



**JOHN HORVAT II**

**Where We've Been,  
How We Got Here, and  
Where We Need to Go**

# **RETURN TO ORDER**

**From a Frenzied Economy to an Organic Christian Society**

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# Foreword

*by Harry C. Veryser*

The argument presented in this book is very unique in that it is at the same time very old and very new. It reaches back through the philosophers to the thoughts of Plato and Aristotle. In his book, *The Republic*, Plato presents an argument that the state of the Commonwealth is the state of the individual souls writ large. Plato saw in democratic societies a danger that the desires of the people for bodily satisfactions would outrun the resources of the State and result, eventually, in a tyranny.

Aristotle also was concerned about the problems of the democratic society in which people, being free, would allow their desires to become disorderly and inimical to the common good. To overcome this tendency, he recommended a mixed or constitutional regime.

This argument was taken up in the mid-twentieth century by the prominent writer Russell Kirk. In an important essay, “The Problem of Social Justice,” Kirk argued that disorder in the soul reflects itself in disorder in the Republic.

*In Return to Order*, John Horvat II continues the argument by teasing out its application to the present twenty-first century. Applying it to the economic, financial, social, and finally moral crisis faced by Western civilization, he argues for a return to the cardinal virtues, particularly temperance. This is a new way of looking at the present economy and social order.

While Plato and Aristotle focused on the political factors—that of a democratic society and the inordinate desire of the population to use political measures to achieve their satisfactions—Horvat sees our enormous technological success, from the Industrial Revolution to our days as a major factor. With the increase in productivity, people were able to realize a standard of living hereto only dreamed of by past generations. As more desires were fulfilled, this led to frantic explosions of expectations. So great was the desire to fulfill these benefits that political society began to break down the necessary preconditions for a prosperous society. Intemperance reigned!

Since intemperance is a matter of habit, people became habituated to great expectations and fulfillment, until finally, in the words of one economist, they began to

consume the seed corn of moral capital. In this way, self-interest exhausted itself in intemperance.

It was almost as if a young man, left with a great legacy by his grandparents, destroyed the trust fund. One could go back to Scripture to the story of the Prodigal Son where the young man, having received great wealth, wasted it on intemperate desires. Horvat sees America as that type of society. He argues that the inability of many to control their desires led to “frenetic intemperance” setting the tone for society as a whole.

And what was the consequence? The profligate wasting of a great inheritance.

Horvat calls us to return to our Father’s House, not just individually, but collectively. If we do this, not only will we restore our individual souls to a more virtuous state, but America will be a great and prosperous nation once more.

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## [Introduction](#)

### **Back on Course**

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 occasional celebrations, 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 the 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 passengers. 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 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 nation, 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 that gave rise to Christian civilization. We believe these teachings can serve as 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 in history. Unless we have the courage to draw heavily 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 in a succinct form 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 restraining 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 we 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 tempers the markets and keeps them free.

The model we will present is the organic socio-economic order that was developed in Christendom. Inside this organic framework, we find timeless principles of an economic order, wonderfully adapted to our human nature and 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. We find the anchors of the virtues, especially the cardinal virtues, to be a necessary condition for sound economy. Inside this order, there are the elements to replace the rule of money with a rule that favors honor, beauty, and quality.

Yet we must stress that this is a Christian order well rooted in 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.

### **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, 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.



# Chapter 1

## 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 our lives and interpret reality to such a degree that it is difficult to imagine life outside this model.

In face of the present crisis, this model now 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, which 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 his personal happiness as long as it does not interfere with another's dream. The result is a practical way of life where each pursues his dream celebrating 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 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, and 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-illusory 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 toward 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, which establishes what many have called a “civil religion,” 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 government has no sense,” notes President Dwight Eisenhower, “unless it is founded in a deeply-felt religious faith, and I don’t care what it is.”<sup>1</sup>

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.

### **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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology*, Doubleday, Garden City, N.Y., 1960, p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> 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, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1996), p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira, Meeting with American TFP members, Jan. 14, 1980.

Despite its intense self-interested nature, this American model has endeared itself to countless Americans since it 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, which 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 model has dominated the American way of life, and it is in crisis.

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

### **Defining the American Cooperative Union**

A dominant socio-economic model consisting of a vibrant economic system that produces a great abundance and a corresponding American way of life by which we enjoy it. Those citizens adhering to this model see our country working like a farm co-op membership or shareholder company full of legitimate benefits, voting privileges and entitlements.



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