

Initiatives

In Support of Christians in the World

National Center for the Laity
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Economic & Spiritual Crisis

The current financial crisis is more than “a lack of transparency and legal accountability,” more than unemployment, depreciating housing values, or the collapse of retirement funds, says Bishop Adrianus van Luyn of the Netherlands and president of Bishops’ Conferences of the European Community (42 Rue Stevin, Brussels B-1000, Belgium). “It is far more [about] our societal model...based on the continued and unlimited consumption of limited resources.”

“The financial crisis has exposed a spiritual crisis and a distorted hierarchy of values,” van Luyn continues. “The inner sense and value of human work has been pushed to the background” in favor of an exclusive focus on profit or wages to fuel consumption. Indifference toward the spirituality of work is the real culprit in the economic downturn. (*Origins* [11/27/08], 3211 Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20017)

Dan Finn of St. John’s University agrees. He suggests that the current economy offers an opening for Catholic social thought and practice. “Markets are essential,” says Finn. But an “ideology of the free market” results in individuals operating only to maximize their own well-being. Instead, the market has to serve a higher goal, namely the *common good*.

Finn draws upon Fr. Virgil Michel, OSB (1890-1938), who in *Christian Social Reconstruction* (Bruce Publishing, 1937) defines the common good as both those things people need but can only obtain together and also the attainment of a reasonably good life by all people.

There are models for an alternative *civil market* aimed at the common good, Finn continues. For example, the Franciscans in the late Middle Ages designed banks and corporations that aimed for fair prices and wide participation. He recommends *Civil Economy: Efficiency, Equity, Public Happiness* by Stefano Zamagni and Luigino Bruni (Peter Lang Publ. [2007], 29 Broadway #100, New York, NY 10006; \$67.95). (*U.S. Catholic* [3/09], 205 W. Monroe St, Chicago, IL 60606)

Finn, who is associated with the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies

(University of Southern California, Religious Center #102, Los Angeles, CA 90089; www.ifacs.com), is the author of *The Moral Ecology of Markets* (Cambridge University Press [2006], 32 Ave. of the Americas, New York, NY 10013; \$27.99). Another book on this topic is *The Moral Measure of the Economy* by Chuck Collins and Mary Wright (Orbis Books, PO Box 302, Maryknoll, NY 10545; \$18).

Taking the Initiative

For Green Jobs

Van Jones (Green for All, 1611 Telegraph Ave. #600, Oakland, CA 94612; www.greenforall.org) gets lots of ink these days—at least in the type of magazines INITIATIVES reads. That’s because he is taking the environmental movement to a working class constituency. Jones is, according to *The Progressive* (409 E. Main St., Madison, WI 53703; 2/09), “as concerned with creating jobs as saving polar bears.” Look, he says in *Yes!* (284 Madrona Way NE #116, Bainbridge Island, WA 98110; Winter/09), there are “no magical green faries...to come down and put up all those solar panels or install insulation. This is going to take skilled labor. We can make a green pathway out of [unemployment].” Other green jobs include engineering and manufacturing of hybrid cars, improving rail systems, implementing better farming and food processing methods, fabricating recycled products, purifying and conserving water, harnessing wind energy and more.

Jones also strikes a popular tone in calling for legislation and government assistance, but as a partner to business, not as its replacement.

Jones’ book, *The Green Collar Economy* (Harper One [2008] 10 E. 53rd St., New York, NY 10022; \$25.95), comes with an 18-page annotated list of groups involved with green jobs and another list of 66 companies that set the pace for efficient transportation, buildings, products and services.

There are actually thousands of U.S. companies specializing in green. Many are new and operated by young workers.

Akeena Solar (16005 Los Gatos Blvd., Los Gatos, CA 95032), for example, is eight years old; employs 220 in seven states; and has grown 40% since 2007. Its installers need muscle, but also electrical knowledge and other competencies. The jobs come with health benefits and a stock ownership plan.

