

2008 Culture of Enterprise Student Essay Contest:
“Can Character and Communities Survive in an Age of Globalization?”

Community and Character: The Threat from Globalization

By Brian Douglass

Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to discuss the relationships between character, community, and globalization. Character defines communities, while communities ensure that character is passed on to future generations. The natural diversity found in communities around the world is destroyed by globalization, which seeks the “global economic integration of many formerly national economies into one global economy” and the “effective erasure of national boundaries for economic purposes.”¹ It will be shown that the destruction of national and local communities will be the likely outcome of globalization.

On the Nature of Communities

Community is a term that we all seem to have some image of in our minds. In a rather simple sense, it has become a term for a group of people who happen to live together in the same area. This definition is somewhat useful and, sadly, the inhabitants of many of today’s “communities” share little else. Wendell Berry, a writer, poet, and farmer from Kentucky has written extensively about community. In his writing, Berry states that “a healthy community is a form that includes all the local things that are connected by the larger, ultimately mysterious form of the creation.”² Berry’s concept of community as connection is by no means a novel idea. John Donne stated “[n]o man is an island, entire of itself.”³

In Western culture, the concept of community is related to our conception of God. In Genesis, God states “[i]t is not good that the man should be alone.”⁴ In fact, not only is it not

good, but also it is against our nature, for we are created in the image of God,⁵ a God who is not an island either, but rather a Trinity, a community of three consubstantial persons.⁶ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* goes so far as to say that for man community is “not ... an extraneous addition but a requirement of his nature. Through the exchange with others, . . . man develops his potential; he thus responds to his vocation.”⁷ In its definition of community, the *Catechism* goes on to state that it is something that exists throughout time and is spiritual as well as material, it is a “group of persons bound together organically by a principle of unity that goes beyond each one of them.”⁸

There are three main groupings of connections that should be examined when considering communities. These are man-man, man-land, and man-work. Without a proper balance of the three, communities will cease to be healthy communities.

The first, and most basic, of the connections is the connection between men. Without people, a community would not exist. Of the numerous levels of connection between persons, the family is both the most basic and the most essential. It is the family that is the foundation of all societies and can be called “the first and fundamental structure for ‘human ecology’” because it is where “man receives his first formative ideas about truth and goodness, and learns what it means to love and to be loved, and thus what it actually means to be a person.”⁹ The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church* expands upon this theme by stating that the uniqueness of the family stems from the fact that “the obligations of its members . . . are not limited by the terms of a contract, but derive from the very essence of the family, founded on the irrevocable marriage covenant and given structure in the relationships that arise within it following the generation or adoption of children.”¹⁰ John Paul II stated that “the family, as a community of persons, is thus the first human ‘society.’”¹¹ With this in mind, the *Compendium*

affirms that it is a “society built on a family scale is the best guarantee against drifting off course into individualism or collectivism, because within the family the person is always at the center of attention as an end and never as a means.”¹² All relationships between men have their root in the family, the first community. Without the proper foundation of the family, it is nearly impossible for healthy relationships to be formed. If a collection of people cannot maintain healthy relationships, then there is no community.

Secondly, all communities must have a relationship with the land. This should be obvious from two facts. First, we need somewhere on which to stand and walk about. Second, we all must eat. Wendell Berry reminds us that “land” is a broad category, which is often neglected as people use creation to further our own ends. He states that “[i]n speaking of community, then we are speaking of a complex connection not only among human beings or between humans and their homeland but also between the human economy and nature, between forest or prairie and field or orchard, and between troublesome creatures and pleasant ones. *All* neighbors are included.”¹³

The connection between man and the land is also important because all of us must eat, now, and in the future. Communities, being defined by connections that transcend time, must concern themselves with permanence. In his essay “The Small Farm Secures the State,” Andrew Lytle, one of the foremost of the Southern Agrarians of the first half of the twentieth century, states that communities, “to endure must have internal security; and this security is best maintained when its citizens have a stake in the commonwealth; and the lasting kind of stake is property, and the most durable kind of property is a small farm.”¹⁴ Lytle also adds that “the basis of liberty is economic independence” and concludes that “[t]he man who owns a small farm has direct control over the life-giving source, land.”¹⁵

In England, a group led by Gilbert Keith Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc formulated ideas similar to those of the Southern Agrarians based on the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* issued by Pope Leo XIII and historical Catholic teachings. The distributists, as the group became known, sought an economic system that would maximize personal, and family, freedom. In his “Essay on the Restoration of Property,” Belloc states: “[i]t is obvious that whoever controls the means of production controls the supply of wealth. If therefore the means for the production of that wealth which a family needs are in control of others than the family, the family will be dependent upon those others; it will not be economically free.”¹⁶ For many of the English distributists, the key to economic freedom was the same as it was for Andrew Lytle in Tennessee: the family farm. Under the leadership of Belloc, Chesterton, and Fr. Vincent McNabb, OP, the distributists began the Catholic Land Movement which sought to bring people from the slums of English cities out onto the land.¹⁷

