

The Rusting of Our Major Institutions

Our institutions are rusting out. Let me say from the beginning that I am an *optimist* for the human race and for creation in general. God will have His way with creation, and people are amazingly resilient and adaptable. But I am a pessimist about the *ability of our major institutions to survive this century*. The rust has gone beyond cosmetic. The core of our institutions are rusting. The church, government, educational system, military and economy are in terminal trouble. It's not that some form of them all won't survive. All of these *functions* are going to survive; but the institutions that carry these functions now may not.

The Church

Arguably the most resilient of all institutions (outliving languages and nations, and *all* ideologies), the church has gone "sideline" in the space of one generation. The church was the only major institution to survive the fall of the Roman Empire. *Irrelevant* and *ignored* are the two adjectives that come to mind when I think of the 21st century church.

Virtually no explicit Christian leaders, for the first time

in two millennia, are first-team varsity culture-shapers on our planet. We don't even have an Oprah, let alone a Churchill.

Today's 15-year-olds to 30-year-olds are ignoring the church in unprecedented droves.

Most denominational organizations are ripped apart by political issues. Christianity is fragmented like never before.

The Government

I live in California. More or less the first to try out everything, California became ungovernable a few years ago. The U.S. is not far behind. Our current form of democracy is based on British parliamentary and American constitutional decision-making—also on the idea of the sovereign “nation state.”

More Americans seem to believe in the sacred inerrancy of our Constitution than in the veracity of the Bible. But the Constitution's days are numbered because the institution it calls forth is no longer able to solve problems. It can't do its job.

The truth is, the folks in Sacramento and Washington, D.C., are no longer at the helm of our culture. They are not calling the shots. The models they follow are based on preindustrial and preinformation-age interaction. They are more and more unable to solve the challenges we all face together.

The European Union is facing increasing opposition from

client states and their citizens. It is a faux empire with no mass appeal or loyalty (from the citizenry). It lacks patriotism.

The Romans were unable to adapt to changing situations. Patriotism and effort is not enough. Sometimes you just have to think differently.

The Educational System

We all know great educators are out there. Most of us were influenced by outstanding teachers. But there is a nagging consensus that the way we do school and university is not working as it should.

We have been unable, in the U.S., to figure out how to include all the major lifestyle ideologies in our official education process.

Abraham Kuyper of Holland was the last one to pull this off (about 100 years ago). So we settle for lowest-common-denominator *secular humanism* as our official education vibe.

The Military

We are unable to create safety for productive citizens. Our U.S. military was designed to beat the Germans (tanks) and the Japanese (aircraft carriers). The military of other countries is more or less totally impotent and unable to project power anywhere. Europe couldn't even take care of Kosovo without our help.

The real threats are politically and psychologically (sometimes both) fringe people—especially when they congregate and organize.

Call it extremism, or whatever. They want to blow up airplanes over Detroit. They form camps to train angry young men to hate and kill. They are notoriously flexible and hard to locate. The most powerful military on earth can't find Osama bin Laden. They generally hate Israel, America or the U.K.—not necessarily in that order. As strongmen, they take over failed states and provide “stability” and pride for their followers.

As a result, harmless grandmas have to take off their shoes at airport security, get their water bottles confiscated and honest people are limited in how much money they can move around. I have an 827 credit rating, and the bank has to put holds on my checks because of the Patriot Act.

New nuclear powers are added to the world every few years. It's an obsolete form of national security, but it continues to spread. Who will be the first to pull the trigger? Pakistan? North Korea?

We, and other nations, spend bazillions on “military,” but most of it is still focused on a World War II that is not going to return—or on a Cold War that is just plain over. And bin Laden and North Korea continue to do whatever they want.

The Economy

It has been fragile for quite some time. “Recovery” seems to be an elusive thing. The economy may not arrive; at least in the sense of returning to the way things were.

People may well prosper in the future. I believe they will. But the Reagan and Clinton prosperity patterns are not coming back.

We are moving forward into something new. The big time bomb is China. They have huge problems. Three hundred million Chinese—the entire population of the U.S.—are seasonal, itinerant migrant workers. Their environmental issues are like gathering national mudslides. Their core industries are rusting out, and only 8 percent to 10 percent annual GNP growth “keeps the doctor away.” What will happen the day that expansion slips below that level? The effect of this on the global economy will be staggering.

Money also is making no sense. What is it anyway? We are constantly measuring something that is an abstraction at best. Money is a very old-school way of value storage; kind of a reel-to-reel tape in an iPod financial era. Money is simply not keeping up (obviously). And our global banking system can't exist without huge cash infusions that the governments paying them can't afford to make.

Conclusions

Archaeology shows us that institutions calcify and end up in layers revealed by “digs.” We may be facing revolutionary changes in our institutions. Many of us alive today may see these institutions (peacefully or otherwise) make way for new forms of completing the same tasks.

Even our cities may not survive. Cities (bigger and bigger) have to get their food from farther and farther away. They have to trade something in return for being fed. Cities cannot feed themselves. It used to be that cities, by concentrating people, could create innovation that they could sell to people who would feed them.

With technological and communication breakthroughs, people can live in Northern Alberta and create innovation in conversation with the whole world via technology. We don't have to live in cities anymore.

Deurbanization (along with other things) killed the Roman Empire. Rome could no longer add value to the rural areas that were feeding the great city. People moved to the countryside and reorganized as local fiefdoms.

The 21st century is going to be the most revolutionary since the 6th century. Are you ready for it? What are you doing to position yourself to prevail?

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