

Establishing A Relational Community: A Theology of Community
for Messianic Jews and Judeo-Christians

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Introduction

The notion that man is essentially a social being is accepted by virtually every Western cultural academic discipline and Judeo-Christian religious denomination. Our existence, individually and as a species, is socially dependant. People are in social relationships as married couples, families and extended kinship groupings, as well as bands, tribes, villages, cities, states and nations. In each of these social and cultural institutions, there are socially constructed systems which keep us functioning in relationship to others within our various groupings. The explanation of the nature of this relationship between the individual and the social group varies, however, among these disciplines and denominations. This is, in part, the result of the function or aspect of the relationship being explained, and in part, the result of the epistemology and theory used to examine this relationship.

This paper examines the notion of religious community within the general framework of a congregation. It draws on the idea of community as understood by the modern behavioral sciences (anthropology, sociology, and psychology) and the Judeo-Christian religions (Judaism and Christianity) that have resulted from the Holy Scriptures and sectarian traditions found within these religions. It suggests that the notion of community is essentially a sense of belonging (as related to identity) and that community involves three significant parts. These are Relational Kinship, Relational Roles, and Relational Rules. These three parts function together to create the psychological experience of community for the individual and operate together to bind the members of the congregation into a *koinonia* (fellowship of interdependence and common welfare) and extends to the whole *ecclesia* (Body of the Messiah made up of Israel and the Believers

from the nations). In effect, this is a theology of community and can be evidenced in two examples taken from among many which will be presented later.

These positive examples of *koinonia* (community) will be taken from the Rule of St. Benedict which is arguably the most foundational document of community produced within the Christian tradition, and, the experience of the author in the DiscipleCenter congregation of Anaheim Hills, CA. The difficulties with religious community in Western culture will be included in the explanation. Finally some suggestions for establishing genuine community will be given for congregations within the Messianic Judaism and Judeo-Christian contexts.

Community in the Ancient World

Western civilization is a syncretism of two major streams of thought – Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian. Greco-Roman tradition is the cultural foundation of the West. Its tradition finds its origins in the mythical poetry of Homer and others, and the philosophical traditions of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle among still others. This foundation combines contemplative speculation and direct observation of nature and the human condition which has resulted in a rich canon of poems, plays and texts which have had a great effect on Western thought to the present. The second stream is the Judeo-Christian tradition which developed originally in a different cultural milieu (Egyptian and Babylonian) and which has maintained a significant distinction, even though it was in direct and uneven contact with both the emerging Greek and Roman cultures. This stream of thought has a very different epistemology. It assumes that knowledge and wisdom comes from God and is found in the study of the revealed narratives and the doing of the revealed commands of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as found in the Torah. The

experience that results from the knowing and doing of the Torah and Prophets is then contemplated and the path of life is wisely understood.

These two epistemologies, one based on observation and speculation and the other on revelation and reflection, are very different and if maintained in separation, come to different conclusions in most cases. The goal of the Greco-Roman culture is the “reputation of man” as found in the heroes of old and the present Western push for individual fame and fortune. The goal of the Judeo-Christian epistemology is the “Glory of God” within His creation before the angles of heaven. But these approaches have not remained separated. They have been syncretized into the Western culture of the present.

The weaving of the Greco-Roman epistemology and the Judeo-Christian epistemology into a single western culture came about during two major periods of history. The first was the period prior to the destruction of the second temple in 70CE by the Romans to the establishment of the Holy Roman Empire in the fourth and fifth centuries. The second includes the Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment around the fifteenth through the nineteenth centuries. The first mix was the formation of a religious worldview that gave perspective to Western Culture for about one thousand years. The second remix began a worldview split that continues to the present and is found in the struggle between the secular and the religious. The second mix created a new epistemology that was post-religious and scientific in the sense that it draws upon observation and common opinion clothed in scientific nomenclature to establish fact and reality. Rationality is found in both world views (religious and secular) but the function of rationality is significantly different.

To replace the theological worldview, a theoretical one was formed and it was tied to science to give it credibility. This was during a time when scientific discovery had removed medicine and health from religion and society was turning to science as the answer to other modern problems. Jewish and Christian theologies became minority voices to the new voices of Anthropology, Sociology and Psychology. The modern behavioral sciences provided answers to human behavior and the problems of the human condition that were believed to be closer to reality than the old religious answers. Darwin in anthropology, Marx in sociology, and Freud in psychology opened the possibility that man could solve his own problems and bring about a better future.

Community in the ancient world was connected to family. People belonged to family and kinship was the foundation of social structure. Kin helped kin. People lived in extended family bands and belonged to tribes which could be tied to geography. Extended family became larger groups of related people with common language and history and values resulting in ethnicities and ultimately, nations. Community developed in villages and neighborhoods. These smaller groups of like-minded and often related people had a sense of belonging and common welfare. Social roles extended out of family roles and relational rules became local customs and later codified into laws with formal sanctions.

