

## July 6: Cooperatives

In modern business world cooperation is a suspect word. To regulators it often means that businesses are ripping off their customers by fixing their prices. To businesses it can mean that you stop competing with your rivals, stagnate as companies and become less profitable. Cooperation means taking the easy way that leads to extinction.

The history of cooperatives, however, offers a larger perspective from which to reflect on what we take for granted in business and the economy. In the nineteenth century the cooperative movement was a response to the industrial revolution and to the desire for democracy.

After the French Revolution conflict arose between people who wanted the State to take complete responsibility for the economy and government of society and those who believed that competitive businesses would work efficiently for everyone's benefit. These broad currents of thought can still be found today.

In the Industrial Revolution people flocked from the depressed rural areas to towns where large factories offered employment but focused exclusively on making large profits. In a society where few laws governed labour relationships and where welfare provisions were almost non-existent, for workers this meant long hours, dangerous conditions, unstable employment and housing dependent on the whim of the company.

One reaction was to fight against private enterprises and make them over to the state and ultimately to the workers. This could produce a tyranny of its own, as was later seen in Communist Russia. Another response was to start enterprises in which workers pooled their resources to buy or build housing, to buy food cheaply and distribute it, or to manage and staff firms that provided employment and produced goods that benefited the community. Workers not only had a vote, but shared responsibility for the conditions of working and for social contribution made by their workplace. This was a more complete form of democracy.

Many cooperatives later failed, partly because they were vulnerable to sudden economic shocks, but also because people were attracted to them mainly for the benefit they received – housing, for example - and lost interest after receiving it. They ceased to take responsibility for the enterprise and left it to managers, who made profit their aim. Many cooperatives were demutualised and made into engines for profit, with consequences that can be seen in the recent Royal Commission.

The challenges, however, remain. Unrestrained capitalism has led to the inequality and to entrenched disadvantage. It engenders the self-focus and disregard for people with disadvantage whom we at Jesuit Social Services serve.

That is why the cooperative ideal nevertheless remains strong in the Catholic tradition. It gives priority to persons over profit, to cooperation over competition and to negotiation over conflict. Successful enterprises, like the Spanish venture in Mondragon, show us in germ what Pope Francis' vision of the economy as building prosperity for all, including those who are doing hard, could look like in practice.

## **\*July 1-7: Naidoc Week**

It is never easy to see the world from the perspective of other people. If we are passionate about an issue, we become impatient with someone who argues a contrary view. We also find it difficult to enter the world of people who are imprisoned, mentally ill or refugees whom popular opinion regards as less than ourselves. We may need them to bang drums in order to encourage us to make us see and listen to them.

That is why the National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) week is so important. It emerged from the recognition by Indigenous Australians that they were neither respected nor listened to, and from their determination to change things. They thought it inappropriate to celebrate Australia Day on the anniversary of the arrival of the First Fleet, because that was the beginning of their dispossession. In the face of considerable opposition they began to organise. They drew up a petition to send to King George V to ask for Aboriginal electorates, but the Government saw it as outside its constitutional powers to provide them. In 1938 a Congress of Indigenous people met in Sydney. Its members marched on Australia Day, which they called Mourning Day. These were the origins of NAIDOC

Australia Day is still celebrated on the anniversary of Indigenous expropriation, but NAIDOC week provides an opportunity for all Australians to join in celebrating the culture and aspirations and hopes of Indigenous and Torres Strait Islanders.

The theme of NAIDOC Week this year is 'Voice, Treaty, Truth. Let's work together.' These words lie at the heart of the Uluru Statement that represents an Indigenous position reached after long discussion. It begins with the importance of voice. Indigenous culture, like all cultures, is built around language, in this case many languages. When languages die out cultures are put under great strain. Because Indigenous Australians are the first Australians with some 60,000 years of care for country, the preservation of their voice and languages in education and communities matters to all Australians.

Voice is also important in the sense that Indigenous Australians seek an institutional say on the matters that affect their lives. That demand is central to the Uluru Statement, and is captured by the second word of the 2019 Theme: Treaty. To appreciate its urgency we need think only of the catastrophic effects that such interventions by Australian governments as stealing and routinely jailing children have had on people and communities. There will be many legitimate differences of opinion about what shape that voice may take, but its need is not in doubt.

To understand the present condition of Indigenous Australians and to respond to their call we must understand the past. Truth is the third word of the Theme. Truth embraces the relationship between the Indigenous peoples, the first people, and the later people who dispossessed them by force, excluded them from their hunting grounds, stole their children and continue to jail them out of all proportion to the rest of the Australian population. The relationships also include, of course, the later people who have befriended and defended the first Australians, studied their languages and culture, and sought to build a more just Australia.

