

OPEN SPACE

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Woodbury Common, Devon, England

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Engaging the signs of the times:

COMMONING

FORUMWORD

OPENSOURCE

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The Jesuit Forum is an initiative of
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The Jesuit Forum brings together
small groups of people, who want
to – and can – make a difference, to
reflect, share and speak openly and
honestly on a range of issues.

The hope is that this trust-building
approach will counteract the grow-
ing privatization of peoples' faith
and deepest convictions. We want to
foster friendship, energy, enthusi-
asm and a deeper understanding of
the world in which we live. The Jesuit
Forum process helps to uncover cre-
ative solutions that are within us and
direct them outward, enabling us to
determine what we can do with oth-
ers to build a better world.

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After a two-year process of global discernment by the Society of Jesus, the superior general, **Fr. Arturo Sosa**, has announced the **Universal Apostolic Preferences** (UAPs) which will guide the Jesuits for the next ten years. They include walking with impoverished peoples and care of the Earth in a mission of reconciliation and justice.

“The damage done to the Earth is also damage done to the most vulnerable, such as Indigenous peoples, peasants (landless farmers) forced to emigrate, and the inhabitants of urban peripheries. The environmental destruction being caused by the dominant economic system is inflicting intergenerational damage: not only does it affect those now living on Earth, particularly the very young, but it also conditions and jeopardizes the life of future generations.”

*“We resolve, considering who we are and the means that we have, to collaborate with others in the construction of **alternative models of life** that are based on respect for creation and on a sustainable development capable of producing goods that, when justly distributed, ensure a decent life for all human beings on our planet.”*

This **Open Space** offers a look at the commons, often forgotten as one of the four major sectors of the economy with the state, the market and the household. We suggest that the reclamation of the commons is a key element in nurturing an economy of solidarity and reconciliation and restoring right relationships, implicit in the UAPs.

As you will see in our short text, the commons are flourishing in many different forms and in all parts of the world. Let us find ways to spread the notion as commoners, engaged in commons efforts which foster inclusion, community and care of Earth. We thank **David Bollier**, author of several books on the commons, for his leadership and inspiration.

Last year, the Jesuit Forum celebrated its first ten years. The next decade is well under way and we are into strategic planning, while we continue to promote **Laudato Si'** using our dialogue guide. We are also developing a new resource as a response to the **Calls to Action** of the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission**. To that end, we have a wonderful Advisory Group comprising Indigenous and non-Indigenous people from different parts of Canada. We are pleased to have the collaboration of **KAIROS Canada**.

I want to acknowledge and thank **Sami Helewa sj** for his leadership as chair of our board in the last few years. I now welcome **Kevin Kelly sj** to that role. I am grateful to **Laurence Loubières** for her contribution to the Forum and wish her well in leading the new service of communal discernment for the Jesuits of Canada.

Anne-Marie Jackson
Director



COMMONING

LIVING AND RESTORING THE COMMONS

In our North American scene today, how are we doing with truly inclusive, non-partisan, non-elitist social dialogue? How is our self-centred, profit-focused world managing with the long-term work of promoting human dignity and the common good through building an economy grounded in solidarity and subsidiarity? You might be surprised at how many efforts are emerging along these lines.

Both Popes Benedict and Francis speak about social enterprises, which aim at maximizing community benefits, not merely profits. They foresee that growing numbers of such social enterprises could influence the whole economy.

Even within corporate capitalism, there are efforts to find working models and forms of production which can help to pry open the exclusive focus on profit margins that so damages the humanity of our business class. For example, there is the Canadian publication, *Corporate Knights*, which researches and names the “100 best corporate citizens” in Canada presently working within the free market system.

More good but non-radical news: the cooperative movement (where the workers or members are the owners of the work)

has survived and is, in fact, thriving. This is an important movement whose birth in Canada was associated with the Catholic Church—especially in Quebec—and in the famous Antigonish movement in Nova Scotia.

The commons is essentially a parallel economy and social order that quietly but confidently affirms that another world is possible. And more: we can build it ourselves, now.

— David Bollier
Think Like a Commoner
New Society Publishers
www.newsociety.com

Today the cooperative movement is at work in 96 countries and has reached one billion members. In Canada alone, co-ops have over 18 million members, and co-op credit unions serve 1 in 5 Canadians. Globally, co-ops account for about 280 million jobs, and one in ten employed people works in a co-op.

