SOCIAL WORSHIP

How Catholic Social Thought Helped Build the Modern Cooperative Movement

NATHAN SCHNEIDER

University of Colorado Boulder
New forms of cooperation and community organization can be encouraged in order to defend the interests of small producers and preserve local ecosystems from destruction. Truly, much can be done!

—Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*
43 Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. 44 All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

3 One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at

10.44: 18.26; 19.5–6) 39: Isa 57.19; Joel 2.32. All who

...
CHAPTER IV: THE ELECTION AND OFFICE OF THE ABBESS; THE CHAPTER. THOSE WHO HOLD OFFICE AND THE DISCREETS

11. At least once a week the Abbess is required to call her sisters together in Chapter. 12. There both she and her sisters must confess their common and public offenses and negligences humbly. 13. There, too, she should consult with all her sisters on whatever concerns the welfare and good of the monastery; for the Lord often reveals what is best to the lesser [among us].

15. This prescription takes on full significance when it is seen that neither the Rule of Hugolino nor that of Innocent IV mention the Chapter. Neither the Earlier Rule nor the Later Rule of Saint Francis describes it in the same manner as Saint Clare does in this document. It may have been the result of her long years of ministry to the sisters of San Damiano. Cf. Lazaro Iriarte, O.F.M. Cap., La Regola di Santa Chiara, trans. Fiorenza Fiore (Milano: Biblioteca Francescana Provinciale, 1976), pp. 103–115.
The law ... should favor ownership, and its policy should be to induce as many as possible of the people to become owners.

— Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* (1891)
SEVEN COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLES

VOLUNTARY
OPEN
MEMBERSHIP

DEMOCRATIC
MEMBER CONTROL

COOPERATION
AMONG COOPERATIVES

AUTONOMY & INDEPENDENCE

MEMBER
ECONOMIC
PARTICIPATION

CONCERN FOR THE
COMMUNITY

EDUCATION
TRAINING AND
INFORMATION
NEW MEMBER - NEW OWNER

REA CO-OPS ARE MEMBER-OWNED AND CONTROLLED
CATHOLICS AND COOPERATIVES

IOWA IN OCTOBER is a lovely country. In the autumn the rolling prairie puts on its Sunday best of glowing colors, and makes holiday between the droughts of summer and the howling winds of winter. Shelby County, where you find Westphalia, Iowa, is no exception. If you had been there October 7 and 8 just past, you would have become part of the scenery yourself, for Westphalia’s guests at the Rochdale Centennial—sponsored by the Catholic Cooperative Committee—picked apples off the trees, helped milk the cows, and in general were taken right into the local farm families as their own.

Westphalia country people are not only hospitable, they are practical as well. Through the initiative and energy of their gifted Pastor, the Rev. Hubert Duren, the people of that little village have built up one of the most remarkable cooperative communities that you can find anywhere. The visitors to Westphalia were rewarded by a glimpse of parish cooperatives in action. But they were also rewarded by the opportunity to join in the spiritual activities of a parish which draws the light and strength for its economic life from the Catholic ideal of truly social worship. Guests and
DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE
JOHN A. RYAN

Father Albert J. McKnight
“Spiritual Soldier for Social and Economic Justice”
(August 18, 1927 - April 17, 2016)
it was 1954, and I heard my father speak on Christian cooperativism and from that moment I developed an enthusiasm for it... I remember that reflection my father gave: it goes forward slowly, but it is sure.

— Pope Francis, November 2013
In some places, cooperatives are being developed to exploit renewable sources of energy ... while the existing world order proves powerless to assume its responsibilities, local individuals and groups can make a real difference

— Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*
Liberation from the dominant technocratic paradigm does in fact happen sometimes, for example, when cooperatives of small producers...opt for a non-consumerist model of life

— Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*
The law ... should favor ownership, and its policy should be to induce as many as possible of the people to become owners.

— Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* (1891)
SOCIAL WORSHIP
How Catholic Social Thought Helped Build the Modern Cooperative Movement

NATHAN SCHNEIDER
University of Colorado Boulder
Many commentators complained that Laudato Si was dark and pessimistic. But the enthusiasm of passages like this suggest otherwise.

He is calling for what could sound impossible: BOTH addressing the climate crisis and addressing social injustice.

Integral ecology.

What “forms of cooperation” is he talking about?
The explanation might begin with Acts 2 and 4—holding all things in common, seeing signs and wonders. Upon witnessing the power and grace of God, the first impulse of the early church was to share property, to make sure everyone's basic needs were met.

