

Ten Outstanding Traits of Organic Christian Society



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Ten Outstanding Traits of Organic Christian Society

BY JOHN HORVAT II

Organic Christian society is a remedy that can lead us to a balanced economy without the ills of frenetic intemperance. It might seem strange that we deliberately propose a society as a solution to an economic problem. However, we believe that economy should be so embedded in a social order that the two solutions, social and economic, are united into one.

To better explain the concept of Christian organic society, we can cite ten defining characteristics, which create a climate of order and virtue that favors social bonds, commerce and free markets.

Why is it Organic?

The first characteristic can be found in the name



The main street of Castle Combe in rural Wiltshire, England.

we have given to this society: it must be organic. We can define an organic society as a social order oriented toward the common good that is wonderfully adapted to the full development of our human nature and our life together in community. It is termed “organic” because this order does not treat people like parts in a machine but as living and

unique beings with all the complex and nuanced elements that are part of life.

Spontaneity, Vitality and Creativity

From the concept of organic, we can consider characteristics that spring from living things: spontaneity, vitality and creativity. *Return to Order* pres-



A Gouda cheese market in Gouda, Netherlands.

ents and celebrates these characteristics as a refreshing contrast to modern economy. The resulting society and economy is full of vitality and creativity; nuance and meaning; poetry and passion. At the same time, such an order is full of dynamism and capable of great production.

Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance

An organic Christian society must necessarily cultivate the virtues, especially the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance which we can characterize as necessary traits. When these virtues are practiced in an organic society, everything enters into a proper balance



and rhythm because each acts in accordance with his nature. This is the foundation for true order and also the true progress and prosperity that is so needed today.

Uniting Hearts and Minds with Charity

Yet another characteristic is charity. In such an order, charity is a moderating influence on economy. Furthermore, charity is necessary because it perfects and secures the practice of justice in society. For, although justice can diminish strife and disunity, only charity can bring about a true union of hearts and minds. Thus, although not an economic principle in itself, charity easily serves as ballast amid the turmoil of frenetic intemperance.



Saint Marguerite d'Youville founded the Order of Sisters of Charity of Montreal. She is called the "Mother of Universal Charity."

It is Profoundly Christian

Finally we must add that this order must be Christian. An organic order cannot be reduced to a natural manner of organizing society. A Christian order extends beyond the mere practice of virtue since it is well rooted in the reality of our fallen nature, the confidence that all must have in Providence, and the help of Divine grace. It adapts well to both the

sufferings and joys that this vale of tears affords. Indeed, the Christian organic society is born under the constant shadow of the Cross which teaches us how to suffer life's vicissitudes. It must have Christ as Divine model and teacher.

Thus, an organic Christian society must have these ten elements as a framework of timeless principles to which we might return:

1. Organicity
2. Spontaneity
3. Vitality
4. Creativity
5. Prudence
6. Justice
7. Fortitude
8. Temperance
9. Charity
10. Christianity

In the face of the present economic and moral crisis, we need refreshing remedies like those offered by an organic Christian society and which are carefully explained in the book, *Return to Order: From a Frenzied Economy to an Organic Christian Society—Where We've Been, How We Got Here, and Where We Need to Go.* ■

BACK ON COURSE

BY JOHN HORVAT II

If there is an image that corresponds to the state of the nation, it would be that of a cruise ship on a never-ending cruise. On each of its multiple decks, we find every modern comfort and entertainment. The bands are playing, the theaters are full, the restaurants crowded, and the boutiques well stocked.

The atmosphere is outwardly marked by fun and laughter. Everywhere there is dazzling spectacle, amusing games, and gadgetry. There is always one more joke or one more dance to keep the party going. The cruise ship gives an almost surreal impression of fantasy, unrestraint, and delight.

Cruises are normally celebrations for special occasions, but this party cruise is different. Over the decades, many have come to see the cruise not as a holiday but as an entitlement; it is no longer an exceptional event but the norm. Rather than leave the ship, many seek instead to prolong the party on board without worrying about a final destination, or who will pay the bill.

Breakdown of a System

Even the best of cruises reaches a point of exhaustion. Even the best of parties can last only so long. Behind the festive veneer, things start to run down. Scuffles and disagreements break out among pas-

sengers. Crew members quarrel and cut corners. Financial problems curtail the festivities. Yet no one has the courage to suggest that the party should not go on.