Solar Center (47 Woodland Ave., Rockaway, NJ 07866) recruits among unemployed home builders. Communication skills are important. There is a three-month training program. (*N.Y. Times*, 12/14/08)

What if, INITIATIVES wonders, a slumping Great Lakes or Atlantic Coast city made an all out commitment to recruiting and sustaining green companies, while putting its community colleges behind training for green jobs? INITIATIVES welcomes comment, or better yet reports, from its readers in Cleveland, Buffalo, Rochester or Providence.

Taking the Initiative *Against Foreclosures*

In a familiar tale the Dudley Street neighborhood in Boston fell prey to urban renewal, redlining, blockbusting, illegal dumping, abandonment, real estate speculation and more. In the late 1980s those remaining began the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (504 Dudley St., Roxbury, MA 02119; www.dsni.org) to, as Holly Sklar reports, shift “control over development from city planners, speculators and private developers to neighborhood residents.” Their tactic was unique: force the government to cede the power of eminent domain to a non-profit community group. The power, called *community land trust*, only applies to vacant land.

Gradually, DSNI granted 99-year renewable land leases on parcels for affordable housing. The lease comes with an inheritance clause. The homeowner, however, never has complete title to the land, only the home. Mortgages and home improvement loans can be obtained only through a DSNI approved source. DSNI steps in with assistance if a homeowner gets behind in the mortgage. There is a beneficial ripple effect on other property in the area, particularly as other homeowners and businesses participate in DSNI programs. The foreclosure rate in DSNI turf is negligible.

National social policy thinkers are studying DSNI. (*Yes!* [Winnter/09], 284 Madrona Way NE #116, Brainbridge, WA 98110)

For more information on the community land trust experiment contact National Community Land Trust Network (2710 NE 14th Ave., Portland, OR 97212; www.cltnetwork.org). For more on DSNI itself see *Streets of Hope* by Peter Medoff and Holly Sklar (South End Press [2009], 7 Brookline St. #1, Cambridge, MA 02139; \$18).

U.S. Rep. Marcy Kaptur (House of Representatives, 2186 Rayburn Bldg., Washington, DC 20515; www.kaptur.house.gov), a National Center for the Laity friend since her long ago days as a community development expert in Chicago, tells people to stay in their home until the moment they get a sheriff’s eviction notice. Those in foreclosure must get legal help, she says. The Legal Aid Society, with branches in every state, is a resource.

Mortgage contract law obliges a bank to show an actual loan note, explains Kaptur. Five major banks bought most of the mortgages that are now suspect, but those banks have so bundled and bungled the paperwork that they cannot produce required legal documents. Kaptur’s suggestion is an implicit criticism of provisions in the bailout. “The bad paper,” she says, is sitting with banks that are big beneficiaries of assistance. They should not be hasty in evicting taxpayers.

Neighborhood Assistance Corporation (3607 Washington St., Jamaica Plains, MA 02130; www.naca.com) is making things personal by sponsoring a nationwide “Predator’s Tour” of the homes of certain bank executives. Kaptur and NAC propose these tactics in order to put a human face on fast moving events (though slow moving improvements) in the economy. (*Democracy Now* [2/4/09], 100 Lafayette St. #604, New York, NY 10013)

Taking the Initiative *Assisting the Unemployed*

Job Transition Network is a new ministry at St. Edward’s Parish (9401 Nesbitt Ave. S, Bloomington, MN 55437). Help Wanted and Job Opening notices appear in the bulletin and on the parish website.

Employment Assistance and Resource Network (St. Patrick Parish, 137 Moseman Rd.,

Yorktown Heights, NY 10598) meets monthly to coach and inspire job seekers.