In recent years, the International Summit of Cooperatives, whose participants control over \$2 trillion in assets, has been determined to make co-ops less self-absorbed and more influential, both economically and politically.

“

Commoning is about lived experience, not ideology, and more about living systems that emerge from the bottom up than about policies imposed from above.

— David Bollier

Photo courtesy of Ian Morton.

In this issue of Open Space, we want to put a focus on an even more alive and radical global social movement, which, though hardly visible in Canada, is spreading quickly throughout the world. It is the commons movement.

In brief, this movement is an alternative to corporate capitalism. Indeed, its ultimate goal is to rid the world of our market price/private property system. For “commoners” (that’s what members of this movement call themselves), the greatest value is not counted in monetary terms but in communally shared relationships and spaces.

To put it simply, the commons refers to goods and enterprises that no one owns and are shared by everyone. There are thousands of commons but no master list because any community can start one.

Think like a commoner

Since this movement is fairly new to us, we are counting substantially on the thinking of one of its most articulate leaders, David Bollier, and his popular book *Think Like a Commoner: A Short Introduction to the Life of the Commons*.¹

Whole pages of this book could have been written by Pope Francis. Bollier never mentions Catholic Social Teaching, but the language of the commons movement often overlaps with the traditional language of our social doctrine.

Market-obsessed persons will never understand the creative dynamic of the commons. In the social thought of the English-speaking west, there is a long history of dire speculation on the predictably disastrous effects of individual freedom of action on social goods that are shared.

Thomas Malthus, with his tragic view of the inevitability of overpopulation and the catastrophes through which Nature will “cure” overpopulation, might be an early example.²

William Foster Lloyd in 1832 wrote a famous pamphlet on “the tragedy of the commons,” describing the unavoidable destruction by over-use of any pasture to which all herders have free access.³ More influential in our generation is the work of Garret Hardin, who in 1968 borrowed Lloyd’s notion of “the tragedy of the commons” in a long, brilliant article in *Science* magazine.⁴

Hardin repeats the argument of William Foster Lloyd: collective property is impossible because, in a common pasture, every farmer, being a rational being, will inevitably seek to maximize his own gains—and thus the pasture is destroyed by being overused.

Hardin and his like teach that “the tragedy of the commons” proves the virtues of private ownership of property and free markets.

Enclosure of the commons

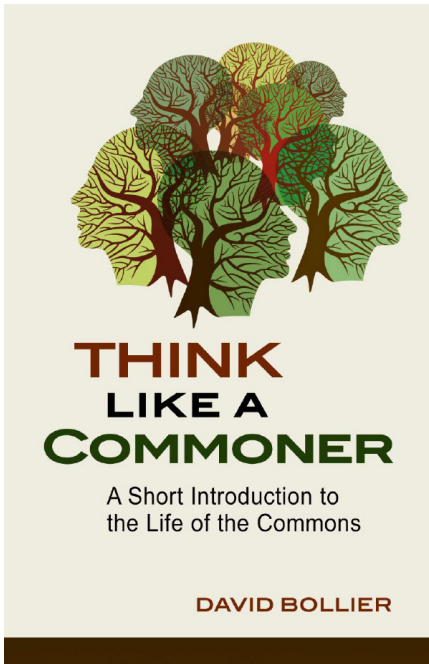
What happens when markets become so powerful that they disrupt natural ecosystems, reorder how people conduct their lives and claim ownership of life-forms?

It is sometimes difficult to step outside of our culture to take stock of the actual power and far-reaching effects of markets. But once you learn to identify the commons and understand its dynamics, it becomes quite clear that the privatization and commodification of our shared wealth is one of the great unacknowledged scandals of our time. Its pernicious effects are everywhere.

This process is called the enclosure of the commons. It’s a process by which corporations pluck valuable resources from their natural contexts, often with government support and sanction, and declare that they be valued through market prices.

The point is to convert resources that are shared and used by many to ones that are privately owned and controlled, and treat them as tradeable commodities.

— David Bollier
Think Like a Commoner



“*Our world is in need of reviving an ancient wisdom if it is to survive.*

David Bollier has a beautiful, bold and practical vision for our commons future and lights the path forward. I love this book!

— Maude Barlow
Honorary Chair
Council of Canadians
Chair, Food and Water Watch
Washington DC

Different way of seeing

This thinking may be the chief source of the dictum that there is no alternative to capitalism.

Indeed, “commoning” is a different way of seeing and being. As Bollier writes, “To understand the commons requires a willingness to think in particulars, see the creative potential of social relationships and surrender the search for abstract universals and predictable certainties.”