This image is a fitting way to explain the present crisis. As a nation, we are in the same dilemma as those on a never-ending party cruise. Economically, we have reached a point of unsustainability with trillion-dollar deficits, economic crises, and financial crashes. Politically, we have reached a point of immobility as polarization and strife make it difficult to get anything done. Morally, we have stooped to such great depths with the breakdown of our moral codes that we wonder how society will survive. The course is plotted to send us to our ruin, but all the while the bands play on.

Instead of confronting these problems head on, many are looking for ways to prolong the party. No one dares to declare that the party is over.

Ill-equipped to Face the Storm

The problems inside our cruise ship are compounded by those outside it. We are facing an impending economic collapse that appears on the horizon like a gathering storm. Few want to admit the storm is approaching. When the full thrust of this storm will break—be it months or even a few years—is difficult to determine. We do not know exactly how it will strike or the precise means to avoid it.

What we do know is that a storm lies ahead. It is not just a passing tempest for we already feel its strong winds. By its sheer magnitude, we sense there is something about this particular crisis that touches the very core of our American order. It will

The state of the nation might be compared to a cruise ship on a never-ending cruise. The bands are playing and the decks are full of light and activity. No one wants to declare that the party is over.



Bert van Dijk

have political, social, and even military consequences. What makes it so grave is that our ship seems so ill-equipped and its crew so divided as we approach the ever more menacing storm.

In the past, we had a unity and projection that helped us stay the right course in storms like these. We were a people solidly united around God, flag, and family, but now all seems fragmented and polarized. By our great wealth and power, we once held the respect and awe of nations, but now we are unexpectedly attacked by unforeseen enemies and forsaken by friends and allies. Now, our certainties are shaken; our unity is in doubt. There is anxiety and dark pessimism about our future.

Our Purpose

The American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property (TFP) is a group of Catholic countrymen concerned about the state of the nation. This concern prompted the formation of a study commission that would delve deeply into the causes of the present economic crisis. Motivated by love for God and country, we now enter into the debate with the findings of this commission. We will be indicating where we as a nation went wrong. Our desire is to join with all those practical-minded Americans who see the futility of prolonging the party. The time has come to declare the party over. Now is the time to batten down the hatches and plot a course in face of the raging tempest ahead.

Although the storm be treacherous, we need not sail on uncharted seas. That is why these considerations spring from our deep Catholic convictions and draw heavily from the Church's social and economic teachings, which gave rise to Christian civilization. We believe these teachings can serve as a lighthouse; they contain valuable and illuminating insights that will benefit all Americans since they are based not only on matters of the Faith but also upon reason and principles of the natural order.

Having this lighthouse is a matter of great urgency because we navigate in dangerous waters. We cannot follow the socialistic courses to anarchy and revolution that have shipwrecked so

many nations in history. Unless we have the courage to draw upon our rich Christian tradition and place our trust in Providence, we will neither steer clear of disaster in the coming storm nor arrive to safe harbor.

Since the storm is principally economic in nature, that will be our main focus. However, this is not an economic treatise. Rather, we offer an analysis based on observations of economic developments in history from which we have constructed a number of theses, which we present succinctly without excessive proofs or examples.

To develop fully every thesis is a vast task beyond the scope of this work. Our purpose is to provide a platform for debate; to point in the general direction of a remedy. We invite those who enter into this debate to apply the broad principles found here to the concrete circumstances.

A Great Imbalance in Economy

Our main thesis centers on a great imbalance that has entered into our economy. We do not think it is caused by our vibrant system of private property and free enterprise as so many socialists are wont to claim. What is at fault is something much more profound yet difficult to define.

We believe that, from a perspective that will later become clear and not denying other factors, the main problem lies with a restless spirit of *intemperance* that is constantly throwing our economy out of balance. It is made worse by a *frenetic* drive generated by a strong undercurrent in modern economy that seeks to be rid of restraints and gratify disordered passions. We call the resulting spirit "*frenetic intemperance*," which is now pushing the country headlong into the throes of an unprecedented crisis.

In the course of our considerations, we will first look at this frenetic intemperance and see how it manifests itself in our industrialized economy. We will look at the unbalanced drive to reach gigantic proportions in industry and the mass standardization of products and markets. We will analyze its urge to destroy institutions and break down re-

straining barriers that would normally serve to keep economies in balance.