Finally, while it is land that provides both permanence and independence to communities, without labor, there can be no productive relationship between man and land. *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine* states that “[h]uman work has a twofold significance: objective and subjective. In the objective sense, it is the sum of activities, resources, instruments and technologies used by men and women to produce things. . . . In the subjective sense, work is the activity of the human person that corresponds to his personal vocation.”¹⁸ Most people today seem to understand work in the objective sense as it is simply descriptive of what is being done. What appears to be less widely understood is the sense of work as vocation which is a connection between man and work. Without this deeper, subjective sense of work, work simply becomes drudgery and toil.

For the distributists, the Southern Agrarians, and Wendell Berry, the importance of

vocation is central to the understanding of community. Eric Gill, a Distributist, stated the concept of work as vocation as the fact that “every man is called to give love to the work of his hands. Every man is called to be an artist.”¹⁹ In his commentary on this quote, Berry says that “by the dismemberment of work, by the degradation of our minds as workers, we are denied our highest calling.”²⁰ In his introduction to *Who Owns America*, a collection of essays in large part written by Southern Agrarian writers, Herbert Agar states that “far from offering the chance to do creative work, monopoly capitalism subjects more and more laborers to a humiliating, nerve-racking boredom.... The man lies who says that such things are compatible with the American dream. And his lie corrodes the roots of life, for it implies that good is the same as bad and nothing is worth even a little trouble.”²¹

The loss of the sense of vocation in work means the loss of a connection to our work. The only connection that really remains is fear. Belloc calls such a situation the *Servile State* and those who labor for such a state, *wage slaves*. In “Restoration of Property,” Belloc proposes that “[w]hen men have become wage slaves they think in terms of income. When they are economically free, they think in terms of property.”²² With the government frequently promising that economic prosperity is to be reached by the distribution of checks, by tax breaks, or the creation of incomes (i.e., jobs), it seems few Americans think in terms of property. For Belloc, the Servile State is a return to slavery. Looking at our current situation in such a light is disconcerting to say the least.

Communities and Character

The English word “character” derives from Latin and Greek roots relating to a “distinctive mark.”²³ To Aristotle, “excellence of character” is referred to as “moral excellence”

which he defines as being a mean determined “by reason and in the way in which the man of practical wisdom would determine it.”²⁴ In addition to being the first community, the family is also of central importance to the development of character because it is within the family that “moral values are taught starting from the very first years of life, the spiritual heritage of the religious community and the cultural legacy of the nation are transmitted. In the family one learns social responsibility and solidarity.”²⁵

While the family is the first and most basic community, it is by natural extension that the larger community plays a role in character development as well as in the passing on of standards of excellence of character to future generations. By the fact that communities serve as a conduit for knowledge from old to young, they are the ideal and natural defenders of character.

On Globalization

It is said that we live in an “age of globalization,” however popular use of the term can be rather confusing. Herman Daly, an economist at the University of Maryland, College Park and a former senior economist at the World Bank, observes that a distinction must be made between “internationalization” and “globalization.” He states: “[i]nternationalization refers to the increasing importance of international trade, international relations, treaties, alliances, etc.”²⁶ “The basic unit remains the nation.”²⁷ On the other hand, “[g]lobalization refers to global economic integration of many formerly national economies into one global economy.... It is the effective erasure of national boundaries for economic purposes.”²⁸ With globalization, there is implied a “national economic disintegration” in which the parts of national economies “are torn out of their national context (dis-integrated), in order to be re-integrated into the new whole, the globalized economy.”²⁹ Tom Palmer of the Cato Institute proposes a similar definition for

globalization as “the diminution or elimination of state-enforced restrictions on exchanges across borders and the increasingly integrated and complex global system of production and exchange that has emerged as a result.”³⁰ It is clear from both these and other experts that when we are discussing the “age of globalization” we are not simply talking about a period with a large amount of international trade.

