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## **A PERSONAL WORD FOR YOU from Mack McCarter**

Lewis Mumford, surely one of the great creative minds of our century once said that the chief enigma of the history of civilizations lay in the question, “Why is there a consistent and repetitive pattern of societal collapse?” Of course what Mumford’s query underscored were the startling facts that: a) we have yet to devise a method to stop the deadly “decline phase” from inevitably ushering in the ultimate collapse of a particular “civilization;” and consequently mankind has been unable to build a society which has the capacity for perpetual renewal. The mystery to Mumford was simply this: after thousands of years of birthing and building societies, why haven’t we learned from our past what is causing the terminal malaise of our civilizations and how to stop it. I know that you will agree that this is a crucial issue. It involves you and me. And more to our immediate predicament, it certainly involves our children and our children’s children.

We have learned how to build societies, but not how to maintain them. What we can do with technology, we have yet to master for society. We can “improve” gadgets. It is an easy matter to discern the levels of development of cars or computers from one “generation” to the next. The computer that once filled a room can now be far outdistanced by the one that fills your hand. The “Tin Lizzie” is now the newest Lexus. The improvement in gadgets is both continuous and cumulative. But we have yet to find a way to build generations of humans into this “improvement” mode. We are caught on some ironic sorrow-go-round of a repetitive build/collapse cycle. You and I, unfortunately, are not “new and improved” versions of any of our civilized kindred who have gone long before. We just have new and improved gadgets.

I have a theory which I believe could explain why our societies began to decline and collapse after reaching a certain point in their development. My thinking has been profoundly influenced by Arnold Toynbee’s definition of society as a “system of relationships.” So when collapse comes, it comes as a collapse of this sustaining, interlocking system of caring human relationships. What happens?

Toynbee rightly showed that “societies” of human beings are birthed and strengthened by what he called “the challenge and response” phenomenon. By discerning challenges, both threatening and inspiring, both internal and external, and by banding together to successfully and successively meet those challenges, a disparate collection of individuals becomes molded into a dynamic collective of persons with “one accord” and “one destiny.” This is how societies are formed.

Now imagine that many generations of these “builders” have so grown together that a workable and working “community” is formed. It is relatively safe. It is relatively harmonious. And this system of relationships provides an environment which produces creative lives capable of continuing the growth of the good values of human living.

But now see many generations born *into* that time of “harmony” and “safety.” These generations are not the “builders.” The dream of removing the challenges leaves generations of flaccid “maintainers.” You and I are born into the last years of a maintenance era. We have watched that era end. We are no longer safe. There is not an abundance of connectedness or harmony. But we remember when there was.

What has happened to the system of relationships. I believe that we “maintainers” made the same mistake as every generation of “maintainers” in every preceding civilization. When we were born into this era, we erroneously assumed that this “system of relationships” which we knew as our community was both *natural* and *permanent*. That assumption is about as rational as believing that a field of cotton is both natural and permanent. It is decidedly neither.

But by believing that the system of relationships was both natural and permanent and thus by not intentionally nurturing the relationships necessary to sustain community, we made a fatal error. We sought to “improve” life. But we did not give ourselves to the only avenue of improvement which is to seek the good of another. Instead, we sought to make things better by building gadgets to make life “easier.”

So we made air conditioners. And we left our front porches and we left our neighbors and all went inside. Then we made televisions and so we all stayed inside. And now we have the technology to make home burglar alarms systems – *and we now live in a society that needs them!!* By trying to make life easier we have not made life better. We have improved ourselves emptier and emptier!

I believe that we have a chance to correct this error. I believe that we can arrest the decline phase. And by becoming experts in restoring and rebuilding the system of relationships using the laws of God’s love as our means and our goal, we can transform our futures together. This is why SCR exists. I have never been a part of something so august and exciting in my life as this grand adventure. And I want you to join with us in striving for the highest and the best!!