccabean era *without* taking an institutional route to that blessing.⁴

The state brooks no rivals, and smaller institutions blend into larger ones, smaller businesses merge into conglomerates, and the people can only view reality through statist, centralist glasses. This road is paved with the confidence that only the largest entity can solve social problems.

We need to recapture the proper definition and implications of *community* in contrast to the humanistic institutions we have for too long put our trust in. This is the missing ingredient: we need to grasp the *profound value of community* before taking the next steps.

PREPARING THE SOIL FOR RECONSTRUCTION

We must prepare the soil before we start planting seeds. There *is* a seedbed of innovation in God's economy, but we've lost sight of it by a gradual process driven by statism. God's means may seem quaint, but they are where the true power lies.

The soil for reconstruction is the community. But the term *community* must first be recovered from a century of social decay. *Community* is the victim of intellectual termites released into our culture while men slept. We must prepare the soil well ahead of exhorting you to work towards the endgame, lest we be counseling you to make bricks without straw.

As Rushdoony noted, we must remember that "the basic pressure" in so-called primitive societies

is not a sense of community but a sense of envy. So intense is this envy that men dare not advance over other members of the tribe, for to do so means to all that their prosperity is at the cost of someone's welfare. Envy prevents any cohesiveness in society, and it destroys progress by making personal success a criminal offense. (103)

These pressures work to suppress the *community context* required for cultural growth to occur and for new institutions to gain a foothold.

FALSE PATHS TO THE FUTURE

Humanism cries out against perceived enslavement but is incapable of countering it. Pink Floyd's disaffected children's chorus delivers the bitter accusation that "all we are

is another brick in the wall." The implication is that individuals (the many) need to defeat the collective (the one). Humanists have only negation and abstention in their toolkit (37). They lack the *active obedience to God* that would deliver them from this situation.

Negation is no answer, nor are Neoplatonism or Romanticism, as Rushdoony points out:

Neoplatonism ... downgrades the material creation as something lower, degrading, and unworthy, as though the material world, if created by God, was the work of His left hand. (85)

With Romanticism, there was no return to community. Instead of community, enforced political socialism and communism became the goal." (68)

But man still strives to restore community despite his destructive Midas touch.

Modern man is hungry for community, but he destroys it by his humanism. Nisbet has called "the longing for community which now exists as perhaps the most menacing fact of the Western world."

The hunger for community makes man receptive to the pseudo-community offered by the totalitarian state. Such a hope substitutes envy for community and cynicism for faith and thus furthers the disintegration of community. (113)

The hunger for community in the modern era has led to attempts to impose it by force, a contradiction of an extreme sort. The imposed order of communist states leads instead to a radical destruction of community and a distrust. Impersonalism cannot produced community. (68)

Man's insistence upon being his own god constitutes a faith that "is the antithesis of community." (113) The field he plants his seeds in isn't rich and fertile: it's an asphalt parking lot.

INDIVIDUALISM, TOTALITARIANISM, AND COMMUNITY COLLAPSE

The rival forces of individualism and totalitarianism have a common enemy in the community. Each erodes community in a different way, and statists have leveraged individualism to do their dirty work for them. Christians ignorant of these dynam-

ics are prone to be on the wrong side of the issue by default, since these two alternatives each claim true dominance over the world of man.

Individualism means the decline of the sense of community. ... Modern individualism holds that the person is only truly an individual if he cuts his ties to the community and seeks an independence from it. ... Washington always saw his own goals and wishes in the context of a community; Thoreau felt it imperative to wage war against the community. (72-73)

The corruption of the idea of freedom has been driven by statist interpretations of freedom, which have little in common with the Biblical doctrine of liberty.

Freedom thus means guaranteeing all men freedom from “all personal dependence” on anything but the state. Man is to be “freed” from dependence on the family, the church, or any non-statist associations, and freedom is redefined as independence from these things and dependence on the state. (80)

To keep any Christian concept of *community* off the table, the statist has simply co-opted the term *community* and applied it to statist power structures, as witness book titles like the CFR’s *Building a North American Community*⁵ and IIE’s *Toward a North American Community*.⁶

Totalitarianism has as its concomitant the collapse of true community. We should mark well the statist’s intentions in respect to his handling of the communities he seeks to supplant.

