

Faith, Community and the New Economy: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Collaboration in Communal Enterprise and Mutuality

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Conference Themes addressed by this Proposal: work, money, care

This paper is a work-in-progress report on a multi-faith collaborative venture in constructing forms of communal enterprise and mutuality as an alternative to the dominant paradigm of liberal individualism in western societies.

The venture is national in scope, based in Melbourne, and involves activists, entrepreneurs and community leaders from three traditions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It identifies the plethora of existing forms of mutuality and enterprise within these traditions in Australia, examines scope for collaboration between them, and explores the potential impact of this collaboration in constituting a new economy that is communitarian and mutual in nature.

The existing forms of mutuality and enterprise examined include financial savings and loans groups, private and social housing arrangements, private and social investment mechanisms, family support groups, playgroups, formal and informal child care, aged care, schools, tertiary education, health care, disability groups, employment creation for people with disadvantages, and community settlement and shared infrastructure arrangements.

Many co-operatives, credit unions, friendly societies, charitable health organisations and mutuals were formed by groups within these three religious traditions. Faith and faith-based communal life appears to have been an important foundation for the development of various forms of enterprise and mutuality. Collaboration in strengthening and extending various components of this common life may be an important part of the emerging movement for a New Economy.

The venture assumes a collaborative market share of 10% of the Australian population that may be potential participants in its work. It assumes a 45-45-10 breakdown in the constitutive activities of the venture as it develops, being 45% community activity, 45% enterprise activity, and 10% political activity aimed at creating favourable legislative, regulatory and cultural environments to operate within.

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Bio:

Vern Hughes is Director of *Civil Society Australia*, and has been Director of the *Centre for Civil Society* since 2007.

He is a former CEO of *South Kingsville Health Cooperative* (Australia's only consumer-owned primary health care centre); Director of *Hotham Mission* in the Uniting Church; Founder of the *Social Entrepreneurs Network (Australia and New Zealand)*; and Director of the *Cooperative Federation of Victoria*.

He is an Adjunct Fellow in the Faculty of Business and Entrepreneurship at *Swinburne University*.

He is also a historian and researcher on civil society, social policy and political reform issues.