As population increased and people groups began to interact with other similar and dissimilar groups, business, wars and other dynamics created a need for more than community. This “more” is society. According to socio-political thinking, Ferdinando Toennies expressed the primary differences between community and society using German linguistic categories. For Toennies, *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft*

(society) are distinct but related terms. Community is familial and intimately present, while society is public and utilitarian and as such must be learned and negotiated by means of polity and laws rather than relational identity and belonging. (Toennies 1957) In essence, this distinction is one of organismic relationship as distinct from mechanistic relationship. Polity and other mechanical aspects such as economics and authority structures are considered society. Kinship, and relational roles and rules within kinship, is the basis of community.

These two, community and society are not completely distinct. It is not possible even in small communities to completely avoid some mechanistic and utilitarian relationships and systems. Also, belonging and intimate relationships form and operate informally (albeit meaningfully) in societal institutions. But community and society focus on different goals. Community is about the preservation of the life to life connections between people. Society sacrifices the quality of communal relationships for the sake of the larger public good and maintenance of the society. Thus a socio-political approach to community will fail. A relational approach is needed.

Those Messianic Jews and Judeo-Christians who miss this *Gemeinschaft* – *Gesellschaft* distinction tend to blur the goal differences of each as well as misunderstand the implications of the distinct purposes. This is particularly true in the struggle to “preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3) as described by the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul. Both the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches see this in mechanistic and political terms which require a centralized uniformity and authority based on *Gesellschaft* structures (polity and doctrine). What is being expressed by the “one body and Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, and baptism in the

Ephesians text is not a uniformity of polity and structure (or even doctrine in a creedal sense) but a recognition that our diversity is intentional and from a common source so that we are in a “belonging relationship” to one another and that common source is the One God. The sign of our unity is not agreement of doctrine or practice or centralized government but love (*agapeo* – self sacrificing love at our expense for the benefit of the other). Community is a unity of belonging. Society is a uniformity of function and control.

The focus of this paper is community and for that purpose, the subject of polity and society will be reduced in emphasis. This should not to be taken as a rejection of the importance of societal polity and governance, but a desire to express more fully the need of community in family, congregation and in relationships between Messianic Jews and Judeo-Christians.

A Theology of Community

A Theology of Community requires three components. These are **Relational Kinship**, **Relational Roles**, and **Relational Rules**. While each of these are addressed in each of the behavioral sciences, it is most common to find kinship (and ethnic) structures studied by anthropology, relational (and social) roles studied by sociology and relational rules (and boundaries) studied by psychology. The attempt to draw concepts from the behavioral sciences and the theological explanations from Judaism and Christianity together in regard to community is problematic. Each discipline of the behavioral sciences has various schools of thought which agree and disagree within that discipline. In addition, the various dogmatic theologies of the denominations within Judaism and Christianity

make agreement difficult in religion. As a result, one is left with a difficult and seemingly impossible task.

In our book *Integration of Behavioral Sciences and Theology* (1999), my co-author and I suggested a model for putting the behavioral sciences and theologies of Judaism and Christianity together based on a comprehensive epistemological and world view approach. Historically the integration of these disciplines was categorized as in Conflict, Compartmental Separation, Functionally Equivalent or Blended Eclectic approaches. We suggested a Systematic-Relational model that avoids blending (and therefore violating the integrity of the various disciplines and schools) by putting the behavioral sciences and theologies into **proper relationship** based on their epistemology, domains of reality, and verification of knowledge methodology. By systematically and relationally examining the claims of each discipline, including world view assumptions, we can make use of the disciplines as a more complete and holistic examination of the question. This model is behind my presentation of a Theology of Community here.

Kinship

Kinship relationships have been studied by anthropologists from the beginning of the discipline. This is in part, because kinship is culturally universal. Also, kinship is thought to be the basis of the most primitive communal social structure. Lastly, kinship has an almost mathematical essence and opens the door to understanding identity, language and many other cultural characteristics. Two conceptual aspects of anthropological kinship study are helpful in understanding Biblical and religious community. One is the basis of kinship and the other is the classification of kinship systems.

Anthropologists have developed a typology of kinship based on the notion of belonging. The term kinship is related to being of the same kind. Three kinship types have been identified – Consanguinal, Affinal, and Fictive (Radcliffe-Brown 1952). Each of these kinship types are used in culture groups to express the nature of the kinship relationship. Consanguinal kinship is a belonging relationship that is based on biology. This seems rather simple but it is not. What constitutes a biological relationship is culturally determined. For example, the Trobriand islanders and the aboriginal people of Australia do not consider one's father to be a biological relative. They reject the notion that sexual intercourse is the basis of life. A dead female ancestor places the child within the womb of the mother. Thus, only maternal relatives are biological. Orthodox Jewish *halacha* also ignores male biology in the determination of Jewish identity. A Jewish mother makes one Jewish. Each of these important exceptions notwithstanding, biology is a basis for kinship and belonging.