Nisbet has pointed out how the decline of community means also the rise of totalitarianism. In every era of a decline of freedom, there is “the fatal combination of individualism and political power.” The less community there is, the greater the custodial powers of the state. (74)

Rushdoony points out the practical impact of Nisbet’s observations:

If we do not enjoy too close a contact with people, and if we break with them readily if they do not suit us, then, whatever our politics, we are helping create a totalitarian regime. ... Where there is a strong community influence, there is less anarchistic liberty but more essential freedom. (74-75)

The alternative to community government is statist government. Where the self-government of the Christian man flourishes, there community flourishes. Where atomistic individuals withdraw from one another, there the state grows as the only effectual force. (81)

But the flip side of community is mutual responsibility, which explains man’s willingness to slide into the statist surrogates for community, since the state offers to absorb responsibility in an impersonal way, which doubles down on man’s alienation from himself and from God.

THE CURSE OF DEPERSONALIZATION

Depersonalization, a festering blight that has grown as the love of men has grown cold, brings a suite of side effects in its wake. Rushdoony’s observations regarding how an impersonal view of causality shapes things are to the point.

Causality has been depersonalized. ... This same impersonalism of modern man has led to a decline of community ... the person and any community of persons is devalued. ... The “age of reason” which followed the Reformation and Counter-Reformation led to a devaluation of community. (67)

Further, the moral domain continues to shrink as substitute models of reality gain ground.

By converting human problems into sociological ones, they are depersonalized and also removed from the realm of morality by that depersonalization. (111)

When the philosophy of impersonalism reigns,

man interprets himself in terms of drives and instincts which depersonalize him and at the same time strip him of responsibility. [He] talks of his alienation, of communication problems, of conflicts of the mind ... With all this, he destroys the relics of community even further. (69)

This is why Rushdoony concludes that “this same impersonalism of modern man has led to a decline of community.” (67) This decline is intentional.

THE BIBLICAL CORE OF COMMUNITY

Dr. Rushdoony noted that while the basic government is Christian self-government, “the basic *area* of government is *the*

community. ... Neither atomism nor collectivism can prevail, because for the Christian man both his self-government and his life in community are mandatory aspects of his faith.” (83). The enemies of community are more aware of its power than Christians are.

The criminal group recognizes what the state refuses to admit, namely, that *community is life and power on the human level*, and the means to effectual power is the control of the community. The state wishes to *suppress and destroy* the community; the criminal group seeks to *control* the community. ... The revolutionary group is out to destroy the community in order to create a new state, so that its activities, while criminal, have a different function than the activities of purely criminal groups.” (92)

Which is to say that the enemy seeks either to co-opt the community or destroy it. What are Christians doing to reverse these trends? After all, “while there are many groupings in the modern world, there is very little community, even within the family.” (74)

Further, order doesn’t equate to community, although there is indeed order in true community.

Community requires order, but that order can be productive of peace only when it begins with God’s order, His redeeming grace and His prospering law. ... There is neither true community nor order in a prison or in a totalitarian state. Men are brought forcibly together, or are held together by coercion, not by an inner bond or relationship. (107)

This is why Rushdoony concludes that “every idea of community which humanism has offered is bankrupt, and the bankruptcy of economic man is destroying civilization. The need is for a restoration of Christian community.” (235)

The Biblical key to community isn’t some mystical association (which the statist would have no reason to worry about). True community is where the rubber meets the road: it has deeply practical implications. Rushdoony puts it plainly:

The basic requirement for community among men, who are not perfectly sanctified, is stated in Galatians 6:2, “Bear ye

one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” ... The *burdens* can be distress or problems, physical, mental, or moral. ... Redemptive power is not ours, but sanctifying grace and patience are. (74)

And here is the offense of true community: it exercises governance in dealing with human problems that the state claims sole jurisdiction over. We should heed Rushdoony’s exhortation to follow Abraham’s example and make “a break with all existing ideas of community and a spiritual pilgrimage towards the Kingdom of God, the true community.” (235)

In short, “community therefore begins as an act of faith in a sovereign power whose law is accepted as the life of the community and of the individual.” (243-244)

SUPERNATURAL COMMUNITY

Community therefore is not something assembled in our own strength. God is with us in the building and nurturing of community, and imbues true community with His joy, oversight, and blessing.

