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Consensus Social Movements and the Catholic Worker

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Abstract: This article proposes a revised conceptual definition of consensus social movement. By using the example of the Catholic Worker, I construct a workable concept of a consensus social movement based on Quaker consensus and indigenous decision-making. The new definition of consensus social movement brings theoretical strength as demonstrated in the illustration of the Catholic Worker. The concept of a consensus social movement offers a revised theoretical tool for the social movement literature toolkit.

INTRODUCTION

Consensus means many things. Many writers utilize *consensus* in its most basic connotation — agreement across a population — that confuses theoretical usages. This article dissects the various interpretations of *consensus*, specifically consensus social movements, argues their inadequacy and offers a new interpretation of consensus social movements.

The Catholic Worker remains one of the most durable social justice entities in the world. Founded in New York in 1933 as a newspaper, the Catholic Worker quickly evolved into a unique combination of religious-inspired care for the poor and nonviolent, social justice activism. At the same time, challenged by the leadership of Dorothy Day, the Catholic Worker experimented with various organizational strategies to resist co-optation while focusing on "the work." Today, the movement includes around 200 houses and farms around the world.

Following a review of recent work focused on *consensus* in general, I explore consensus decision-making with an emphasis on the Quakers. I then draw a parallel between consensus decision-making and indigenous

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knowledge that emphasizes context in decision-making. Next, I offer a re-imagined concept of consensus social movements. Last, I offer the Catholic Worker movement as an example of a consensus social movement.

A LACK OF CONSENSUS ON "CONSENSUS"

Consensus appears throughout the academic literature with multiple meanings. While much of the consensus literature offers solutions to point in time problems, it fails to appropriately theorize *consensus* as an operating framework of a particular legislative body, organization or social movement (Susskind and Cruikshank 1987; Ozawa 1991). Most notably, consensus implies either an outcome (agreement within a small group or a nation) or a process (decision-making strategy). In the social sciences, consensus describes a type of social movement that gathers widespread support. While these interpretations all mesh with dictionary definitions of consensus, they lack theoretical vitality. Before examining the existing consensus social movement's literature, it is important to review work related to consensus politics and decision-making.

CONSENSUS AND POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING

Lijphart (1998) dissects the difference between consensus democracies (including Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Germany, and Switzerland) and majority democracies (US, UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand). The waffling conclusion posits, "the structure of consensus democracy may be the *product* of a consensual culture or its *causal agent*" (Lijphart 1998, 107). Habermasian political analyses maintain that, "the telos (ultimate purpose) of all rational communication is to reach an understanding or consensus" (Habermas 1984, 11; see also Downey 2006; Dahlberg 2005; Whitworth 2003). Consensus acts as the keystone to true democracy and revolves around personal awareness, education, peaceful conflict resolution, and recognition of common unity. Consensus, then, implies a move away from the formalized organizations that form the backbone of social movement literature. Hierarchical organizations distract from an idealized decentralized society driven by moral imperatives of care for one another. Earl and Schussman (2003) put forth online movements, as opposed to movements that employ online tools, as a form of consensus. Downey

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(2006) theorizes consensus movements as less contentious with a historical analysis of post-World War II intergroup decision-making.

QUAKER CONSENSUS

While the literature on consensus in politics and decision-making grows, the Quakers offer the best example of consensus decision-making in practice. The consensus approach of Quaker meeting contrasts with Robert's Rules of Order[1] that dictate a hierarchical approach concluding in majority rule decisions. Quaker consensus is based on compassion for those involved in the meeting (Bacon 1969; Brinton 1950; Hare 1973; Hoffman 1968; Sheeran 1983). As Bacon (1969) describes at length:

> Throughout this loose structure, decisions are made not by voting but by the group as a whole reaching a common conclusion. After discussion … a clerk states what he feels to be the sense of the meeting, but if a single Friend feels he cannot unite himself with the group, no decision is made … The process is slow, but the miracle is that decisions are finally made (Bacon 1969, 8).

Quakers aim for unity of thought. By taking time to make decisions that are informed by all, the decision more appropriately reflects the needs of the community. This often means waiting. Hoffman (1968) refers to this process as the civilizing dialogue that:

> … incorporates a perception of the relationship of the members to each other and to the issue. In every group (of persons, whether or not Friends) there are some whose views are more weighty than others in respect to any particular issue. The extra weight or trust or respect given to a member may derive from his special knowledge, or his age, or his familiarity with the processes of the meeting; or perhaps the meeting recognizes that for this moment, for reasons not visible, this person has "had an opening," a "movement of the spirit," an unusual inspiration that enhances his authority (Hoffman 1968, 10).