Affinal kinship is based on religious or secular law. This is commonly a relationship based on marriage, adoption or conversion. A man is related to his wife and her family by marriage. The kinship term normative in our culture is in-law. Technically, one could refer to his wife as a wife-in-law but this would be unwise. An adopted child creates a step-parent or step-brother or sister. A Gentile who converts to Orthodox Judaism is considered a Jew and that person's biological offspring may benefit from that conversion as being native Jews.

A third type of kinship exists which is called Fictive kinship. Fictive kinship is based on the role one plays in relationship to another. This may be a minor relationship that serves much like a beloved friend, or it may be a relationship more significant and

important in that it rises above the importance of a biological or affinal relationship. The believer's relationship to God and to Yeshua (Jesus) is fictive. God as father is based on the role He plays toward us and the role we play in response to Him. It is not biological. It is not legal or adoptive as defined here. It is fictive (role based), but for the religious person, it is a greater priority than that of all others. A personal example may help.

I had three grandmothers when I grew up. Each related to me with love and kindness. The one I knew the best was grandma Kaster who lived around the block from me. One day I inquired of my mother. "Mother, I know that grandma Carlson is your mommy. Grandma Gregory is dad's mom. But whose mom is grandma Kaster?" My mother told me that grandma Kaster was not my real grandma. And I said, "You wanna bet!" and I was right. Who grand mothered me more than her? No one! She was my fictive grandmother and it was more psychologically real than the other two. American culture often misses this because we give such authority to material (genetic) and legal systems. But genetics and law are *Gesellschaft* (societal) categories. Kinship is *Gemeinschaft* (community). This will be addressed more fully in the explanation of the next concept.

In addition to categorizing the basis of kinship, anthropologists have also categorized kinship systems. Several systems have been found among the cultures of the world. In some of them, a brother and a cousin from your father's brother are both called brother. In such a system, the kinship term identifies the closeness of the relationship between men whose fathers are brothers. This is the basis of the story of Abraham referring to Sarah as his sister (a parallel-cousin or father's brother's daughter). These systems give a distancing or importance to a kinship relationship based on the kinship term. For example, the American system follows the Iroquois system. Our kinship terms make

biological, gender and affinal distinctions for close family – Father, mother, sister brother, son, daughter etc. But for some less important kinship relationships, we drop affinal morphemes, such as for aunts and uncles, and gender morphemes for cousins. As we will see below, the Hawaiian system fits the Biblical theology of community.

The Judeo-Christian scriptures acknowledge and use kinship systems regarding peoplehood and relationships as the people of God. The origin of this is found in the person of Abraham. In the Torah, Abraham is recognized as the patriarchal origin of Judaism and the direct covenantal sign of patrilineal consanguinal kinship is by circumcision. This lineage continues to the twelve sons (or grandsons through Joseph) of Jacob (also called Israel) and ultimately this lineage becomes the tribes of Israel who are later united and then divided into the nation of Israel and the nation of Judah. This lineage is interconnected with affinal kin through absorption, adoption and conversion. Well known examples of this include Rahab and Ruth. That fictive kinship also exists in historical Judaism is certain though consanguinal and affinal relationships are primary. In Diaspora, this peoplehood is a significant part of the continuation of the Jewish people and for secular Jews serves as perhaps the major basis of Jewish identity. However, even among secular Jews, the relationship between peoplehood and religion (which includes God, Israel as a people and a land, and Torah) is difficult to separate. This kinship connects all Jews – past, present and future – consanguinal, affinal, and fictive – religious and secular - to one another in a psychologically real manner.

The first disciples and believers of Yeshua were Jewish and this peoplehood component was not immediately affected by the division of faith in Yeshua. Struggles of heresy and related issues certainly divided Jews into sects and affected relationships but