Shrine Career Network (Shrine of the Little Flower, 2123 Roseland Ave., Royal Oak, MI 48073) gathers monthly for mutual support and sharing of job leads. (*Our Sunday Visitor* [2/1/09], 200 Noll Plaza, Huntington, IN 46750)

Once each month the Job Network (St. Frances Cabrini, 6673 W. Chatfield Ave., Littleton, CO 80128) offers a full-day workshop for job seekers, complete with expert advice, role playing and resume review. (*Denver Catholic Register*, 2/4/09)

There's a weekly Job Seekers Support Group at St. Gertrude's Parish (1420 W. Granville Ave., Chicago, IL 60660), a monthly Interfaith Career Network at St. John of the Cross Parish (5050 S. Wolf Rd., Western Springs, IL 60558) and a monthly job networking group at St. Raphael Parish (1215 Modaff Rd., Naperville, IL 60540). (*Catholic New World*, 2/28/09)

Taking the Initiative

On Making Saints

Mother Mary Theresa Josephine Dudzik (1860-1918) is the founder of the first women religious order in Chicago, the Congregation of Franciscans Sisters of Chicago. INITIATIVES happened upon her biography in a parish's used-book shelf. *Therese of Chicago* by Fr. Henry Malak (League of the Servant of God [1975], 11400 Theresa Dr., Lemont, IL 60439) makes timely points about sanctity.

Saints are not "puppet[s] dropped from heaven; [to be portrayed] in bright and favorable pictures [with only a] beautiful side, wonderful and captivating," says Malak. Rather, saints are "down to earth" people who struggle with "failures and defeats."

Second, sanctity is suggested from a particular culture and a social background. Contrary to popular impression, a person cannot simply shop around for a mix-and-match spirituality, pulling it off a shelf. Dudzik, as Malak details, found her sanctity in response to her Polish-American immigrant culture within her Chicago environs.

INITIATIVES is left with a question: What are some characteristics of Catholic spirituality, Chicago-style? Or North American-style? Let INITIATIVES know.

From the Workbench

Lay people have difficulty integrating faith and work because workplace language is different from so-called *churchy* language. Currently the word *hermeneutic*, for example, is harmlessly part of the jargon at every conference of Church employees. Other churchy words are problematic. *Evangelization*, for example, is an excellent concept. In the U.S., however, it is irredeemably associated with *proselytizing* and will never be useful to Catholics, no matter how popular it is among Church employees. Other good words have been given such a *churchy* hue that they lose their true meaning. *Stewardship*, for example, could speak to work responsibility, but in U.S. Catholic circles it is now synonymous with *fundraising*.

James Nash conducted an informal survey at St. Matthew's Cathedral (1725 Rhode Island Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20036), looking for some language to bridge the reality of work with faith. Several people use the phrase *offering it up* to "connect the inevitable toil of work with Christ's suffering," Nash reports. "It is an old-fashioned concept but it gives some redemptive meaning to some people."

Nash is encouraged that some people mentioned *gifts*, as God-given talents in service to others through their careers.

A couple of parishioners offered a critique of their workplace with phrases like *not enough dignity* and *too much consumerism*. *Justice* and *peace* were mentioned, but in an individual sense: fairness and tranquil environment.

Nash is disappointed that most people did not associate *calling* with their work. When pressed, the survey participants pointed to ordination and marriage as a calling, but not work. Nash wonders if this is because people devalue work and because work, unlike marriage and ordination, is not understood to be a sacrament.

The word *meaning* "came up a lot and it could be a major opportunity to construct a truly Catholic language about work," Nash concludes. "People want meaning out of their work and they need a way to find it."

Our National Center for the Laity believes that crafting an intelligible language about faith and daily life requires the whole church to ponder first-person accounts from the great workbench.

The Way We Work edited by M.C. Boyes and Peter Scheckner (Vanderbilt University Press [2008], Box 1813 Station B, Nashville, TN 37235; \$29.95) is primary resource material for reflection. It contains 42 contributions on the meaning of work, each previously published in a magazine or journal. About half are poems, some are short stories and the remainder is nonfiction essays. The book is all the more valuable because the entries with one exception come from blue collar and public service workers, including police and firemen, several food industry workers, three accounts of migrant labor and two reports on the sex trade. The books' editors obtain a subsequent sentence or two from each contributor that insightfully gives context to the entries.