The Bretton Woods Agreement after World War II and successive meetings led to the creation of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization and other organizations and treaties which have laid a foundation for the move to a globalization-based economy.³¹ The G-20 Leaders Summit on Financial Markets and the World Economy held in November 2008 shows that world leaders are seeking ways to revitalize the Bretton Woods Organizations and possibly create new organizations to meet the current financial crisis.³²

Daly notes that a switch from international trade to a globalized economy involves a change from a market governed by comparative advantage to one governed by absolute advantage.³³ He points out that the ease of capital mobility seen in a modern, globalization economic model would make competitive advantage arguments, with their focus on lowering opportunity costs, outdated. Instead, capital would “flow to wherever costs are lowest — that is, to pursue absolute advantage.”³⁴ Such a proposition seems rather worrying when looking at globalization from the perspective of communities. If such a principle underlies the outlook of not just companies, but also governments, then local independence is in danger. Self sufficiency is just not economical in the brave new world of globalization. In the face of globalization’s dogma of absolute advantage, E. F. Schumacher’s words ring true: “there are few words as final and conclusive as the word ‘uneconomic.’ If an activity has been branded as uneconomic, its right to existence is not merely questioned but emphatically denied.”³⁵ Anything that is not

efficient or economic is seen as needing to be discarded and forgotten.

One of the more popular measures of the success of a country is the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The IMF states that “economic growth is the principle route to lasting poverty reduction.”³⁶ As measured by the world’s GDP, growth is certainly expanding driven by the increased movement towards globalization. However, some economists, including those at the New Economics Foundation of the United Kingdom, point to the fact that studies in the developed world fail to show any connection between GDP growth and total quality of life, or happiness, since World War II despite the enormous growth and advances that have taken place.³⁷ More specifically, when it comes to globalization as a means to eradicate poverty, they cite data showing that during the 1990s, for every dollar of poverty reduction, \$166 of extra global production and consumption was required.³⁸ The report questions the efficiency of GDP growth as a means to poverty eradication as well as the true cost of such programs on the environment, communities, and workers.³⁹

Communities and Character in the Age of Globalization

Traditional functions of family and community are clearly not “economical” when looked at through the lens of GDP growth and absolute advantage. Childcare by parents, caring for elderly at home, and helping a neighbor are all activities that contribute nothing to GDP measures and yet are indispensable for any healthy community. Similarly, there is little room for consideration of environmental damage or the impact on the land’s future fertility allowed for in purely quantitative measures. The community, the shaper and guardian of character, stands out in sharp contrast to the drive towards more globalization and less self sufficiency. Joseph Pearce in *Small is Still Beautiful* points out that it is the discontented, who always want more or want

different, that are the ideal consumers in the age of globalization.⁴⁰ Healthy communities, on the other hand, are bastions of stability and tradition.

By the nature of the analysis and measurement that globalization depends upon, the non-quantifiable is neglected. The simplification turns the economic picture into a view characterized by humanity stripped of what makes us human as noted by Pius XI in *Quadragesimo Anno*.⁴¹ Pius XII, reflecting on the problems of a world scared by the Great Depression and preparing for a second World War, summarized the main problem stating that “[t]he wound of our individualistic and materialistic society will not be healed, the deep chasm will not be bridged, by no matter what system, if the system itself is materialistic in principle and mechanical in practice.”⁴²

Joseph Peace states that “the deadly sins of Christianity have become the deadly virtues of consumerism.”⁴³ This statement mirrors an observation of Keynes looking forward to a future when morality could be restored and we can “rid ourselves of” the need to “pretend to ourselves and to everyone that fair is foul and foul is fair; for foul is useful and fair is not.”⁴⁴ Yet, he still held that “[a]varice and usury and precaution must be our gods for a little longer still. For only they can lead us out of the tunnel of economic necessity into daylight.”⁴⁵ The move towards globalization does not show any sign of breaking out of this Faustian deal.

Conclusion

Western culture has been turned upside down, with the noble goal of eliminating poverty and improving the world’s standard of living. We have not sold our souls, but ignored the souls. Had we paid attention to what our own culture’s tradition could tell us, we would know that no global plan will ever eradicate poverty, for Jesus stated that the poor will always be with us.⁴⁶

Philosophical materialism has led to a denial of the spirit and what makes us most human simply because non-material aspects are virtually impossible to quantify. It is upon this materialism that the support for globalization as the savior of the world is based.

In contrast to the modern materialist mindset stands the dual bulwarks of character: the family and community. As Berry says, they are both built upon connections which are intrinsically interwoven into the “larger, ultimately mysterious form of the creation.”⁴⁷ How can globalization make sense of such mystery? How do you measure the love found in a family? How do you quantify growth in happiness? Scientific analysis, for all the good that it has done over the centuries, is useless.

What does globalism mean for community and culture? It seems that if globalization driven by materialistic and mechanistic forces, as it is currently, is victorious, then community will be changed into something unrecognizable by the traditional, Western definitions that appear in this essay. With community, is interwoven character, freedom, and most importantly, the family. The destruction of communities will mean the extinction of character.