the essential peoplehood identity continued. However, with the entrance of a few Gentiles (resulting from Peter's encounter at Cornelius' house) to the faith, the notion of Israel as the chosen people of God became subtly altered. The expansion of the "Gospel of Yeshua" to Gentiles outside of Israel (Land and people) through migration and the ministry of Paul created a "people taken from among the Gentiles for His name" who were first called Christians in Antioch. Peter explains that these "Gentiles" were once not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy". (I Peter 2:10) He is, of course, drawing from Hosea, as does Paul in Romans 9 who also uses this quote to refer to the calling of Gentiles in addition to the remnant of Israel as the people of God. It is important to understand that both Peter and Paul are including Gentiles with the remnant of Israel as the people of God. There is no replacement theology here, nor are there two peoples of God. The people of God is made up of the chosen people Israel and the Gentiles taken from the nations brought together in Messiah. "For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity of Torah commandments expressed in ordinances, so that by establishing peace, he might make of the two one new man in Himself and reconcile them both in one body to God by having put the enmity (not the Torah) to death by His cross." (Eph. 2:14-16-my translation). The one new man is a spiritual reality that will manifest fully at the resurrection. God will save all Israel, reunite Israel and Judah, restore the kingdom to Israel, establish the Holy Land in peace and the Messiah will reign over all the kingdoms of the earth. These resurrected bodies will not be male or female, Jew or Gentile, bond or free. And though our present oneness is in part, that future hope is spiritual and material and secure in Him.

Christianity has had a more difficult time establishing its understanding of this union of the spirit in the bond of peace. The separation of the Jewish believers from the emerging Church moved toward a replacement of Israel. Then the Church divided over creeds, doctrine, practice, language and ethnicities with each faction claiming to be the one true and apostolic church. The result was that instead of single relational communion (one Lord, one faith, one baptism) with small local communities, there are several communions (denominations) and many independent communities who have reestablished the enmity and often fail to discern the Body of the Messiah. Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox, Baptists and Pentecostals, as well as non-denominationalists continue to divide and fracture the unity of the faith. And to make it worse, there are attempts to re-establish unity by organization and contract (polity) rather than the unity of the spirit in a kinship (ethos) in Messiah. I can trace my ancestry through many families and surnames. Yet it is a single kinship. Kinship rather than polity, language or culture is the focus we need for understanding peoplehood. Paul gives us an origin in Abraham who came to faith uncircumcised and continued in faith circumcised so that he might be father of both Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 4:10-13). We are connected by faith in Abraham and by spirit in Messiah. This spiritual kinship is an important part of a Theology of Community for Messianic Jews and Judeo-Christians.

Relational Roles

Paul continues that we are of the household of God. Household is the closest of family relationships. Even extended family is closer when living together in a household. Paul will tell Timothy, and by extension believers, to treat older men as “a father, younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers and younger women as sisters” (I Tim.

5:1.2). This immediate household kinship is identified by anthropologists as the Hawaiian system. Each person is treated based on generation and gender. But all are treated as immediate kin, in fact, as household kin. This establishes a community that brings the kinship into intimacy in direct relating to one another. This also keeps kinship from becoming simply academic. It is relational and communal.

Psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists have long understood the importance of family and household in human development, socialization and enculturation. Absence or abuse by a father or mother can leave lifelong difficulties. Modern Western society has moved toward an outsourcing of parenting into social institutions such as pre-school, daycare, extended schooling 1st grade through grad school, special interest groups and sports involvement and even programmed church structures which downplay community in favor of society. This has resulted in socio-political and economic struggles unknown to the historic communities of Judaism and Christianity. As Western culture becomes more radically secular, societal, and individually based, community is almost lost. And the household has suffered most. The redefinition of marriage and family and the emergence of cyber-friendships and pet cemeteries is the result of this loss of community in favor of individualism and collectivism.

Relational roles based on generation and gender are being blurred and lost. Parent has replaced the notion of a father and mother (gender specific parents). The idea that a child needs only one or two loving parents is repugnant to traditional Judaism and Christianity where the role of father and mother are distinct. Parental roles based on gender are found in both scripture and religious tradition. Marriage, a command in Judaism and only to be refused for total dedication to God in Christianity is now an option and being put off until

late twenties or thirties. This means that most children will have little interaction with a grandmother or grandfather. Generational and gendered roles are foundational to human development and maturity in Judaism and Christianity as expressed in the Torah (your children and grandchildren) and experienced by Paul to Timothy (your mother and grandmother).

Christianity historically has focused on family life in marriage and family as sacramental. In Protestant and free Christianity, the loss of marriage as sacramental has contributed to this loss of community. Evangelicals focus on political and social issues related to marriage in society more than their own family life in religious community. This betrays the societal rather than community focus as described by this paper. Among Evangelicals, professional Christian counselors and ministry counseling clergy are attempting to address it (Wilson 1995) (Crabb 1999), but much of this discussion is unknown in the congregations. Even marriage preparation and counseling are being outsourced to Marriage and Family specialists who combine graduate psychology training with Sunday school theology which is society rather than community centered. In traditional Judaism and Christianity, eldership was based on generational status that assumed wisdom based on experience. Today, professionalism creates experts based on education and certification with limited or no experience. Wisdom and experience is lost or non-existent as teachers and counselors who have never married or raised children teach and counsel regarding marriages and families. This is society without community.