Marcus Laffey, an NYPD detective in the Bronx, describes the challenge of walking into people's homes, hoping to piece together order and justice: "You get in the habit of reading these scenes for signs, whether forensic or sacramental, of sin and struggle in the fallen world."

Journalist Charles Bowden, in an essay about his coverage of child abuse crime, reminds us that many workers glimpse disturbing deviance and violence. He is up front about the difficulty in processing such work and admits that with too much exposure a worker can lose empathy. It is tempting then to "seek moments of obliteration" in, for example, alcohol or infidelity.

Barbara Garson interviews several McDonald's employees and describes how the company's fine tuned management obliterates individuality. Garson frequently writes about low wage work, including the classic *All the Livelong Day* (Penguin [1975], 375 Hudson St., New York, NY 10014; \$14).

"I'm still with the subject," she comments, "because work is wonderful: concentration is the most spiritual human expression. To me the great crime isn't forcing people to work, but robbing them of real work with all its satisfactions."

Work and Art

The editors of *Portland Magazine* (5000 N. Williamette Blvd., Portland, OR 97203; Winter/08) introduce six photos of cleaning women taken by Pam Duffy with this meditation:

It is the holy Roman Catholic church herself who acknowledges that there are millions more saints than we know or will ever know, far more than will ever be celebrated with feast days and beatification Masses and entities bearing their names. Millions of women and men quietly working away at the lathe of the world, with immense dignity and grace and courage and creativity and diligence, known only to a handful of friends and family, unknown to history, but loved in every molecule of their being by the Voice that once said *I am who am*.

110+ Years

Of Catholic Social Thought

Our National Center for the Laity (PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629) distributes the 2005 official *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the [Catholic] Church*; \$22. The text runs 255 pages, followed by about a 200-page index.

Now comes a shorter commentary: *Catholic Social Thought, American Reflections on the Compendium* edited by Anthony Blasi and D. Paul Sullins (Rowman & Littlefield [2009], 4501 Forbes Blvd., Lanham, MD 20706; \$65).

John Larrivee of Mt. St. Mary University contributes "The Subjective Dimension of Work" to *Catholic Social Thought*. During our economic slump it feels unrealistic to talk about *the meaning of work*, about *spiritual capital*, about *social holiness* or *workplace virtues*. But the church, he says, is "very much in time" prompting reflection on these concepts. In a bigger picture the economy is changing in ways that allow, indeed necessitate that workers (managers and employees) see themselves as the vital component, as the subject of the work process. Unfortunately, many workers in the new economy get trapped in careerism and consumerism. The church, beginning at Vatican II, sees a new opportunity for fulfilling one's vocation and living one's spirituality through work.

Larrivee finds parallels between Catholicism's interest in the meaning of work and the thoughts of Robert Fogel, the 1993 Nobel Prize winner in economics. Fogel's books include *The Fourth Great Awakening* (University of Chicago Press [2002], 1427 E. 60th St., Chicago, IL 60637; \$28) and *The Escape from Hunger* (Cambridge University Press [2004], 32 Ave. of the Americas, New York, NY 10013; \$28.99).

The most complete Catholic reflections on work come from Pope John Paul II (1920-2005) and are summarized in *Pope John Paul II's Gospel of Work* by Bill Droel (National Center for the Laity, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$10).

There's a new classroom edition of *Living Justice* by Fr. Thomas Massaro, SJ (Rowman & Littlefield [2008], 4501 Forbes Blvd., Lanham, MD 20706; \$19.95). Chapters treat the history of Catholic social thought, its place in the mission of the church, and its nine key themes. Massaro applies Catholic ideas to macroeconomics and to current issues. Each chapter has questions for reflection and topics for research. The book concludes with annotated resources, including 14 websites.