The supernatural community is a product of Christ’s work and an aspect of His new creation. It is both truly natural and of this world and yet an outpost at the same time of the new creation. (101)

Such cities on a hill, however, garner the attention of humanists intent upon driving out all competition to the city of man. They start out building their own systems but soon transition into hostility toward communities that bring an intruded supernatural power into the human realm.

However intensely the national state and the one-worlder try to create a unified human community in terms of blood, these attempts are failures. Instead of a unified society, there is a divided one which continues to fractionalize. (93)

All free associations *and* all natural communities (the family, the tribe, the clan, etc.), as well as all supernatural communities (the church and Christian covenantal associations) must be outlawed or suppressed in order to prevent the fractionalizing of humanity. The state then requires conformity; it educates all into a common faith in man (national man or world-man), and it provides unity by means of coercive laws. ... The

death of the community, natural and supernatural, is the goal of the state. (94)

It is the supernatural community that spawns many of the key institutions that exert godly government, “the waters of Shiloah that go softly” (Isa. 8:4). In the face of statist oppressors, it is the supernatural community alone that can prevail, because mere resistance to statism is not enough. “Resistance is reactionary and cannot reconstruct, only oppose. Thus, the only kind of community which is able to survive and grow is the supernatural community.” (100)

CAPITALIZATION AND INSTRUCTION, OR DECAPITALIZATION?

The centrality of *instruction* is a point that Rushdoony emphasizes.

God here does *not* establish the church as the companion institution to the civil government. The function God requires as *the necessary concomitant* to a godly law order is *teaching*. (124)

If we fail to recapture this orientation and remain stuck in an institutional mindset, we will participate in the decapitalization of society and its collapse into statism. The future isn't to be capitalized by the ministry of grace (which, like the ministry of justice, is not actually productive – its function lies elsewhere) but by pollination via instruction. This is why Rushdoony held that “the great missionary requirement of the days ahead is Christian schools and institutions. This is in part Chalcedon's function. It must become a central area of activity for all Christians, and for their tithes, in the days ahead.” (126)

The key take-away is laid out clearly by Rushdoony:

The function of instruction is the theological and intellectual capitalization of a society, and there can be no other capitalization if a society is lacking in the capital of sound faith and knowledge. Instruction is thus highly productive. The capture and corruption of schools is a sure means to the decapitalization and destruction of any society. (140)

Of course, much ground has already been lost, and thus must be recaptured.

Society moves forward and is capitalized religiously, intellectually, and materially when the family and instruction are

given their due. Where church and state monopolize man's income, there is a radical decapitalization. (140)

Not surprisingly, Rushdoony reaches into Leviticus 26 to illustrate how capitalization follows covenantal obedience, while decapitalization follows disobedience.

TITHE AGENCIES: OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND

One of the great mysteries of history is the tithe agencies that once dominated the American social landscape. Both church and state have a vested interest in maintaining this intellectual blackout. The state desired to take over all the functions of the tithe agencies and worked to destroy them. The church wants to cover up the story of how the tithe was used in early America up until the mid-1800s, since its doctrine of where the tithe goes conflicts with it (as well as with Numbers 18 and Nehemiah 10).

Consider the proportion of capital flowing to the tithe agencies versus the state. The tithe agencies had nearly nine times as much funding to do their work than the state did. The tithe agencies were huge, the state was tiny. This was a situation the state was committed to reversing, with the churches assenting to the collapse of the tithe agencies and the subsequent growth of the power state.