A Theology of Community must have roles that are gender and generationally based and operate in immediate household closeness. This is the meaning of Paul's admonition to Titus to establish elders in every city and to instruct the older women to be able to

teach the younger women in family life (Titus 1,2). We can no longer afford to have congregational leaders who have not yet raised a family or who wait to raise a family in their thirties or forties while engaged in professional ministry. The Biblical age of marriage and the time of parenting is late teens and early twenties (puberty to 30). This allows for the children to be raised and the parents to turn to community service in their thirties and forties (30-50). Then eldership and wisdom is found in the fifties and sixties. Messianic Judaism and Judeo-Christianity must regain the priority of early marriage and the priority of family life by putting off career instead of marriage. This is community over society. The role of congregational leadership at the local level is an extension of family life brought into communal life in congregation. This is being lost and replaced by career and a business model of congregation. This is the new replacement theology.

Relational roles are of three basic types. These are mentoring roles, peer roles and utilitarian roles. Mentoring roles are uneven. This involves the mentor having authority or influence over the one being mentored. Parenting, roles are the primary example of this type of role. In Judaism and Christianity, parents (especially fathers) are given the responsibility to raise the children in the faith and into adulthood. And children are to honor (obey) their father and mother. This is found in the Ten Commandments and is reinforced in the teachings of the apostle Paul. A pastor or rabbi has a similar role with their disciples and congregants. The writer to the Hebrews expresses this by telling the readers to “obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls” (Heb. 13:17). The greater burden is upon the mentor which is understood by anthropology as negative reciprocity (uneven in the direction of the lesser role) but the roles of the learner must include obedience and respect for learning so that maturity may

be accomplished. The mentoring roles in the scriptures are often given distinct instructions to optimize the purpose of the relationship. This purpose is developmental in nature toward mature wisdom.

Peer relationships are more egalitarian. The reciprocity in such relationships is usually balanced. That is, there is a more or less mutual benefit to each person in the relationship. This is the common nature of things as Yeshua observes that almost anyone loves those who love them. But in the community of God's people there will be a higher requirement which will be addressed below in the section on relational rules. Peer relationships are different than mentoring relationships. It is not possible to be mentored or parented or pastored by an equal. In the household analogy used by Paul, this is the idea of being the same generation, yet maintaining gender distinctions – brothers and sisters.

Judaism and Christianity have long maintained this sibling (egalitarian) notion within congregational structures. Boy's groups, girl's groups, men's groups and women's groups have long been formed and reinforced in congregational relationships and activities. The danger here is that of egalitarianism that completely ignores gender and generation is emerging as the result of Western individualism which may destroy the communal connections found among like aged and like gendered relationships. These groups are not primarily to be developmental in function or purpose. They are to promote connectedness and commonality which is the heart of *koinonia* (fellowship).

The last kind of relational role is the utilitarian type. This relationship is the least communal and the most societal. It meets a single need in most cases. This is the doctor, dentist, tailor, waiter, busboy or cab driver. Often this type of relationship is completely impersonal. If the same person continuously serves in a utilitarian capacity, a low level

friendship may form but in most cases, utilitarian relationships are not personal. If a different person takes my order or gives me a haircut, little is lost. And this is why society prefers utilitarian relationships. Society is not concerned with kinship and household role. Society is concerned with function and relationship merely serves function. As Western culture becomes more and more individualistic, utilitarian relationships become preferred. And with the loss of family and community, social utilitarian relationships become normative in the developmental experience of a child. Synagogues and Christian congregations of a generation or two ago operated by fictive kinship in nursery, teacher and groups activities. But most are moving toward a utilitarian and programmed structure as community is lost in larger and larger congregational systems.

The idea of a community views the presence of various gifts as a basis of belonging. This is Paul's meaning in describing the Body of the Messiah and the Corinthian congregation as a body which must embrace relationally its parts as a community of belonging and mutual functioning. This comes from spiritual community. If we fragment into interchangeable parts where function is the goal rather than belonging, the Body of the Messiah will become a Mr. Potato Head with parts changed and moved at the whim of culture.

A theology of community must prioritize mentoring and peer relationships and minimize utilitarian ones to avoid the loss of community toward a societal individualism. We must have a sense of kinship (peoplehood) that is expressed in congregation as a household of immediate family with generational and gender roles and giftedness being used to serve one another rather than act as a means of exchange.