These peaceful and enquiring relationships underlie the hope embodied in the NAIDOC theme: Let's work together. We at Jesuit Social Services, who include many Indigenous people among our staff members and the people whom we serve, endorse the theme of NAIDOC week. The words are simple and attractive, and are a challenge to us all.

## **\*July 15 World Youth Skills Day**

World Youth Skills Day is a clunky phrase. But the day is important because it insists that each young person is important in themselves and is a gift to society. Young people are the future of an increasingly sophisticated and interconnected world in which those who have skills will find employment much more easily than those who are unskilled. Training is important at a time when many unskilled jobs are disappearing and when young people are three times more likely to be unemployed than their elders.

To gain skills young people need good teachers and mentors. Access to good education is a high priority for society. It is particularly important for young people from a background of deprivation. That is why most Catholic schools and teaching religious congregations began by reaching out to children in impoverished areas. Ragged schools drew children who were not attending school and gave the children a good basic education that enabled them to find employment and to develop their skills and self-confidence. Later, as societies became more sophisticated, schools prepared people for tertiary education so allowing them to teach, nurse and to enter other professions.

In developing nations in which there is much poverty it remains a priority to help disadvantaged young people connect with society and gain skills through receiving a basic education. In Australia it needs also to be a focus in Indigenous communities and in other areas where people are disadvantaged. In our work at Jesuit Social Services we find that young people who have been in the justice system need the education and skills that enable them to connect with society. That can make all the difference between a life spent in and out of prison and a life of stable relationships in the wider community.

It is a sobering thought that in Australia a large proportion of the prison population comes from relatively few geographical areas. It is equally striking that in those areas people are more likely to suffer from mental and physical illness and addiction. They are less likely to have access to child and educational support and are more likely to be unemployed. On every scale of disadvantage these areas are conspicuous.

Society has ultimately to pay for the human costs of failing to support people in early childhood, in schooling, in parenting and in dealing with illness at an early stage through the building of prisons, institutions for the mentally ill and hospitals. It would contribute greatly to human happiness and a fruitful society if the resources devoted to addressing this failure could be devoted to supporting them connect with society. In that education and the gaining of skills are essential.

Of course, the learning of skills and access to education are not simply about building a more prosperous society. They are about helping people, each of whom is precious, to grow in respect for themselves and others, to develop their gifts and to build good relationships with others and with their world. Skills matter because people matter.

**\*July 30 World Day against trafficking in persons;**

At first sight a World Day against trafficking persons is a relic of other times and places. That it coincides with the feast day of Samuel Wilberforce, the most celebrated opponent of the English slave trade in the nineteenth century, might confirm that impression.

The evil that lies at the heart of trafficking persons and especially young persons, however, is not confined to the past. Human greed treats people as means to others' enrichment and is willing to profit from other misfortunes. Wilberforce's struggle against slave trading by British companies lasted so long because the profit made by it enriched many British merchants and investors. It was a core part of a three way trade: selling and transporting English-made goods to Africa in order to pay for slaves; transporting slaves to British colonies in the Americas to be sold to landowners; transporting sugar and other goods from the Americas to be sold in Britain. The enslavement, degradation and death toll involved in transporting as many slaves as possible at minimum cost were seen simply as the necessary cost reduction central to any profitable business.

Today the majority of people trafficked comprise women and children. They depend on others for their survival, and are often forced to do demeaning things. Young girls from poor families in Myanmar, for example, may be sold to Thai families who promise to look after them, but keep them as domestic servants. As they grow older they are sold to factory owners who force them to do dangerous work in return for starvation wages. They are later on-sold to people who force them into sex work, and as they grow older and less profitable may be sold to brothel owners in Malaysia and later perhaps in Australia. Their passports are taken from them and they are kept in debt.

This is just one example of people who are serially trafficked. Children are also trafficked to provide body parts for patients wanting surgery, to join criminal gangs or militia, or to beg on the streets. Trafficking takes many different shapes, but in every case it involves exploiting people in great need by inflicting sufferings on them for the trafficker's benefit.

Although most trafficking of persons is illegal in Australia, some forms of it are relatively common. Women are trafficked to Australia for sex work; firms use lax immigration regulations to exploit overseas workers. And the Government traffics people who seek protection to PNG and Nauru where their sufferings are used to deter other would be asylum seekers

Trafficking people, of course, is opposed to the respect for the humanity of each person that is central to Christian faith and to any humane understanding of the world. That is why we at Jesuit Social Services deplore it. We are encouraged by the example of Wilberforce and other Evangelical Christians of the nineteenth century who so strongly opposed the slave trade, and of Pope Francis who has been so outspoken about trafficking.