The Quakers recognize the importance of elders or wisdom; thus, not all opinions weigh equally. "It must be remembered … that minorities are sometimes right" (Brinton 1950, 33). The "step-aside" can facilitate resolution, where, although disagreement remains, people set aside their personal grievances for the sake of the whole (Mansbridge 2003, 240). The gradual adoption of the Quaker abolitionist position illustrates the time potentially involved with pure consensus decision-making processes (Jordan 2007). The abolitionist stance paralleled the Quaker emphasis

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on non-violence. Here "Non-violence means more than non-killing; it means respect, even reverence. It means caring enough about each member of society to renounce any action that will violate him, even if the violation is only to his spirit" (Hoffman 1968, 12).

Thus, the Quaker idea of consensus bases itself in care and recognition of the dignity of the human person. Not just non-violence in issues of war, peace, and slavery, but a reverence for the ideas of everyone in the human community such that the minority (politically, human rights, etc.) is not and will not be oppressed. Indigenous decision-making examples offer a parallel to consensus in trying to protect those in the minority with an emphasis on decisions that are contextual and geographically relevant.

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AS A FORM OF CONSENSUS

Anthropologists illustrate the conflict that arises when two cultural bodies collide (Birkes 1999; Cleveland and Soleri 2007; Harris, Sachs, and Broome 2001; Hunn et al. 2003; Sillitoe 2007a, 2007b). Indigenous knowledge encompasses knowledge embedded in community and tradition. Colonizers often strip communities' autonomy along with their material resources.

In recent years, it has become politically strategic for corporations and nations to include representatives with indigenous knowledge at the proverbial (and sometimes) literal table for negotiation. Examples include revised approaches to tribal matters for the Comanche (Harris, Sachs, and Broome 2001) and Maori conservation co-management (Taiepa et al. 1997) based on the recognition that indigenous knowledge emerges from different assumptions (Sillitoe 2007a, 2007b; Hunn et al. 2003). This expert-lay divide (Wynne 1996) is often represented in clashes between agricultural "experts" and farmers (Cleveland and Soleri 2007). Hébert (2003) draws the connection explicitly between an indigenous Mexican group and consensus while also illustrating that consensus at a small scale may be able to grow into larger scale consensus processes by redefining what we mean by community. The next section outlines the existing uses of *consensus* related to social movements.

EXISTING CONSENSUS SOCIAL MOVEMENTS THEORY

The concept of consensus social movements evolved without critical appraisal. Klandermans' (1988) *consensus* refers to a formalized

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movement that seeks ideological consistency by absorbing already sympathetic actors. Lofland's (1989) formulation of consensus movements draws on the City Twinning movement, an anti-establishment and apolitical oppositional tactic to nuclear proliferation. But Lofland sets up the concept of a consensus social movement as a straw man in his description of the City Twinning movement. He lists ideology, emotional motifs, core activists, and an enthusiastic public response as characterizations of consensus movements. Then this:

> Indeed I argue that *consensus movements are disguised or timid politics* (as politics are classically understood) a way of safely posturing as social movements without the problems of real conflict that genuine — that is, conflict movements — engender. Consensus movements are subterfuge conflict movements; they are derailed dissent and the disguised rebellions of timid rebels. (Lofland 1989, 165, emphasis in original)

These are non-negotiated consensuses; they are moral decisions much like human rights and the Geneva conventions. Who is against human rights? Lofland, therefore, does not offer any theoretical power in his conceptualization of consensus movements. He describes something new (consensus movement) simply to dismiss it as something old (a contentious social movement). Despite lacking theoretical clarity, the concept proliferated (Downey 2006; McCarthy and Wolfson 1992; Michaelson 1994; Schwartz, Paul, and Mueller 1992).