The commons is essentially a parallel economy and social order. This movement insists that not only is another world possible, but that we can build it ourselves. Its greatest value or wealth is community-shared relationships.

Ideally commoners are building little by little an alternative system. This is a rediscovery of the commons—“the common pasture” of preindustrial, free market times.

Commoners are fighting against the forces that are trying to privatize all natural resources, especially land and water. This echoes Indigenous thinking, but also Pope Francis’s social teaching.

It’s hard to imagine the commons as an independent sector separate from the government or state—yet, this is what Indigenous people have always sought. Impractical in today’s world? Maybe not. States regularly delegate authority to corporations to perform certain functions while retaining ongoing oversight. It’s about having the human right, the social right to establish and maintain ecological commons.

There is great variety among present commons—they include cooperatives, common lands such as parks, the internet, Wikipedia, and journals published by the Public Library of Science (www.plos.org), among others.

Among international commons Bollier lists the Occupy movement. And lest you may still think most commons are local and limited, Bollier reminds us, “There are the fisheries, farmland and water that an estimated two billion people around the world manage as commons to meet their everyday needs.”

Great variety, yes—but all must seek to combine production, consumption and governance. Notice that government and markets are not included here. All commons must also promote participation, cooperation, inclusiveness, fairness, bottom-up innovation and accountability.

Seeds: a mystical relationship

Here is an interesting example, noted in Bollier’s book, of a small commons.

In the village of Andhra Pradesh, in India, at the time of the Green Revolution with its market-based monoculture crops, a group of women realized that their traditional seeds for “mixed crops” were still more suitable for their semi-arid landscape than the new, chemically modified seeds being promoted and sold for intensive single-crop production.

The women managed to find enough traditional seeds of seven kinds for mixed agriculture.

Commoning: Flip the Narrative

If you really want to challenge the political agenda, which today is an agenda of enclosing the commons, of market fundamentalism with a consequence of rising nationalism, you have to flip the whole narrative.

It is not about making an amendment to concrete laws here and there—it is about commonizing the way we do politics, rethinking politics and rethinking democracy.

Because if representative democracy is tied to un-free political processes, then what the commons system needs the most is conversation, deliberation, and time and space for people to figure out how they can resolve their own problems in very concrete contexts.

So perhaps the most important thing policy makers can do is recognize our right for self-organization, provide means and financing for opening spaces, and support people in finding their own solutions.

It’s flipping the whole narrative, rethinking the very categories policymaking is based upon today. It’s rethinking and challenging the dominant notion of representative democracy.

—Silke Helfrich
Commons Strategies Group
commonstrategies.org



Seed sharing: Zambia

The loss of seed diversity is a national problem in Zambia, but farmers are taking action.

Mary Tembo (pictured right) who lives in Chongwe is part of the Seed Knowledge Initiative (SKI) which is growing out native crops, so seed is available to local farmers.

Despite the late rains, an indication of the changing climate of Southern Africa, most of Tembo's land was in diverse native crops, chemical free for ten years.

"I see improvements from organic," she explained to Timothy Wise of the Small Planet Institute (with translation from the Nyanja language by Austin Chalala), "It takes more work, but we are now used to it."

The work involves more careful management of a diverse range of crops planted in ways that conserve and rebuild the soil: crop rotations, intercropping, conservation farming with minimal plowing and the regular incorporation of composted manure to build soil fertility. She has six pigs, seven goats and twenty-five chickens, which she says give her enough manure for the farm.

She was most proud of her seeds, which she laid out for the visitors: finger millet, orange maize, Bambara nuts, cowpeas, sorghum, soybeans, mung beans, three kinds of groundnuts, popcorn and common beans. All had been saved from her previous harvest. Some would be sold, some shared with the fifty other farmer members of the local SKI network and some would be for her family.

"Crop diversity is certainly good for the soil," she said, "but it's even better for the body."

Adapted from an article
by Timothy A. Wise
www.smallplanet.org



Photo courtesy of Timothy A. Wise.

Mary Tembo, pictured above on her farm in Chongwe, was trained by Kasisi Agricultural Training Centre, an initiative supported by Canadian Jesuits International.

A vote for small scale farmers worldwide!

In a historic vote on December 17 2018, the United National General Assembly approved the **Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP)**.

"As peasants we need the protection and respect for our values and for our role in society in achieving food sovereignty," said Elizabeth Mpofu, coordinator of La Via Campesina, an international alliance of peasants.