We will then show how this frenetic intemperance has facilitated certain errors that extend beyond economy and shape the way we live. To illustrate this, we will discuss the frustrations caused by an exaggerated trust in our *technological society*, the terrifying isolation of our *individualism*, and the heavy burden of our *materialism*. We will highlight the bland *secularism* that admits few heroic, sublime, or sacred elements to fill our lives with meaning. Far from promoting a free market, frenetic intemperance undermines and throws it out of balance and even prepares the way for socialism. The tragic effect of all this is that we seem to have lost that human element so essential to economy. Modern economy has become cold and impersonal, fast and frantic, mechanical and inflexible.

The Missing Human Element

In their zeal for maximum efficiency and production, many have cut themselves off from the natural restraining influence of human institutions such as custom, morals, family, or community. They have severed their link with tradition where customs, habits, and ways of being are passed from generation to generation. They have lost the anchors of the cardinal virtues that should be the mooring for any true economy.

The result is a society where money rules. Men put aside social, cultural, and moral values, adopting a set of values that attaches undue importance to quantity over quality, utility over beauty, and matter over spirit. Free of traditional restraints, those under this rule favor the frantic dealings, speculation, and exaggerated risks by which they have sent our economy into crisis.

Finding Remedies

If frenetic intemperance is the main cause of this economic imbalance, the quelling of this restless spirit must figure in the solution. To this end, we need to reconnect with that human element that

DEFINING THE PRESENT ECONOMIC CRISIS

When referring to the *present economic crisis*, we are not referring to any specific speculative bubble or financial crash. We are generally speaking of the cumulative effect of massive debt, unbridled government spending, economic instability, and other factors that are already threatening to coalesce into a single global crisis that is likely to cause a major economic collapse.

tempers the markets and keeps them free.

The model we will present is the organic socioeconomic order that was developed in Christendom. Inside this organic framework, we find timeless principles of an economic order, wonderfully adapted to our human nature. This gives rise to markets full of exuberant vitality and refreshing spontaneity. There is the calming influence of those natural braking institutions—custom, family, the Christian State, and the Church—which are the very heart and soul of a balanced economy. Economy becomes anchored in the virtues, especially the cardinal virtues. Inside this order, the rule of money is replaced by another rule that favors honor, beauty, and quality.

Yet we must stress that this is a Christian order suited to the reality of our fallen nature. It is well adapted to both the sufferings and joys that this vale of tears affords. Indeed, we are reminded that it was born under the constant shadow of the Cross with Christ as Divine model.

By studying the principles of this order, we can come to have a notion of what our ideal should be and how it might be obtained.

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With the menacing storm on the horizon, the stage is set for a great debate over where we are now, and where we need to go. At this point, our principal concern will be to understand both the nature of the storm we face and that of the harbor we seek. Only then can we chart a course for the future. ■

The Dominant American Model: A Cooperative Union

Throughout our history, we have always relied upon a dominant socio-economic model that has helped us navigate through storms and shape our way of life. This American model has survived economic booms and busts, the Great Depression, world wars, recessions, and times of unrest. We find it portrayed in our literature and films. It influences how we live and interpret reality to such a degree that it is difficult to imagine life outside this model.

In the face of our present crisis, this model no longer works as it once did. It is breaking down, and hence our first task is to understand this dominant American model and where it went wrong.

A Description of This Model

We can identify two main elements in this dominant model. The first is a vibrant economic system with a great dynamo of production that churns out material comfort and well-being. With a healthy regard for private property and free enterprise inside the rule of law, this model has given us great abundance and prosperity.

The second element is a corresponding *American way of life* whereby we enjoy the fruits of this production. Above all, it supports a dream—the idea that everyone must have the maximum amount of freedom to pursue their personal happiness so long as it does not interfere with another’s dream. The result is a practical way of life where all can pursue their dreams and celebrate life’s small joys, domestic virtue, and financial success. This way of life supports an atmosphere of mutual cooperation where individuals and families within their communities all get along while pursuing their individual interests. This system promotes and rewards hard work, initiative, and an optimistic can-do mind-set.

Components of a Consensus

The key to the success of this model lies in a great

universal consensus, a kind of spiritual glue that holds everything together, one where everyone agrees to get along. It is a flexible and deliberately vague consensus that tends to sweep aside any robust attachments to religious, ideological, or universal traditions that might prove divisive or stand in the way of each one’s constant and ever-elusive search for perfect happiness.