Michaelson (1994) offers a better demonstration of a consensus movement in Wangari Maathai's Green Belt Movement. He characterizes the social movement literature as homogenous and dominated by combative or antagonistic movements as opposed to the change-oriented consensus movement. Mansbrigde (2003) offers a nice summary of consensus movements. For our purposes here, Mansbridge highlights the dynamism and variety of consensus that helps open up the theoretical possibilities associated with a consensus social movement framework. First of all, "The practice of consensus, well done, fosters innovation … A good process of consensus promotes the elaboration of differences" (Mansbridge 2003, 229) while at the same time privileging context for any decision. That centrality of context also helps to indicate to movements and leaders that, pragmatically, maybe not every decision has to proceed via consensus. As Ianello (1992), points out, a modified consensus "distinguishes between 'routine' and 'critical' decisions, requiring consensus only on the critical ones" (from Mansbridge 2003, 248).

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For the Quakers, consensus is an explicitly God-centric process, in that individuals are guided by their own spirituality. This will hold true for many Catholic Workers. At the same time, for many activists and movement members, the idea of consensus retains a secular sacredness. With this in mind, I want to recapture the theoretical power of "consensus" as procession and adaptive with a focus on human dignity and local knowledge.

CONSENSUS SOCIAL MOVEMENTS RE-IMAGINED

Drawing from Quaker and indigenous knowledge decision-making we can outline a new theoretical description of a consensus social movement. A consensus movement focuses on process that maintains respect for persons and knowledge in order to continuously negotiate the movement. First, the Quakers and indigenous models privilege process over results. Whether slavery for the Quakers or an emphasis on local issues for the Comanche or the co-management of resources for the Maori, the process of decision-making remains just as important as a particular outcome. Second, there is a focus on respect for individuals and opinions. Therefore, disrespect for any person is disrespectful of the whole. Third, there is an emphasis on the local needs of a community.

A theory of consensus social movement offers a different language for analyzing movements. Most social movements are described as antagonistic — there is something wrong here, we will fight it. Yes there is ideology designed to attract people, but movements (like Civil Rights) fight injustices. They are antagonistic, against the structures. Like the concept of non-violence, discussions of social movements are locked in a language of antagonism (Schell 2003, 350–351). At the core of many movements is a vision that things could be different, a positive vision for society that is often overshadowed by emphasizing the conflict of movements as opposed to the consensual unity.

To that end, consensus social movements: (1) Focus on process: Quakers and indigenous knowledge recognizes that decisions take time. For the Quakers, a unified stance on abolition took decades. Similarly, Maori decisions about co-management take time, but they are actively informed by traditions and respected knowledge that is based on the context of place. This focus on process highlights a consistency of means and ends valued by those concerned with consensus. Consensus social movements ask: Can you engender support through cooperation?

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Cooperation, the opposite of coercion, forms the backbone of consensus organizations. (2) Respect persons and ideas: Consensus social movements value the dignity of persons. This is fundamental and often necessary in small group meetings. Consensus processes have evolved out of communities often in the form of church communities and tribal affiliations as the Friends and indigenous groups illustrate. For that matter, respect extends to considerations of land use, impact on future generations, networks and the value of individuals not based on their economic potential, or any other measure other than their personhood. In these same contexts, some people's opinions carry more weight. Valuing those elders or experts can mitigate the effects of petty objections. Respect engenders inclusion which counter the antagonistic politics that often settle for a least bad option in majority rules decision-making. (3) Emphasize context: Respect and matters of process often evolve in local or geographical contexts. Decisions are often rooted in place and tied to tradition. "Best practices" disappoint by externalizing context. This is not to say that local equates to better. As Born and Purcell (2006) argue, we cannot equate scale with outcome. The local trap that many of us get ourselves into argues that the local is good because it is local and often obscures problems involved in local issues as well as blinds us to other possibilities. That being said, local and context are not the same, but in the case of the English sheep farmers, people with local knowledge knew better than the experts (Wynne 1996).

Consensus social movements offer a different conceptualization for social movements in general. This is not just a shift in language. By looking at certain social movements with a focus on their process and means of change rather than outcomes, we can parse out those social movements that seek positive change with visions of how the world can be different as opposed to the current overarching narrative of social movement literature that focuses on what social movements are against.

The Yukon Inter-Tribal Watershed Council provides one great example of a consensus social movement (Record 2008). With a long view about the heath of the Yukon River watershed, tribes, government agencies, policy makers, local citizens, towns and other agencies have combined local and indigenous knowledge with science and policy initiatives to form a multinational movement with astounding results while privileging consensus, respect and tradition. The next section illustrates how the Catholic Worker provides another example of this new formulation of consensus social movements.