"To have an internationally recognized instrument at the highest level of governance written by and for peasants from every continent is a tremendous achievement," said Jessie MacLinnis of the National Farmers Union of Canada. "This Declaration sends an important message that our livelihoods matter and our small-scale methods of food production are vital for a sustainable future."

Adapted from an article by Timothy A. Wise

See the full article here:

www.foodtank.com/news/2018/12/un-backs-seed-sovereignty-in-landmark-peasants-rights-declaration/

They succeeded in recovering traditional agriculture not through “technical transfers” of foreign expertise, but by people’s knowledge of their own needs and a seed bank. No one was allowed to buy or sell seeds: they could only be shared, borrowed or traded. The village women came to have an almost mystical relationship with their seeds.

For them, their seeds were their very own knowledge.

But there are also huge commons such as the Social Services of Lara in Venezuela (www.cecosesola.org). For 50 years this self-financed, self-organized project has run over 80 cooperatives—including banks, farms, factories—with no boss but only 1200 associated workers. Their market food prices are measured in “fairness” rather than price. They can do all this because of their mutual trust and commitment to the common good. A process of education is included in all they do.

Savvy pragmatic dreamers

Finally, does the commons have a growing global future? Rather than give you my opinion, I share Bollier’s own down-to-earth dream. He writes:

“In the face of the colossal troubling dysfunction of neoliberal governance, a growing, movement of commoners from India, Italy, Germany and Brazil, the US and the UK and many other regions of the world—furiously coordinating through the global Internet culture—are cobbling together a new shared imaginary for change.



Photo courtesy of Frances Moore Lappé and LEISA India.

“This is no ideological pipe dream or utopian fantasy. It is a piecemeal revolution of savvy, pragmatic dreamers determined to build a living functional alternative in the face of many looming catastrophes.”

Presently, the movement is coordinated by the Commons Strategies Group. It is a partnership to help advance the commons in diverse settings—both in theory and practice. They are working on four continents to catalyze and assist commons-based projects, activism, research and public education with a great variety of partners.

Excerpt from a lecture by Bill Ryan, Regis College, Toronto, 2017. For the full talk, please contact gcarhart@jesuitforum.ca

Seeds: a source of dignity

‘Our seeds, our knowledge’ is how the women put it: every seed is a capsule of their knowledge. No-one is allowed to buy or sell seeds; they can only be shared, borrowed, or traded. The seeds are not regarded as an economic input.

Villagers have a social, almost mythical relationship with the seeds, a subtle but important reason that the women were able to emancipate themselves.

‘Every crop has a meaning in a woman’s life,’ said P. V. Sathesh of the Deccan Development Society. ‘The seeds are a source of dignity.’

— David Bollier
Think Like a Commoner

Photo: Community members participate in a Sangham. Deccan Development Society, www.ddsindia.com

Notes:

1. David Bollier, *Think Like a Commoner: A Short Introduction to the Life of the Commons*, (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2014). www.thinklikeacommoner.com
2. See Malthus’s infamous work *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, originally published by J. Johnson in London in 1798. Available in print from Dover, 2007.
3. See William Foster Lloyd, *Two Lectures on the Checks to Population*, delivered at Oxford University, 1832.
4. Garrett Hardin, *The Tragedy of the Commons*, Science Magazine, 13 December 1968, <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/162/3859/1243>.



Co-working, community, and collaboration

Creative social energy

Commoning acts as a kind of moral, social and political gyroscope. It provides stability and focus.

When people come together, share the same experiences and practices and accumulate a body of practical knowledge and traditions, a set of productive social circuits emerges. They create patterns of social energy that can accomplish serious work. They provide ongoing benefit to the community.

In this sense, a commons resembles a magnetic field of social and moral energy. The force field may be invisible to the untrained eye, and its effects may even seem a little bit magical.

It's time to face the facts: the commons is a versatile system for organizing reliable flows of productive, creative social energy.

— David Bollier
Think Like a Commoner



Courtesy of the Centre for Social Innovation.

The Centre for Social Innovation (CSI) opened a world-pioneering 5,000 square foot office space on Spadina Avenue in Toronto in 2004 with fourteen tenants. From the beginning, emphasis was placed on the creation of a common culture of inclusivity, support and innovation in which members are encouraged to share questions, strategies, and skills.

The model has worked tremendously well and CSI is now hosting more than 2,500 member organizations in five locations in Toronto and New York City.