When the community grew and widows weren't getting what they needed, the early Christians even found they had to elect a board.
The Rule of Saint Clare

CHAPTER IV: THE ELECTION AND OFFICE OF THE ABBESS; THE CHAPTER. THOSE WHO HOLD OFFICE AND THE DISCREETS

11. At least once a week the Abbess is required to call her sisters together in Chapter. 12. There both she and her sisters must confess their common and public offenses and negligences humbly. 13. There, too, she should consult with all her sisters on whatever concerns the welfare and good of the monastery; for the Lord often reveals what is best to the lesser [among us].

15. This prescription takes on full significance when it is seen that neither the Rule of Hugolino nor that of Innocent IV mention the Chapter. Neither the Earlier Rule nor the Later Rule of Saint Francis describes it in the same manner as Saint Clare does in this document. It may have been the result of her long years of ministry to the sisters of San Damiano. Cf. Lazar Iriarte, O.F.M. Cap., La Regola di Santa Chiara, trans. Fiorenza Fiore (Milano: Biblioteca Francescana Provinciale, 1976, pp. 103-115.
The law ... should favor ownership, and its policy should be to induce as many as possible of the people to become owners.

— Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* (1891)

This tradition began to take new form in the modern era, as popes struggled to find a third way between the rock and hard place of capitalism and communism.

They landed on what became called “distributism,” the idea that ownership of the means of production should be distributed among the producers—private property, but spread out as a commons.
More and more Catholics began joining the global cooperative movement, which offered a democratic alternative to the investor-controlled industrial revolution.

It was a way for farmers, shoppers, depositors, and workers to own and govern the businesses they depended on.
One of the most powerful feats of economic development in US history: 1936 Rural Electrification Act. Demonstrated that co-ops can deploy utilities at scale.

More recently, this has enabled both renewable innovation and inflexibility around coal.
America magazine reported in the 1940s about an Iowa parish celebrating its cooperative ministry. This seemed normal at the time. The anonymous writer uses a beautiful phrase to describe it: “social worship.”

Catholic thinkers around the world were recognizing cooperation as a kind of formation that puts human dignity at its center. As Msgr. Ryan wrote, “it has finally shown itself to be sound in principle, and feasible in practice.”

But many Catholics today don't know this legacy.
Catholics proved adept at this. The first credit union in the United States, for instance, was St. Mary's Bank, which grew out of a parish in New Hampshire.

This, in turn, was derived from the wildly successful parish-based co-op banks of Alfonse Desjardins in Quebec. He learned the model from a Jesuit working among farmers in the Maritime Provinces.

Their efforts produced a powerful counter-weight to the sprawling for-profit finance sector. Now around 1/3 of Americans are credit union members.

Italy's Confcooperative, the Catholic co-op association, has been an innovator in cooperative banking, as well as protecting traditional agriculture and developing humane models for social care, which are spreading around the world.
Founded under the thumb of Franco in the 1950s, and led by the half-blind priest Jose Maria Arizmendiarieta, Mondragon in the Basque Country became the world's largest worker-owned cooperative.

It has been often studied and imitated, but never replicated. It stands in contrast to the abuses of industrial labor, powered by a long spiritual tradition rooted in human dignity and solidarity.
In the United States, economist Msgr. John Ryan helped build cooperatives into the New Deal.

He saw in cooperation, quote, “the mechanism and the atmosphere for a greater development of the altruistic spirit than is possible under any other economic system that has ever been tried or devised.”

Fr. Albert McKnight was a brilliant strategist who helped create a system of financing that enabled Black farmers across the Southern states to become landowners.
it was 1954, and I heard my father speak on Christian cooperativism and from that moment I developed an enthusiasm for it... I remember that reflection my father gave: it goes forward slowly, but it is sure.

— Pope Francis, November 2013

Pope Francis has had a long personal connection with cooperatives, from his childhood to social justice organizations in Argentina. That's the experience he speaks from in Laudato Si.
In some places, cooperatives are being developed to exploit renewable sources of energy ... while the existing world order proves powerless to assume its responsibilities, local individuals and groups can make a real difference

— Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*

Thus he sees the potential that shared ownership has for enabling transition to integral ecology.

These are examples in Colorado: Namaste Solar, a worker co-ops; Amicus Solar, a purchasing co-op; and Clean Energy Credit Union, a financing co-op.
Liberation from the dominant technocratic paradigm does in fact happen sometimes, for example, when cooperatives of small producers...opt for a non-consumerist model of life

— Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*

Pope Francis connects the problems of technology with the opportunity of cooperative economies.

Can cooperation transform our relationships with our gizmos, putting human needs and creativity more in control of them?

Can better ownership produce more convivial tools?
The law … should favor ownership, and its policy should be to induce as many as possible of the people to become owners.

— Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* (1891)

Once again, the law. We need energy policy built around community ownership, so communities can prioritize shared benefits and renewables over profit.
Thank you.