News and Views

The 2012 presidential campaign won't begin in earnest for another week or two. Smile. Maybe U.S. Catholics can use this brief moratorium to think about the relationship between our faith and the electoral process.

A point of entry into that consideration comes from Bernard Crick, a British political theorist who died last December. "We must not hope for too much from politics or believe that we see it everywhere," he writes in *In Defense of Politics* (University of Chicago Press [1962], 1427 E. 60th St., Chicago, IL 60637; \$23). He develops this point through a contrast between non-violent politics and totalitarianisms or other ideologies that encroach on the domains proper to the family, social groups and private life.

"Political activity is a type of moral activity," Crick acknowledges. But "it does not claim to settle every problem or to make every sad heart glad... Its actual methods are often rough and imperfect, [but] the result is always preferable to autocratic or totalitarian rule." Politics aids the moral order but it is "a matter of *practical relations*, not a deduction from higher principle." To achieve societal improvement through politics requires putting the quest for certainty aside. It further means tolerating in some situations "a clash between the public interest and private conscience"

Catholic life has progressed in our common understanding about war, labor relations, biological research, gestation, food distribution, environmental use and more as moral issues. There is not an unmediated line,

however, between a moral issue and a social or political policy. The transition requires prudent and honest politicians whose job, Crick reminds us, is to "treat deep divergences of values as natural." The characteristic features of their honorable vocation include "compromise, conciliation, uncertainty, conflict; [a] necessary ambivalence or tension between preservation and creation; and [a] curious movement between bureaucratic anonymity and magnification of personality in politicians."

More recent books consider the topic of faith and politics, some specific to Catholicism:

The first comes from National Center for the Laity board member Vincent Rougeau, *Christians in the American Empire* (Oxford University Press [2009], 198 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016; \$29.95).

Others in alphabetical order include *Faith in Public Life* edited by William Collinge (Orbis Books [2008] PO Box 308, Maryknoll, NY 10545; \$30) and *Souled Out* by E.J. Dionne (Princeton University Press [2008], 41 William St., Princeton, NJ 08540; \$24.95) and *Vote Catholic? Beyond the Political Din* by Bernard Evans (Liturgical Press [2008], 7500 Collegeville, MN 56321; \$9.95) and *Catholics and Politics* edited by Kristin Heyer et al. (Georgetown University Press [2008], PO Box 1287, Lebanon, PA 17042; \$29.95) and *A Nation for All: How the Catholic Vision Can Save Politics* by Alexia Kelley & Chris Korzen (Jossey Bass [2008], 111 River St., Hoboken, NJ 07030; \$24.95) and *The American Catholic Voter* by George Marlin (St. Augustine's Press [2004], PO Box 2285, South Bend, IN 46680; \$30), an analysis of voting trends over the past 200 years, and *A Theology of Public Life* by Charles Mathewes (Cambridge University Press [2007], 100 Brook Hill Dr., West Nyack, NY 10994; \$99) and *American Babylon: Notes of a Christian Exile* by Fr. Richard Neuhaus (Basic Books [2009], 10 E. 53rd St., New York, NY 10022; \$26.95) and *The Party Faithful: How and Why Democrats Are Closing the God Gap* by Amy Sullivan (Scribner [2008], 1230 Ave. of the Americas, New York, NY 10020; \$25).

Happenings

The Liturgical Institute (1000 Maple Ave., Mundelein, IL 60060; www.liturgicalinstitute.org) will host an April 24, 2009 conference, "Liturgy, Justice and Social Reconstruction." Talks will consider Dorothy Day (1897-1980), Fr. Virgil Michel, OSB (1890-1938) and the Catholic Action movement. The conference is dedicated to Fr. Richard Neuhaus (1936-2009).

"Formed by the Word," a July 30-31, 2009 conference in Cincinnati will also consider the connections between worship and society. More information: *Celebration* (PO Box 411009, Kansas City, MO 64141; www.celebrationpublications.org/conference).