Jesus showed that each person is precious to God, and strongly criticised the habit of subordinating people to greed for money. Faith and the attitude that human beings can be treated like parcels, to be sent, stamped and dumped are irreconcilable.

**\*July 31: St Ignatius Feast Day.**

Most stories of St Ignatius' life focus on the twenty years of his life from his conversion to the founding of the Society of Jesus. These were indeed rich and adventurous years of radical choices, seminal experiences, large desires and commitment to a radical way of life. Ignatius, however, lived for another fifteen years. In these he set into the institutional ways of living and acting in the new Society of Jesus all that he had discovered. He faced new situations and had to find a way of adapting to them while being faithful to his initial vision. His way of doing this is reflected in the recently formulated Apostolic Preferences that will shape Jesuit life and choices today.

Ignatius' distinctive gift was to combine a passionate desire to serve God through following Jesus' way with prayerful reflection about how to adapt his service to the diverse and changing situations of his age. That required being open to change. His initial vision was for himself and his companions to place themselves at the service of the Pope in demanding missions. They were to be like a troop of lightly armed troops running solo missions behind enemy lines, travelling light and moving fast. Francis Xavier's journeys to India and beyond, Faber's work in Germany, the delegation to the Council of Trent, and the Jesuit mission to Ethiopia are some of the faces of this dream.

Key to this dream was flexibility and freedom from responsibilities to sustain large institutions. But as the number of Jesuits grew and Ignatius was constantly asked to staff Jesuit schools, he saw the importance for the church and society of forming future leaders with a gift for service and discernment. Schools and universities spread through Europe and beyond. Jesuits spread, so did the demand for education and the opportunities for serving God through forming future leaders. Ignatius focused on providing new schools and universities through Europe and beyond. Each step along the way involved reflection in the light of Jesus' values, recognition of new possibilities, and an enthusiastic response to the way seen best to respond to God's will. In Ignatius' word, discernment.

The four Apostolic Preferences reflect this process of discernment. Jesuits around the world were invited to pray and speak together about where they see the Society called to focus today. These conversations took place at the level of communities and ministries and then at Province, Regional and International level. The Four Preferences reflect the directions taken in these conversations and on the places where people found life as they prayed.

The preferences named are for the Spiritual Exercises, for people on the margins of society, for the young, and for the World, our home. They are not defined areas of work, but are better understood as rivers of the heart that flow into one another and carry people and ministries on them. On them Jesuits and the people with whom they work are asked to feel carried, finding enthusiasm and joy in making them part of their lives, whether directly through their ministry, or as one aspect of their lives, or as a focus in their prayer. When they inspire individual Jesuits and communities, they will inevitably flow into the ministries undertaken by Jesuits around the world and to the way they engage in them.

At Jesuit Social Services we like to believe that we are animated by that passion for people at the margins of society and particularly for the most disadvantaged young people among them. Though we are very diverse in our staff and the people whom we accompany we are committed in our practice to the discernment and reflection that lie at the heart of the Spiritual Exercises.

**\*Pope's Intention: The Integrity of Justice:** That those who administer justice may work with integrity, and that the injustice which prevails in the world may not have the last word.

Small children have an instinctive sense of justice. They know if they are being treated unfairly and resent it. They also feel for others whom they think are being picked on unjustly. Of course, their sense of justice can sometimes degenerate into self-interest – they call every limitation of their freedom unjust. Respect for justice, however is vital in families. Nothing destroys trust and energy in families and societies more effectively than injustice.

That is why Pope Francis' intention this month is not a minor point but is central to building a world that works for everyone. He recognises that in all societies some people will profit unjustly at others' expense. They bend the law, break the law, and try to pressure governments and public servants to overlook their illegal behaviour.

To protect society every nation needs judges who are independent of Government and whose decisions cannot be bought. Ideally they should be appointed after consultation with their peers, supported in their decisions by Government even if those decisions are not in its interests, and scrupulous in avoiding conflicts of interest and sharp commercial practices.

In his Intention Pope Francis explains why this is so important. Judges are often the last court of appeal against the tyranny of government and the unbridled power of wealthy and well-connected people. We have only to remember the Royal Commission into the Banks to see how little people can be exploited and ripped off by people who claim to act in their interest. Governments, too, can treat people unlawfully in depriving them of their rights and their liberty. They may also try to silence people who threaten to expose their wrong-doing.

In many nations there is no realistic appeal against the wrongdoing of the powerful. Judges are in the pocket of the government or of wealthy oligarchs. When people are brought to trial, their guilt is decided in advance. Judges are there only to pass sentence. This ultimately corrodes the responsibility of citizens for their society.