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THE CATHOLIC WORKER

On May 1, 1933, Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin began distributing *The Catholic Worker* newspaper in Manhattan to the poor and the hungry, the workers and the unemployed, the Communists and the Capitalists, and the atheists and the faith-filled. The paper uniquely addressed social problems from a Catholic perspective. Additionally, the *Worker* served as a forum for Maurin's verses that outlined a three-point plan or a "Green Revolution as opposed to the Red Revolution [of Communism]" for broad social change rooted in papal encyclicals and Catholic social teaching.

Step one of the Green Revolution involved the newspaper and discussions. The second step called for parishes and individuals to open houses of hospitality, similar to a shelter. Last, Maurin proposed a return to communal agricultural living presciently anticipating the "back to the land" calls of the 1960s. Maurin soon began inviting those he met to the meager publication offices for sustenance. From those first encounters emerged hundreds of houses of hospitality and a distinct enactment of social justice.[2]

The Catholic Worker demonstrates qualities of both traditional and new social movements as well as remaining an enigma given its combination of traditionally liberal, social justice orientations, and Catholic pietism. Many have discussed this paradox, especially in relationship to the Left, the New Left, and Catholic liberal traditions (Boehrer 2001; Coy 1988; Piehl 1982; McKanan 2008). The work on new social movements highlights how this contradiction goes beyond merely the liberal/conservative dichotomy (Calhoun 1993; Offe 1985; Rose 1997). The social networks of the Catholic Worker developed via the decentralized structure that emphasized community, context, and a cross-class approach (Calhoun 1993; Nepstad 2004). As a lay and volunteer organization, the Catholic Worker could risk experimentation with economic and organizational structures not possible in the Church hierarchy.[3] Furthermore, no one has ever been catalogued or charged dues to belong to the Catholic Worker.

THE CATHOLIC WORKER AS A CONSENSUS SOCIAL MOVEMENT

Drawing on the formulation outlined above as to what constitutes a consensus social movement, what follows is a description of how the

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Catholic Worker operates with a focus on process, respect for persons and ideas while operating with an emphasis on local context. Following that I illustrate three examples where consensus unites the Catholic Worker.

CATHOLIC WORKER FOCUS ON PROCESS

Despite Peter Maurin's "plan," the Catholic Worker evolved negotiating between the plan and the reality of borderline destitution and turnover. While Dorothy Day has been viewed as a benevolent dictator — an anarchist who prefers to be the anarch according to Tom Cornell — her personal struggle between a vision for the Catholic Worker and an emphasis on decentralization epitomizes the movement's continuous renegotiation of what it means to be a Catholic Worker.

Payerhin and Zirakzadeh (2006) contrast frames with negotiations regarding the "shared mental experiences" of movement participants. The negotiated approach relies on diverse historical work (Banaszak 1996; Brinkley 1983; Cohen and Arato 1992; Gitlin 1980; Harvey 1998; Kelley 1994; Melucci 1996; Steinberg 1999; 2002) and involves the continuous negotiation of a movement's heterogeneous goals. Negotiation theorists emphasize the "multivocal" and participant ownership of a movement's goals (Steinberg 2002, 210–211) that contrasts with framing's unifying theme developed by leaders and enacted by participants. In both instances, the movement positions itself in just opposition (Tesh 2000, 123).

Consensus, through a process of negotiations, provides a movement model of dialectical change over time starting with a frame. For the Catholic Worker, that process ties in with a respect for persons and ideas.

RESPECT

Like many indigenous peoples and religious traditions, the Catholic Worker respects the dignity of human persons; that respect originates in the biblical claim that humans were created in God's image and likeness. More recently, the philosophical tenants of personalism advocate direct personal aid and bolster a theory of positive social change (Coy 2001; Holben 1997; McKanan 2008). Personalism also shares qualities with the political theory of non-violent anarchism. Expressions of communitarian anarchism, notably of Tolstoy, Proudhon, and Kropotkin, which focused on resistance to the state and the value of human freedom,

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propelled Day and Maurin toward the anarchic, decentralized structure that has endured and evolved since 1933 (Boehrer 2001; Segers 1978). The Catholic Worker offers social alternatives based on their unique expression of Christian anarchism to the point that personalism and anarchism are often used interchangeably (Boehrer 2003). The Catholic Worker's faith affiliation often prevents them from being recognized as anarchists however (Woodcock 1967).