St. Francis Xavier Parish (124 N. Spring Ave., LaGrange, IL 60525; www.sfx-lg.org) presents talks on "Vatican II and Its Future." Fr. George Kane will be the presenter on April 20 & April 27, 2009. Greg Pierce, former National Center for the Laity president, will speak on May 5, 2009.

Pierce's talk is one in St. Francis Xavier's series dedicated to Msgr. George Higgins (1916-2002). Higgins, who participated in Vatican II, was assigned to the national bishops' conference in Washington for most of his career. However, Higgins was born in LaGrange and died there. Many of Higgins' *Yardstick* columns can be found on the website of Catholic Labor Network: www.catholiclabor.org. The same site features many back issues of INITIATIVES.

Villanova University (800 Lancaster Ave., Villanova, PA 19085; www.villanova.edu) is offering a "curriculum development workshop," June 8-12, 2009. Its purpose is to help high school and college teachers in all disciplines insert elements of Catholic social thought into their courses. One session is specifically on "Catholic Social Thought and Human Work."

The Eighth Day Center for Justice (205 W. Monroe St. #500, Chicago, IL 60606; www.8thdaycenter.org) will celebrate its 35th anniversary with an event on September 27, 2009. Eighth Day is a consortium of religious orders that advocates for peace, for human rights and on behalf of immigrants.

The International Labor Organization (4 route des Morillons, CH 1211 Geneva 22, Switzerland; www.ilo.org) celebrates its 90th anniversary. Its magazine *World of Work* contains a summary of the "Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization" and a 10-page pictorial history titled "Seeking Peace by Cultivating Justice."

Kim Bobo (Interfaith Worker Justice, 1020 W. Bryn Mawr Ave., Chicago, IL 60660; www.iwj.org), a longtime friend of National Center for the Laity, has written *Wage Theft in America* (New Press [2009], 38 Greene St., New York, NY 10013; \$17.95). Many workers, she documents, are not—even at respectable companies—given the minimum wage, are not paid extra for overtime and are sometimes required to work off the clock. She includes a 33-page chart that names violators of workers' rights. This not, however, a negative book nor one filled with statistics. It is actually inspiring and warrants more attention in a subsequent INITIATIVES.

Bob Senser, editor of *Human Rights for Workers* (www.humanrightsforworkers.blogspot.com) is waiting at the printers for his new book, *Justice at Work* and INITIATIVES is waiting at the mailbox for an early copy. More on it soon! Meanwhile the cyber-newsletter has commentary on the proposed Employee Free Choice Act and reports on labor conditions overseas.

Websites

Apostles and Markets (Stephen Haessler, Marquette University High School, 3401 W. Wisconsin Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53208; www.apostlesandmarkets.com) is a curriculum that considers "principles of Catholic social doctrine together with economic analysis." Before ordering, teachers can preview materials on topics like unemployment, wages, wealth, fair trade, entrepreneurship, immigration and more.

Faith in Public Life (1101 Vermont Ave. NW #900, Washington, DC 20005; www.faithinpubliclife.org) is an inclusive, inter-religious and ecumenical group dedicated to "advancing the common good in the public

square.” Its site contains news reports and a directory of 3,000 faith-based groups involved in public policy, sorted by each group’s area of interest and its location. Some of the groups are local churches; others, however, have only a tenuous link to any religious tradition.

Greg Pierce, former president of our National Center for the Laity, publishes an occasional *Faith and Work in Cyberspace*, an interactive e-mail essay. Type a cyber-address to join Pierce’s discussion: www.mycatholicvoice.com/faithandwork.

The Center for Business Ethics (175 Forest St., Waltham, MA 02452; www.bentley.edu/cbe) regularly reprints talks, often including responses to questions or responses from a panel. Two recent booklets are titled “Your E-Mail Trail: Where Ethics Meets Forensics” and “Rebuilding a Company after a Near-Fatal Ethics Breakdown.”

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