Relational Rules

All relationships operate by relational rules. While roles are more general, rules are more detailed and specific. Rules can be explicit or implicit. For example, I may have a teasing relationship with another person. We will banter back and forth making fun of each other as a sign of our affection. But I may use sarcasm to express my disgust for another person. The behavior (words spoken) may be identical but the intent and function is based on very different relationships and meaning. It is unlikely that I set explicit rules and terms with either person. The relationship is mutually understood and the meaning of the behavior is a tacit relational rule. On the other hand, a person may call me Dr. Stokes and in response I tell them to call me Bruce. We now have an explicit relational rule between us that has been negotiated. If someone else calls me Bruce, I may reject that behavior and ask them to call me Dr. Stokes. The nature of the relationship, circumstances and negotiation will establish these relational rules. Cloud and Townsend (1992) has made common the term “boundaries” for some of this social and relational behavior, but I believe “relational rules” describes the larger set of relational behaviors more fully. These rules can be negotiated by the two persons in a relationship, or set as general custom or law (either religious or civil). Some are formal and situational, and others are general and informal. Relational problems often happen when the relational rules are unknown or violated intentionally. And this is the reason that many counselors are continually booked. In a culture that is overly egalitarian, individualistic and utilitarian, relational rules break down as each person does what is right in his own eyes.

Judaism and Christianity are religions based on Biblical texts and traditional community interpretations of those texts which include significant and explicit relational

rules. The teaching of Judaism, and included in the teaching of Yeshua, is that there are two primary (greatest as in large and primary) commandments. These are to Love God and to Love your neighbor. These two great commands are the foundation of Holiness and Righteousness in Judaism and Christianity. Yeshua add a third. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you love one another” This last commandment will demonstrate identification as a disciple of Yeshua (John 13:34, 35).

These three great commandments are each a form of self denial love for the benefit of the one loved. Love of God, limits self for the glory of God. Loving a neighbor as oneself limits self-love so that the neighbor is treated with equal kindness and respect. Loving one another is self denial for the benefit of a fellow disciple as Christ limited Himself even to death for our benefit. This is the essence of *agapeo* love. It is not *phileo* love, for as Yeshua said, “If you love those who love you, even the tax collectors do that” (Matt. 5:48). So this is not a command to love “each other” which involves balanced reciprocity. It is generalized reciprocity. Each gives as they can and will to those in need. And in such a community, all are cared for. This was seen in the early Jerusalem Yeshuic community until it was violated by Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5).

Under the three great commandments are general principles that cover significant areas of relational behavior. This is the essence of the Ten Commandments. Five of the commands are related to areas of loving God and five are related to loving one’s neighbor. I will not here get involved in the Jewish, Catholic, Protestant variability of the categorization of the Ten Commandments. The 613 *mitzvot* of the Torah are the example details of the Ten Commandments under the two Great Commandments. While the

Gospels and Epistles do not give this secondary level of commands under the great “love one another” command, they are filled with the example *mitzvot*. There are over one hundred such commands in these documents. After spending a summer categorizing them I have created the following chart of the Judeo-Christian Relational Rules.

Love God

No Other God
 No Images
 Do not take His Name in vain
 Keep Sabbaths
 Honor Father and Mother

Love Neighbor

Do not Murder
 No Adultery
 Do not steal (kidnap)
 Do not give false witness
 Do not covet anything of your neighbor's

613 Mitzvot give specifics of these Commands

Love One Another

Accepting one another
 Be of one mind
 Serve one another
 Encourage and comfort one another
 Forgive and restore one another

The hundred plus “one another” commands give specifics

These commands are valid for Jews and Gentiles who believe in Yeshua. They do not save. They express the relational rules that those who know God, and are His people, should follow in relationship to Him, others, and among themselves. One of the frustrating aspects of this for Western individualism is that these relational rules cannot be done as an individual. They all require relationship. You must relate to God, your neighbor, and your fellow believer in order to obey them. In this sense they enforce and reinforce community.

A Theology of Community must create a sense of kinship which creates a peoplehood that is expressed in immediate familial terms, and has roles which honor and benefit from generational and gender aspects yet avoid the abuse inherent in these structures in the world and which follows the Great Commandments, the Ten Commandments and the mitzvot as relational rules. But a theology (doctrine) of community will not create a community. It requires that we become “doers of the Word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22).

Creating Community: Examples

Creating community based on a theology of community must be an intentional priority in a highly individualized and secular cultural context. Judaism has formed community more consistently in Diaspora than Christianity. This is, in part, as result of consanguinal kinship (peoplehood), religious distinction (Torah observance), and anti-Semitism (isolation). Avoidance of assimilation has reinforced marital endogamy. Sabbath has required living in proximity to each other and the synagogue. And the greater cultures have tended to isolate Jews from mainstream community requiring that they maintain their own community. This has been reversed to some extent in America because of individualism, secularism, intermarriage and less persecution. Yet, Jews still maintain a common identity (peoplehood), a religious expression (Jewish Holy Days) and a sense of mutual welfare through Tzedaka (Charitable giving to Jewish causes). Christians have had a greater problem with community, especially those from Evangelical and non-denominational congregations.