Pope Francis, of course, writes as a follower of Jesus. At the heart of the Gospel is the story of an unjust trial where a cowed magistrate convicts Jesus on false evidence, and where Jesus' rising from the dead was the triumph of love over injustice. Jesus' example has encouraged brave people through the ages to protest against unjust judges, and has strengthened judges to insist on their independence and commitment to truth even if they are persecuted for doing so.

As we experience it at Jesuit Social Services in our accompaniment of people in the justice system, the challenge to fairness in Australia comes less from judges than from our law makers. Mandatory sentencing, placing children in detention as the first option, depriving people who seek protection of the protection of law all diminish people and ultimately corrode respect for justice.

## Book Review

Frank O'Loughlin, *New Wineskins*, Coventry Press, ISBN 9780648360124

It is often said that army generals usually fight a new war with the strategies of the previous one. It takes time to learn how to respond with new weapons to a different threat. Frank O'Loughlin, theologian and Parish Priest who has given his life to reflection and pastoral celebration of the Eucharist, believes that we are in the same situation when introducing the Eucharist to our own generation today.

The way in which preachers have presented the Eucharist derives from an earlier conflict between Catholics and Protestants. That conflict focused on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and on its sacrificial character. The emphasis on the reality of Christ's presence naturally led people to see the reality of the Eucharist as hidden by the symbols of bread, wine and offering, rather than as revealed through them. In the words of the hymn, it is 'masked by these bare shadows, shape and nothing more'.

O'Loughlin believes that in the culture of which we are part and in which the next generations are formed, this presentation of the Eucharist is disconnected from life and is unattractive. It does not commend the realities it was designed to defend. If we are to pass on our faith and Christian life today we must help people explore the symbols of the Eucharist and develop the rich meanings they have in our own culture as well as in past ones.

In exploring the symbols of the Eucharist – bread, wine, remembering, words and actions – O'Loughlin gives a thick description. He does not focus merely on bread as bread or wine as wine but reflects on all the associations that they have had in the Scriptural world and in our own.

He situates them in their different contexts as staple foods that we receive from others and rely on for survival, as central to gatherings, connection and celebration, to giving and receiving, and to conversation. Though they are simple things, the way in which they shape the simple rituals of daily life speak to us of the deep human realities of dependence, isolation and sharing, making meaning, life, death and hope, of hoarding and distribution, if we have ears to hear.

*New Wineskins* prepares our ears to hear, and makes it clear how the patterns of connection vary in different cultures and times. Our identity is shaped by the interlocking and forever changing network of relationships we have with one another and our environment, and symbols are nodal points in that network.

Central to the symbolic world of the sacraments is its continuity with the world of the Jews and of Jesus. In that world the symbol of bread recalled the starvation rations of an enslaved nation, the daily food of freedom when they had only enough for each day, and the hoped-for plentiful food of God's kingdom. In the Gospels, bread and wine are the staples of life, recalling the gift of life and freedom in deliverance from Egypt, the precarious gift of life in the present, and the full life promised through the life, death and rising of Jesus. This full life was commonly described as a banquet in which food, drink and convivial company were overflowing.

For Jesus' followers the remembering, the precarious and gifted daily reality and the promise of life embodied in bread and wine are focused through Jesus' Last Supper which we enter in the celebration of the Eucharist. It bears the pattern of our lives as Jesus' disciples of remembering deliverance from slavery, thankfulness for the gift of life in all its declensions and hope for the feasting promised in Jesus' rising.

In its presentation of the Eucharist *New Wineskins* communicates the energy and comprehensive celebration of life that are central to it. For a short book it stirs a flock of ideas and explorations. It would be churlish to criticise it for what it does not do. Like all

good books, however, it leaves the reader asking for more. I found myself musing on the inevitable gaps between reality and symbol, and particularly the ways in which all cultures shape symbols to conceal as well as to disclose reality. To take one example, the reality of wine is that it is a toxic, mood altering substance with pleasant effects but naturally addictive. As symbols, however, wine and other alcoholic drinks, embellished through poetry and song, are associated with sophistication, taste and conviviality. The symbol is decorated in order to disguise and minimise the destruction of personal lives, families and social groups through alcohol addiction. The association with the sacred through the symbol of Christ's Blood has had a part in this romancing of wine.

If we appropriate a thick description of wine as symbol, how do we reconcile the slavery to which it manifestly contributes with the freedom Christ brings? Exploring these kinds of question will take us further into the depths of love and suffering at the heart of Jesus' death which the Eucharist makes real to us.