Notes

1. Herman Daly, "Globalization Versus Internationalization — Some Implications"
Ecological Economics 31 (1999): 31-37,
http://www.uvm.edu/~jdericks/EEtheory/Daly_on_Globalization.pdf (accessed
November 27, 2008), 31-2.
2. Wendell Berry, "Conservation and Local Economy" *Sex, Economy, Freedom, and
Community* (New York: Pantheon, 1994), 15.
3. John Donne, "Now, This Bell Tolling Softly for Another, Says to Me: Thou Must Die"
Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions and Death's Duel (New York: Random House,
1998), 102-07.
4. Genesis 2:18 Douay-Rheims.
5. Genesis 5:1 Douay-Rheims.
6. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), #242.
7. *Ibid.* #1879.
8. *Ibid.* #1880.
9. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (1991),
[http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-
ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus_en.html) (accessed December 1, 2008) paragraph 39.
10. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic
Church* (Washington: USCCB Publishing, 2005), #212.
11. John Paul II, *Gratissimam Sane* (1994),
[http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/documents/hf_jp-
ii_let_02021994_families_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_02021994_families_en.html) (accessed December 1, 2008).

12. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, #213.
13. Wendell Berry, "Conservation and Local Economy" *Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community* (New York: Pantheon, 1994), 15.
14. Andrew Lytle, "The Small Farm Secures the State" *Who Owns America*, ed. Herbert Agar and Allen Tate (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 1999), 310.
15. *Ibid.*, 310.
16. Hilaire Belloc, *An Essay on the Restoration of Property* (Norfolk, VA: IHS Press, 2002), 25-6.
17. Tobias Lanz, "Introduction" *Flee to the Fields* (Norfolk, VA: IHS Press, 2003), 7-14.
18. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, #271.
19. Eric Gill, *A Holy Tradition of Working* (Suffolk, England: Golgonooza Press, 1983), p61.
20. Wendell Berry, "A Defense of the Family Farm" *Home Economics* (New York: North Point Press, 1987), 166-7.
21. Herbert Agar, "Introduction" *Who Owns America*, ed. Herbert Agar and Allen Tate (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 1999), 3-4.
22. Hilaire Belloc, 76.
23. Marcia Homiak, "Moral Character" *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-character/> (accessed 27 November 2008).
24. *Ibid.*
25. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, #213.
26. Herman Daly, "Globalization Versus Internationalization — Some Implications," 31.
27. *Ibid.*, 31.
28. *Ibid.*, 31.

29. *Ibid.*, 32.
30. Tom Palmer, "Globalization Is Grrrreat!" *Cato's Letter*,
<http://www.cato.org/pubs/letters/palmer-catoletters.pdf> (accessed November 27, 2008).
31. The Bretton Woods Committee, "Bretton Woods Institutions,"
<http://www.brettonwoods.org/institutions.html> (accessed on November 27, 2008).
32. Group of Twenty, "Declaration of the Summit on Financial Markets and the World Economy" <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2008/11/20081115-1.html>
(accessed on November 20, 2008).
33. Herman Daly, *Ecological Economics and Sustainable Development, Selected Essays of Herman Daly* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2007), 205.
34. *Ibid.*
35. E. F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful* (London: Abacus, 1973), 34.
36. Anne Krueger, "Expanding Trade and Unleashing Growth: The Prospects for Lasting Poverty Reduction" <http://www.imf.org/external/np/speeches/2004/120604.htm> (accessed on 1 December, 2008).
37. "Happiness Doesn't Cost the Earth," *BBC News*, 12 July 2006,
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/5169448.stm> (accessed December 1, 2008).
38. New Economics Foundation, *Growth Isn't Working*
<http://www.neweconomics.org/gen/uploads/hrfu5w555mzd3f55m2vqwty502022006112929.pdf> (accessed December 1, 2008), 17.
39. *Ibid.*, 23-5.
40. Joseph Pearce, *Small is Still Beautiful: Economics as if Families Mattered* (Wilmington, DE: ISI, 2006), 22.

41. Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*,
(http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno_en.html (accessed November 27, 2008).
42. Pius XII, "Address to the International Union of Catholic Women's Leagues" (April 14, 1939), quoted in Robert C. Pollock, ed., *The Mind of Pius XII* (London: W. Foulsham & Co., 1955), 33, quoted in Joseph Pearce, *Small is Still Beautiful: Economics as if Families Mattered* (Wilmington, DE: ISI, 2006), 72.
43. Joseph Pearce, 307.
44. John Maynard Keynes, "The Future" *Essays in Persuasion* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1963), 371-2.
45. *Ibid.*
46. John 12:8 Douay-Rheims.
47. Wendell Berry, "Conservation and Local Economy" *Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community* (New York: Pantheon, 1994), 15.