I am not experienced in Jewish community at the level of most of the readers of this forum (Hashivenu 2011) so I will leave it to others to apply this theology of community to traditional Jewish congregations. I would suggest that common traditional synagogues and Kibbutz systems would provide rich examples of this theology of community. But I would like to give two examples from Christianity. One is foundational to monastic community in Roman Christianity and the other is a contemporary example among Evangelicals.

The Rules of St. Benedict

The Rule of St. Benedict was written “primarily for monks, but its sound principles for working together and living together have proved relevant to people of all classes of society through fifteen hundred years” (Fry, 1981). This document written in the sixth century has been a model for community in multiple cultures and several Christian denominations and para-church groups. It provides simple and effective guidelines for relational community that is consistent with the theology of community described in this paper. I will briefly describe it here but suggest a thorough reading of “the rule” by all believers interested in community

Benedict makes full use of the kinship aspect of the theology of community by both understanding the church as an ethos (people of God) but also by seeing that within the monastery the residents follow and use kinship terms related to immediate family. Monks are brothers and must treat each other as brothers. Throughout his rule, he reminds them of this kinship of belonging to one another. Because this is household family, a visitor is not a prospect. He is to be treated as a guest and is to conform to the household. He may ultimately join but not without the permission of the community to which he has

previously belonged. The focus is on the household. Relatives are welcome but this is immediate family. The process echoes the instructions of Paul to Timothy. (Fry 1981)

The household roles are also part of the community building of the rule. This is found in the qualifications and responsibilities of the Abbot (father) of the community. He is to function much like the father in a believing home. He is to be an example of the faith and lead the sons to grow up in the faith in a fatherly manner, not as a monarch (Fry 1981). This is not appearance. Benedict goes to great effort to explain that the Abbot is accountable to God for this role, as are parents in Torah and apostolic instructions.

Roles are found in the rule as well. These are based on generation and gifting with gender obviously missing in this context. He expresses the relational obligations between the older (wise and experienced) monks and the junior (eager and learning) monks. “The younger monks must respect the senior monks and the senior monks must love their juniors” (Fry p86). They are instructed to greet each other with understanding of these roles. Other positions are based on character and giftedness which reads very much like the Pastoral Epistles. Benedict uses relational roles that are mentoring and peer based. Utilitarian roles are effectively non-existent in his order.

Relational rules make up the bulk of the rule of St. Benedict. In great detail he gives principles and instruction, based on the Biblical commandments that maintain attitudes and behavioral interaction between the members of the community. These are intended to bring godly order and a psychological experience of the spiritual community present. In most cases, specific Biblical texts are used as the basis of the relational rules of the community. It is easy to see that this is a beginner’s manual for living in Biblical community that will ultimately be outgrown as the individual members of the community

become more conformed to the whole of scripture through prayer, communal work, and loving one another.

One important aspect of the rule must be included here. The community is a family and the focus is on the community as a base for caring beyond the family. Ministry within the community is not about receiving new members or competing with other communities. It is a household of faith that works for the maturity and benefit of its members in daily life and serving God. In fact, boundaries are in place to avoid making this an open community. Benedict begins with a description of types of monks. These could be believers. To paraphrase, he speaks of four kinds.

1. Cenobites – serious disciples who are committed to a spiritual leader and a community of faith
2. Anchorites – Mature disciples fully equipped to serve God. These are more of a benefit to a community than the community benefits them.
3. Sarabaites – These are non-denominational believers and Evangelicals who have no committed doctrine, liturgy or discipline. They are guided by emotion and circumstances and call this the leading of God. They are immature and developmentally disabled believers without a shepherd.
4. Gyrovaugues – Spiritual gypsies who move from church to church and denomination to denomination creating an eclectic and bizarre version of the faith that is based on their latest passion (Fry p20-21).

He believes that only the first type should be engaged. And even these must prove themselves to enter the community. This filtering of the brethren and working on those who can and will commit is an important part of building a community. The other types are antithetical to community life.

He makes it difficult to join the community. After several days of knocking, an experienced monk opens the door to see if the prospect is able and serious in his commitment. He is confronted with the requirements. If he is still interested he stays two months as a guest. The rule is read completely to him again. If he persists he is taken into

a six month proving period. The rule is read to him and if he persists he continues for four additional months. Only then after testing and perseverance may he join. The new member must make several vows of commitment including a vow of stability, and must write the rule in his own handwriting. He goes through a ritual and prayer and is included in the community (Fry p.78-80).

The stability vow is important. It is a commitment to stay in the community. It is being adopted into a household, and like a household, family members do not stop being family members. This is a committed membership covenanted together for mutual aid and ministry. There is much to be addressed here but time will not allow. But I would suggest that where fictive kinship is the most common form of relationship, a vow of stability is important. Most people do not stop being family even when family is dysfunctional. Family is family. We all belong, even if we are not wanted. Not so in modern individualistic relationships in congregation.