In the early years of our country ... the total take in taxes was originally scarcely more than 1 percent. The functions of civil government were very limited: justice and defense, mainly, plus the mails. The tithe and giving took care of most religious and social needs, voluntarily and economically.⁷

It was not by accident that the early American socialists of 1800-1860 attacked the tithe.⁸

Why do we not know much about these agencies that were ten times larger than the civil government, and doing ten times as much work to improve the lot of the people? The tithe agencies were essentially regulated out of existence and their functions turned over to the state. But we have glimpses of their impact:

Alexis de Tocqueville saw that the evil effects of equality and individualism were overcome by a strong Christian faith

and by free associations (mainly tithe agencies) which worked to bring people together in godly community. (73)

Accordingly, if you want to dismantle community, you start by dismantling the tithe agencies.

Statist taxation is revolution against God, but this does not justify a tax revolt, which only compounds humanism. ... God's kingdom is not established nor furthered by lawlessness, but by God's law and obedience thereto. It is rare to find a tax-revolt advocate who tithes. Tithing creates a new order. The tax revolt adds anarchy to existing evils. (230)

This further explains the issue: the power state doesn't *want* a new order to prosper in its midst. The power state relies on Christian rejection of the tithe described in Numbers 18. Wiping out the tithe agencies in turn led to state taxation being used to capitalize the overthrow of community.

The totalitarian state... wages war against the community, because the community is a powerful rival government. It works to weaken the community, the family, church, and vocation in order to strengthen its own power. ... Thus, as the state weakens every form and aspect of the community, it renders people rootless and atomistic. (91)

The modern state is hostile to the idea of community, because it creates a society or fellowship in independence from the state and with its own separate standards and effectual laws of social behavior. As a result, the state works to undermine communities in the name of a higher loyalty. (234)

By erasing the tithe agencies from history as if they never existed, as if the church always received the entire tithe, the implications of Gen. 3:5 come home to roost. The absence of tithe agencies is an enormous hole blown in the side of our collective ship, because "failure to tithe aggravates and develops the curse." (35)

CULTURE AND INNOVATION

A restoration of the spirit of the tithe agencies is called for, given the church's current impotence.

Much of evangelicalism today is incapable of creating a culture. It either surrenders to the world, or flees from

it, or both. ... People can build large neo-evangelical churches, but they cannot establish a Christian culture. ... We also have the opinion of W. H. Auden that Christianity as such *cannot* establish a culture. (156)

Rushdoony rejects the pernicious view that equates works of art and music with culture.

Culture is not a product of artistic activities but of ideas and faith; it is the social and material consequences of religion. (157)

We can grasp why the soil in which the culture grows is the key to its health and fruitfulness:

Culture is an act of faith and the application of standards and ideas to the disciplines of life and to life itself. (159)

Further, it is in *this context* that Rushdoony sets the innovative component of Christian community.

Jesus called his disciples also the "new wine" which required new wineskins, a new culture, to be free to expand and realize its being. ... Freed from the Fall's consequences, from the power of sin and death, they would now be the new wine, breaking the old world's wineskins and bearing to every area of the world the joy of the new wine. ... By their love, and by their expansive force as the perpetually new wine, they are to create a godly society, to establish the Kingdom of God. (154)

Communion ... summons the branches to bear fruit in obedience to the word of God, and, as the new wine borne by "the true vine," to break all the old wineskins of a fallen world. (155)

What evidence then do we have for such "new wine" breaking old wineskins in today's world?

THE RISE OF ALTERNATE INSTITUTIONS

Most of our readership has already guessed that one major alternative to statist models is Christian education. Here is an area where the Christian community has directed its energy and its resources toward liberating covenant children from the ravages of statist indoctrination. It is a costly alternative since the state still insists on taxing Christian parents for public

schools they will not use. Faithful Christians no longer see the state the way that FDR (according to Mencken) saw it: as “a milk cow with 125,000,000 teats.” Because instruction is central, we were well-served to start innovating here.

This educational shift was more a recovery of ancient paths than an example of new wine. True, technological advances became assets to Christian education, and the Christian community did learn to labor together to meet the needs of the children. But there is another area where innovation has arisen, which deserves to be replicated elsewhere, in different sectors of our economy.