Dorothy married the epistemological affinity between Catholicism and anarchism through their views on work, the dignity of the human person, and the primacy of conscience, despite protests from anarchists and Catholics alike. For Ellul (1988), all true anarchism is non-violent, thus lending itself easily to Christianity. For the Catholic Worker, like the Quakers, non-violence applied to interpersonal and structural relationships. The arrival of World War I conscientious objector and anarchist Ammon Hennacy to the Catholic Worker ushered in a new era in non-violent resistance that meshed well with Dorothy's well-entrenched pacifism (Day 1983, see Chapter 10, 106–121; McKanan 2008, 62–66).

CONTEXT, THE LOCAL AND DECENTRALIZATION

A personalist philosophy emphasizes personal responsibility in response to immediate needs. This applies to individuals and to the houses. These goals translated into specific material structures as an organization. Day (1948, 2) encouraged the movement to grow locally, "[A house of hospitality] can never be operated from outside." The Catholic Worker remains diverse and varied in its execution of the mission of personalism (Betten 1970). Although the New York houses remain the traditional "headquarters" because of the newspaper, the multiple houses across the country have different foci exhibited by the resistance activism of the Des Moines Catholic Worker, the sex worker ministry of the San Francisco Catholic Worker, and the prison ministry in West Virginia. Other houses focus more on non-violent resistance (Coy 2001). Spickard (2005) illustrates the importance of house masses to the Los Angeles Catholic Worker similar to Medvetz (2006) and Klatch (2004) on the need for community boundaries for maintenance. Historically, houses opened and operated with Day's assent. During World War II, Day's staunch pacifism put many off in the face of fascism and prompted some to drop the "Catholic Worker" label. Consensus as a negotiated process does not always end in harmonious

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resolution; it does ensure that people's views will be heard as demonstrated by dialogue in the newspaper concerning pacifism, conscientious objection, and war.[4]

Mansbridge (2003) might describe the Catholic Worker as polycephalous or multi-headed. Segers (1978, 226) argues, "It is decentralized and anti-organizational; every house is autonomous and the Catholic Worker does not attempt to perpetuate itself as an institution or organization." While Day (1983, xix) once described the "organization" of the Catholic Worker thus: "We don't have any in the usual sense of the word;" there's also an oft-repeated motto in the Catholic Worker tradition that it's an organism, not an organization.

A note on categories here might help. The differences between process, human dignity, and context are artificial. In practice, these ideas are dynamic, negotiated, and dialectical; they influence one another just as ideas about each evolve and change. The categories presented here illustrate the various ways the Catholic Worker negotiates and renegotiates itself and its philosophical foundations. At the same time, concerning the uniqueness of the Catholic Worker, an anarchist author wrote, "If it did not exist I would have thought it impossible" (DeLeon 1978, 65).

THREE EXAMPLES

That same uniqueness plays out in various ways that give credence to the Catholic Worker as an example of a consensus social movement. The following examples illustrate the interplay between process, respect, and local action that have come to define the Catholic Worker for those within and those outside (though those boundaries are up for negotiation as well).

CATHOLIC WORKER "AIMS AND MEANS" AND THE WORKS OF MERCY

The Catholic Worker combined with the writings of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin form the theory of the Catholic Worker most explicitly laid out in the "Aims and Means of the Catholic Worker." This statement's republication every May helps reiterate the foundational ideas of the movement (2010a). By drawing on the concrete teachings of the Catholic Church regarding labor, the dignity of work, and social justice in combination with European ideas about just economic structures,

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decentralized organizational methods, and a distrust of the state and authority, the Catholic Worker provides a dynamic and enigmatic frame that attracts diverse participants. Rather than worry about the outcome of a strike, Catholic Workers deliver soup and coffee to striking workers on a cold evening.

The works of mercy emerge from the New Testament in the Gospel of Matthew (25:31–46) where Jesus teaches about those who may and may not enter heaven. He emphasizes the Christian duty of feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, visiting the prisoner, sheltering the homeless, and visiting the sick. The works of mercy, McKanan (2008) argues, retain emotional power because everyone can practice them and assume the value of all human life (personalism). The conclusion of the "Aims and Means" in the *Catholic Worker* newspaper (2010b) reads: "We must be prepared to accept seeming failure with these aims, for sacrifice and suffering are part of the Christian life. Success, as the world determines it, is not the final criterion for judgments."