The Centre for Social Innovation was launched by a small group of social entrepreneurs who were looking for ways to help the social sector scale up its activities and impact.

They envisioned shared office spaces with access to the internet, phones, printers, meeting rooms, etc. that would foster the creation of a community able to accelerate and broaden the scope of social change.

Being physically together is what sets the conditions for new relationships, new projects, and unexpected outcomes.

Climate Ventures Initiative

This constant drive towards social innovation has resulted in the creation of equally pioneering community bonds to finance CSI's development.

More recently, The *Climate Ventures Initiative* was launched to turn the climate crisis into an opportunity for human transformation.

It provides services and funding opportunities for members designing business models and solutions towards a low

carbon economy and the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

— Laurence Loubières
For more information:
www.socialinnovation.org

Ecosystems are more resilient when they are diverse; innovation happens at the intersections of different experiences; and healthy cultures are built on respectful relationships.

— From the CSI's 2016 Demographic Survey

Be a great ancestor!

The Great Lakes Commons Initiative

The Great Lakes Commons Initiative emerged from a recognition that fundamental change is essential if we want to create a sustaining and sustainable future for our Great Lakes. Decades of activism and effort (and even some remarkable victories) have not resulted in thriving and protected waters. It is clear that a transformation of our relationship to these waters and of the region's governance is key for enabling us to care for this life-giving ecosystem.

The Great Lakes Commons initiative draws on the knowledge and practice of both commons and Indigenous governance. These two approaches reflect successful ecosystem governance based on shared benefit and responsibility, sustainable use, and participatory decision-making. They are bolstered by the powerful legal traditions held in the public trust doctrine and regional treaty rights.

Of course the Great Lakes are already a commons—something shared by many and belonging to none. But they are an unconscious commons, left vulnerable to misuse all too often.

A true commons lives in the understandings, relationships, actions, and laws recognized by the public. A commons needs commoners who are

empowered to act as stewards and protectors.

Indigenous communities continue to demonstrate the viability of a life-affirming vision for the Great Lakes. Resurfacing the values that recognize our interdependence, engender multi-generational thinking, and foster belonging, generosity, and reciprocity above ownership, are essential to our collective survival.

The commons approach includes a set of kindred principles and values. As both a worldview and practice, the commons rejects that what we buy, sell, and own in the market provides fundamental meaning to our lives. Instead, value is placed on caring for all that we share and passing this legacy on to future generations undiminished.

Both commons and Indigenous governance approaches are based on the ecosystem, which is held as a precious whole. Water is viewed as a vital gift rather than a resource to be exploited, and each of us has a role and responsibility to care for this gift.

— Great Lakes Commons
www.greatlakescommons.org

Endorse the Great Lakes Commons Charter

"We welcome the wisdom, standing and power that this document will accrue over time to shape the future of our Lakes. We invest it with our hopes and commitments to that future and to the future generations who will inherit the legacy of our actions."

www.greatlakescommons.org/charter-declaration



Photo by Anne Marie Peterson.
www.creativecommons.org (CC BY-SA 2.0)

A CALL FOR DIALOGUE IN HAITI

We hold the people of Haiti in our hearts and in prayer. We are deeply pained by the tense and volatile situation accompanying the humanitarian disaster. Haiti has suffered so much.

Nevertheless, some feel this is a moment of awakening. Here are short excerpts from a statement by **Jean Denis Saint-Félix, Superior of the Jesuits in Haiti, Port-au-Prince, February 15 2019.**

“The executive, the Prime Minister’s Office, the legislature, the judiciary, opposition leaders, supporters of anarchy and violence, the infamous international community and more precisely the Core Group, all are part of the problem and have contributed to increasing the people’s misery and fuelling their anger. They all support a system that is outdated, rotten, out of breath and a real machine of inequality, carelessness, impunity and corruption.

“However, today, this crisis seems to offer us a golden opportunity that we must seize in a hurry to reshuffle the cards of the Haitian nation.

“The time has come for the dialogue so much demanded by all strata of Haitian society and requires the participation of honest, competent and credible men and women. This dialogue is called to overturn a whole system built on contempt for the poorest and blatant inequality.

We (Jesuits of Haiti) want to mobilize all our human and material resources, all our contacts and talents, both national and international, to smooth the ground for this dialogue with a view to building the new society of which we all dream.”

For the full statement:

www.jesuits.ca/news-detail?TN=NEWS-20190222081836



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