Recall the core tenet of community in Galatians 6:2 – the mutual sharing of burdens. Alternative institutions that align with this imperative, especially in the shadow of state-regulated industries, open up new ways to burst old wineskins.

The field of medical insurance is one where several Christian alternatives have grown to have a significant impact. Samaritan Ministries, Medi-Share, Christian Healthcare Ministries, and other organizations leverage Christian community to realize the sharing of burdens that St. Paul refers to. It took some courage to switch to these alternatives, especially early on. But serious Christians valued freedom enough to set aside the old wineskin and adopt the new.

And as with Christian education, statisticians will balk and threaten even these attempts to translate Galatians 6:2 into concrete action. These alternative institutions must have the courage to maintain their freedom from statist intrusion. We must put Christian freedom ahead of competing considerations. We must be tenacious in holding to a godly standard, because for too many Christians, “our standard, instead of being Christian man, is economic man.” (235) As a consequence, we trade freedom for security, not recognizing that “free men can be very poor and needy, but freedom is their wealth.”⁹

In both cases (education and medical insurance) we’ve witnessed the rise of alternatives to massively powerful government-controlled institutions. We’ve seen coercive state pressure levied against

Christian education (and Dr. Rushdoony had a major role in stopping those molestations) and can expect similar hostilities concerning health care. Nonetheless, both alternatives continue to defy expectations and continue to grow in the soil of an awakening Christian community.

In the meantime, the church, in claiming the entire tithe (rather than instructing its congregants to direct it biblically), is a major obstacle in the rebirth of tithe agencies. Churches that do bring tithe agencies back to life will shatter the old wineskins that have prevailed for the last two centuries. Men of vision will be motivated to innovate additional alternatives to the status quo (e.g., Christian courts, addiction medicine, etc.), further strengthening the community of Christ’s people. The process begins with instruction, the development of spiritual capital, and bringing God’s ways to bear upon the world to wholly liberate it. (Rom. 8:19-23). 🙌

1. William Easterly, *The Tyranny of Experts: Economists, Dictators, and the Forgotten Rights of the Poor* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2013). I am not necessarily endorsing the substance of this volume, though it is food for thought.
2. Rousas John Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law, Vol. 2: Law and Society* (Vallecito, CA: Chalcedon/Ross House Books, 2022 edition [1982]).
3. One is reminded of the notorious Nebraska case where Rev. Everett Sileven’s church school was shut down on the pretext of concern for the quality of education. When the state’s own tests of those students showed they were well ahead of their public school counterparts, the prosecutors succeeded in blocking the test results from being admitted into evidence. Why? Because they weren’t interested in *quality* of education but rather *control* of education.
4. <https://chalcedon.edu/resources/articles/the-scope-of-healing>
5. Council on Foreign Relations, *Building a North American Community* (Independent Task Force Report No. 53) (New York, NY: Council on Foreign Relations, 2005).
6. Robert A. Pastor, *Toward a North American Community* (Washington, DC: Institute for International Economics, 2001).
7. R. J. Rushdoony, *Faith and Action, Vol. 3* (Vallecito, CA: Chalcedon/Ross House Books, 2019), p. 1259.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 1262.
9. <https://chalcedon.edu/resources/articles/random-notes-no-83>

Humanism is collapsing, but is the Church ready to govern in Christ's name?

Rushdoony predicted the times in which we live which is why he focused the mission of Chalcedon on the great work of Christian Reconstruction. The only remedy to what we face is a return to Christian faith, character, and obedience.

Rushdoony wrote, "The Biblical doctrine of theocracy means the self-government of the Christian man," (*Sovereignty*, p. 31) which means the Christian most needs the resources to equip him for Biblical self-government.

The Chalcedon Foundation is a "think-tank for the self-governing Christian," and our mission is to equip Christian families and churches to apply the faith to every area of life and cultivate faithfulness to God's law and covenant in order that Christ's Kingdom might increase.

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