This consensus is reflected in our normal political discourse, which does not question this dominant model but rather debates on how best to achieve our American dream. All parties in the political arena use the same concepts, imagery, and rhetoric to reach a consensus: God, freedom, the American flag, family, and apple pie. The dominance of this model is so great that it all but smothers the smattering of radical Communist, Socialist, or other fringe parties that dare to challenge it.

We can see this same consensus reflected in a similar attitude towards religion. Unlike the modern European model, which seeks to break any link between religion and public life, the American model welcomes religions with open arms—as long as they all get along. It is as if the American government has an unwritten agreement that establishes what many have called a “civil religion,” one with a set of working rules in which certain things against God are prohibited. Although legally separate, the State maintains a reverence for a vague Judeo-Christian God in whom it trusts yet leaves undefined. “Our form of government has no sense,” President Dwight Eisenhower once noted, “unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don’t care what it is.”¹

Religion acts as a kind of guarantor of good order through a consensual Christian moral code loosely based on the Ten Commandments, which is adopted by the State, embedded in our laws, and engraved on our public buildings. Ideally, this model holds that everyone should have some kind

of religion, preferably Biblical, so as to maintain an atmosphere conducive to prosperity and general well-being. This part of our consensus has had the good effect of deeply imprinting upon the national character a sense of morality, godliness, patriotism, and family devotion. Its moral code also has a healthy moderating influence on the economy.

A Co-op Nation

This American model presents a formula for running the country that we might liken to that used by a thriving farm co-op or public corporation of shareholders.²

This co-op mentality leads citizens to act as if their connection to our country works like a co-op membership full of legitimate benefits with distributed risks, voting privileges, few liabilities, and plenty of recreational opportunities. As long as an atmosphere of well-being and happiness exists, members renew their membership with great enthusiasm. Many have even taken their membership in the co-op as a kind of entitlement in which benefits are seen as rights. This enthusiasm is aided by a strong economic foundation that practically guarantees some degree of prosperity.

As a result, this cooperative union is remarkably resistant to crisis. Doomsayers have often predicted its ruin. Nevertheless, as long as this economic model maintains the outward appearance of prosperity and confers benefits, liberties, and entitlements upon its citizens, we will have the consensus necessary to maintain our union—even in times of great moral decadence like our own. In theory, it might be argued that our cooperative union can last indefinitely.

Despite its intensely self-interested nature, this American model has endeared itself to countless Americans since it has often delivered growth, prosperity and relative peace where everyone seemed to get along. Many even regarded this practical blueprint for success as a redemptive formula that should be adopted by all mankind, and they have preached this American way to the nations with almost missionary zeal.

America in Crisis

This model can only work as long as everyone agrees to get along and cooperate. When the economic dynamo stalls or sputters, discord arises. When the vague moral code of the consensus begins to crumble, trust and confidence disappear. In periods of prolonged crisis like the present one, this cooperative model breaks down.

Then we see factions forming. Polarizing debates arise where each wants to blame the other for the failure of the co-op. Elections resemble shareholder brawls where officers are frequently changed. The opportunities for profit diminish. The co-op now appears to work contrary to the membership's interests. It is, so to speak, not paying out dividends but distributing uncertainties that cause anxiety, depression, and stress. This raises questions as to whether ours is really a redemptive formula for all mankind.

In presenting this American model, we do not wish to insinuate that all Americans equally adhere to it. We are not affirming that “co-op Americans” lack patriotic sentiments, or that other competing models do not exist. All we are saying is that, generally speaking, this cooperative model has dominated the American way of life and is now in crisis.

The unthinkable is now happening: Our cooperative union is unraveling; our consensus is crumbling; and the dynamo of our production is slowing down. We must now deal with this frightening prospect.

1. Patrick Henry, “‘And I Don’t Care What It Is’: The Tradition-History of a Civil Religion Proof-Text,” *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 49 (Mar. 1981): 41.

2. We already find in the literature of the Founding Fathers references to the nation as a “commercial republic,” a union of legitimate self-interest, providing prosperity and security. Matthew Spalding and Patrick J. Garrity, *A Sacred Union of Citizens: George Washington’s Farewell Address and the American Character* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), 65.