Since the 1930s, the "Aims and Means" declaration has changed, been debated, attacked, and honored. It is not static, nor is it binding in any way. McKanan (2008) outlines its evolution from "Maurin's Program" written by Dorothy in 1933 through Robert Ludlow's 1954 "Catholic Worker Positions" to its restatement in 1987. These primary versions are included on the Catholic Worker website. This evolution transcends rewriting and editing, but implies a negotiated consensus arrived at over time. Most importantly, the individual houses of hospitality interpret the aims and means of the Worker and the works of mercy contextually for specific problems at particular times and places. For example, if you click on the "Mission Statement" tab on the Casa Juan Diego Catholic Worker website (2010) you are taken to the passage from Matthew listing the works of mercy. The works of mercy directly influence personalism as the guiding philosophy of the Worker.

LEADERSHIP

The idea of leadership in an anarchist movement strikes some as odd. Part of the discordance stems from the difficulty of Dorothy Day's dual role as editor of a newspaper and default leader of a leader-less organism (Roberts 1984). For Holben (1997, 67–70), the Catholic Worker's dedication to non-hierarchical decision-making has gone through two phases. First,

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Dorothy embodied "spontaneous, task-specific, non-compulsory leadership." While she would appoint "managers" of the farms and houses, this was primarily an attempt to delegate rather than exert overt control. The Catholic Worker also employs consensus decision-making. Holben (1997, 70) emphasizes how difficult "authentic consensus" can be:

> The demanding requirements of authentic consensus are, of course, completely contrary to our modern Western focus on the end result, on productivity and efficiency. Such a vision of human interaction presumes that no person is so unimportant that he can be ignored or trampled over. No one can be treated as a means to an end in and of herself. The ultimate goal — whether we call it the revolution of the Kingdom of God — must be able to be enfleshed *now*, in this moment, between us, or we can never claim its viability for some future utopia.

Throughout the history of the Catholic Worker there has never existed a board of directors or a set of by-laws. However, before 1980, Dorothy had a prominent role in decision-making that was rarely challenged. While she did not relish the role, she begrudgingly accepted it (Ellsberg 2008). The idea of the Catholic Worker and the operation of houses and farms have often implicitly depended upon consensus even if formal adoption of Quaker-like methods did not emerge until the Vietnam War-era collaboration with the American Friends Service Committee (the Quaker pacifist group). Catholic Worker houses and farms founded since then typically employ some form of consensus decision-making (Coy 2001; Holben 1997).

But leadership and decentralization are often imperfect matches. Once a house struggling with how to proceed on certain issues, wrote to Dorothy for advice and she responded, "we can't give you any advice — you will have to work it out yourself" (Betten 1971, 250).

UP FOR DISCUSSION

While consensus often implies group maintenance, it often involves an agree-to-disagree stance. As Coy (2001) described, the Catholic Worker house he lived in employed consensus decision-making. Catholic Worker discussions of abortion, female ordination, homosexuality, and house finances occur in writings and workshops at national gatherings that have become a much more regular occurrence since Dorothy's death in 1980. Separate national gatherings specific to resistance activism

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and the agricultural communes are in development. For Mansbridge (2003), consensus highlights creativity and differences that can help keep groups together, though too many differences can be destructive (Woerhle 2003).

Financially, the primary disagreement revolves around non-profit status (see Stock, 2010). While many resist the identification that allows donations to be tax-deductible, others have embraced it. Additionally, the threat of gentrification focused efforts on land trusts (Matthei 1977). Land trusts provide one flexible response to local changes such as property prices in Boston or California with ancillary benefits such as enabling consensus decision-making among trustees (with no limit on the number of trustees) (Catholic Worker Farm 2010).