The Rule of St. Benedict conforms to the theology of community presented here. The community is based on a spiritual kinship which has relational roles and rules. It maintains a mutual welfare and sense of belonging as an immediate family and resists adding or removing members. Community requires stability. Stability requires tested character and commitment. St. Benedicts rule is a model of Judeo-Christian community.

The DiscipleCenter

My own community of faith is the DiscipleCenter. This congregation is twelve years old but includes members I have related to in a previous congregation. The congregation is about 40 families or households and has three generations. The majority of families are married couples in their late twenties and early thirties with two or more children. The

congregation is Judeo-Christian in identity and has served from time to time as a half-way house for Hebrew Christians on their journey to Messianic Judaism.

The theology of community described in this paper is intentional in this congregation and has resulted in a real and meaningful community for its members. Kinship is expressed by a commitment to a relational understanding of the people of God. We are multi-denominational. While formally belonging to the Southern Baptist Convention and the Messianic Movement through several direct affiliations, we consider ourselves to be part of the whole people of God. Our members are instructed in Judaism and Christianity in all major denominational forms of doctrine, creed, liturgy, polity and ritual. Many Evangelicals use apologetics to explain why our faith and practice is right and others are wrong. In contrast, we learn the various expressions of all denominations to see what the others do right and in what manner we are connected to them as a large extended family. Where there is conflict in doctrine or practice we attempt respectful dialog never forgetting that children of the same father are siblings and we each have blind spots and immaturity. We seek to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace with our brothers and sisters and cousins. This is work. Most adherents of a faith tradition have difficulty learning their own tradition. Non-denominationalists often know little or nothing beyond their own experience. As multi-denominationalists, we must learn most of some and some of most traditions and express them authentically with respect and understanding. We also maintain a kinship locally expressed as household in that we see ourselves in congregation not as extended household, but as a single spiritual household. We are there for each other. In many ways we are closer to each other than our family of origin. We are in each other's lives and express this in life to life relationships.

The Roles we take in the DiscipleCenter are based on generation, gender and giftedness. The elders train the younger consistent with Biblical life cycle status and proven character with community recognition of character and ability. Home life is given priority over congregational involvement and this is intentional in our planning of functions. Elders and deacons are proven and tested. They are servants, not elites, and yet are respected for their service.

Relational rules are based on Biblical commands. The Biblical commands are taught, practiced and discussed as we struggle with the implications of doing the word. Each week after worship members gather into small groupings and eat together and catch up with family news and issues. The cost of eating is part of the tithe as taught in Deut.14. Those who are unable to afford the meal are paid for by the other members. What is left from the tithe is given to the congregation to fund worship and other congregational functions. We have always had a surplus and even when members lost houses in the last few years of economic crisis, other families took them in until they were able to relocate and re-establish.

The stability of the congregation is maintained by two dynamics. The congregation is private and we do not have visitors. There are often guests, hosted by members and family members who come occasionally but the focus is on the congregation as household. Secondly, we are covenanted together. Membership is slow to receive and requires testing over time. Our pattern is similar to that of St. Benedict requiring time and relationship building. Membership is renewed each year at Pentecost and leaving before the year is out must be addressed formally. In a culture where people come and go as they want, this sounds odd, but it creates a sense of belonging. We discourage joining to test

intent and commitment. We slow the membership process to test character and stability. The result is that membership means something. It means one belongs.

Only a cursory description of “the Rule” and “the DiscipleCenter” can be addressed here but these examples demonstrate that this theology of community can work historically and in the present.

Implications for Messianic Judaism

The modern Messianic movement in America is largely a pilgrimage from non-denominational (eclectic) and para-church Evangelicalism toward a more authentic Messianic Judaism. Many adherents come from assimilated secular or Christian backgrounds and are initially limited in their understanding of Jewish heritage and Judaism and others are struggling with their own evangelical para-church training and conformity. How Jewish should they be and how much Judaism should be embraced is mixed with how Messianic they should be and how much Christianity should be embraced. Add Gentiles of various stripes (noble and problematic) and the problem of community development is obvious. The answers for the movement will need to be flexible but recognizable to all in the process. I am suggesting this theology of community with these two Christian examples because for many Messianic congregations, authentic Messianic Judaism is still far far away. This then is simply a beginning point toward authentic Jewish community and continuity with Christians. And for those more in the Hebrew-Christian camp, these examples are normative models that can be used without having to explain to Christians why they are trying to be so different. But the problem that will most hinder community is the false idea that community is in having identical doctrine or centralized polity on one hand and the latest-greatest new

idea and individualistic “religion for one” on the other hand. We must find a common kinship of the spirit (rather than genetics and contracts). We must create congregations (household of faith) where members engage in developmental and communal roles and where relational rules are taught, enforced, and respected. If we do not reclaim community, we will lose continuity.

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