Houses also differentiate themselves related to their alignment with the Church, other movements and other religions. Unity Kitchen in Syracuse, New York, once tried to write the equivalent of a by-law or mission statement and any house that did not adhere would be excluded and have to sacrifice the title "Catholic Worker" (see McKanan 2008, 108–111). However, it runs directly afoul of the genius of the radically decentralized Catholic Worker movement: the fact that nobody ever had to get permission from anybody else to open up a Catholic Worker houses. By the same token, no one has the authority to close down someone else's house or to deny him or her the use of the Catholic Worker name. There simply is no structural basis for decision-making of this sort, to say nothing of actual enforcement of mechanisms (Coy 2001, 81)

THE CATHOLIC WORKER AND CONSENSUS

By continually examining what it means to be a Catholic Worker the Catholic Worker embodies a consensus-oriented dialogue of process. Second, the Catholic Worker relies heavily on the French philosophical system of personalism and non-violent anarchism that emphasizes personal responsibility for people and events. Third, the decentralized organization of the Catholic Worker allows for local issues and local knowledge in a process that privileges context.

Consensus movements rely on contextual knowledge shared over time. Those negotiations reinforce friendship, respect for persons, and community and allow such a movement to persist and even succeed. There are more Catholic Worker houses now than have ever been open — many of those for longer than ever before (Catholic Worker 2010c). The

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Catholic Worker persists because they value the contextual and continually renegotiate interpretations of the works of mercy.

But consensus differs based on scale (Mansbridge 2003; Ianello 1992). We have seen that individual houses often operate by consensus (Coy 2001; Holben 1997). At the same time the movement as a whole operates by consensus as illustrated by the evolution of the "Aims and Means" and the continual negotiations on emotional topics that might normally divide organizations. Further, these negotiations and consensus discussions are informed by the contextual and local offerings and experiences from individual houses and Workers. By remaining open to persons and communities without demanding resolution, these discussions remain spaces for growth rather than division. While subtle differences exist between consensus at the national and international level compared to individual houses, there is a common respect for people, ideas, the (evolving) tradition of the Catholic Worker and local context.

CONCLUSIONS

Through consistent pursuit of particular aims with a focus on their means including personalism and decentralization, the Catholic Worker focuses on process, the value of individual persons and contextual or (loosely) indigenous knowledge. The Catholic Worker, therefore, embodies a new kind of consensus social movement (beyond a definitional conception) that is rooted in an understanding of Quaker and indigenous decision-making processes.

A theoretically informed concept of consensus social movements adds a useful tool to the social movement literature toolkit. The Catholic Worker is simply one example. The anti-globalization movement teems with multiple movements focused on positive changes including the Yukon Intertribal Watershed Council (Hawken 2007; Record 2008). Gibson-Graham (1996, 2006) advocates a similar shift in economic linguistics and practice. Like peace studies, where peace scholars have to introduce a new vocabulary not dependent upon war analogies, the social movement literature has an opportunity to embrace a vocabulary of positive, not just contentious, change.

In 1961, Deane Mowrer, the longtime chronicler of the Catholic Worker and its farms wrote, "No two of us in any CW group ever agree completely about what the Catholic Worker is and purposes, but we all like to talk about it, and perhaps the truth is sometimes best arrived at through a

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multiplicity of answers" (8). Maybe the same can be said for our understanding of social movements in general.

NOTES

1. Robert's Rules of Order is shorthand for the guidelines of parliamentary procedure adopted by most deliberative groups that utilize majority rule decision-making. They were initially adapted by a former US Army officer from the procedural rules of the United States House of Representatives.
2. The Catholic Worker has also inspired diverse studies ranging from histories to sociological investigations (Allahyari 2000; Aronica 1987; Betten 1971; Boehrer 2003; Cleaver, Preheim, and Sprong 1993; Coles and Erikson 1974; Coy 1988, 2001; Dietrich 1983; Ellis 1980; Fisher 1989; Klejment and Roberts 1996; McKanan 2008; Miller 1973; Murray 1990; Novitsky 1975; Segers 1978; Sniegocki 2005; Spickard 2005; Thorn, Runkel, and Mountin 2001; Troester 1993; Zwick and Zwick 2005)
3. Thanks to one of the reviewers for offering this particular observation.
4. The Chicago Catholic Worker stopped carrying the newspaper and dropped the name "Catholic Worker." At the center of the controversy were people torn between allegiance to their country in a time of war and Dorothy's staunch pacifism. It remains one of the few examples where Dorothy attempted to exert ideological control by "demanding" pacifism as a central tenant of what it meant to be a Catholic Worker. The episode remains a key point in Catholic Worker history and evolution especially regarding house and individual autonomy as well as what it means to be a Catholic Worker. See Sicius (1990) for a full treatment of the Chicago Catholic Worker as well as Miller (1973, 166–184) on pacifism and World War II.

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