

# Initiatives

In Support of Christians in the World

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## Theology of Work

Work “dominates so much of human life [yet] we rarely reflect theologically” upon it, writes Darby Kathleen Ray in *Working* (Fortress Press [2011] PO Box 1209, Minneapolis, MN 55440; \$15). Her 138-page book outlines a Christian approach to such reflection, using current events, Scripture, tradition and the sacraments.

Ray, director of Millsaps Faith and Work Initiative (1710 N. State St., Jackson, MS 39210; [www.millsaps.edu](http://www.millsaps.edu)), begins with brief reflections on the multiple reasons for working. She concludes with a review of the purposes of work itself. In between, two chapters consider “Biblical Insights into Working” and “Insights from Christian Tradition.” The tradition chapter skips past the early church to the Reformation, then covers the Protestant Social Gospel movement and concludes with Catholic social thought.

Ray does not romanticize work, yet she shows that Christianity is positive about work, valuing both menial and professional occupations and tasks. This contrasts with elements from ancient Greek philosophy that demean work. It is different too from some religious strains that equate *the spiritual* with the other-worldly. “The Incarnation means Platonic dualism is not an option...for Christians,” Ray writes. “God is to be encountered in the ordinary...in the everyday, non-heroic ways we carry out our lives and complete our work.”

Echoing ideas suggested in *Love in Truth* by Pope Benedict XVI (National Center for the Laity, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$6), Ray reflects on work as a gift to workers and on each worker’s work as a gift to others. Work in Christian terms is “an offering, a gift, a sacrament.” This perspective is not supposed to be at the margins of church life (only mentioned once each year, usually around Labor Day) nor is it at the margins of economics. The Christian perspective is proper economics, even if it is rarely invoked.

Ray’s book is one in a Fortress Press series called “Christian Explorations of Daily

Living.” Other titles include *Shopping, Traveling and Parenting*.

Among other theological reflections on work, INITIATIVES recommends *After Sunday: A Theology of Work* by Fr. Armand Larive (Continuum, 80 Maiden Ln. #704, New York, NY 10038; \$27.95) and *Pope John Paul II’s Gospel of Work* by Bill Droel (National Center for the Laity, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$8).

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## Taking the Initiative

### *Against Poverty*

Recessions by definition eventually abate and then within a few months the employment picture returns to its pre-recession state. The recession related to the market crash of 2008 is different, says McKinsey Global Institute (55 E. 52<sup>nd</sup> St. #2100, New York, NY 10022). This time jobs will not return for at least five years—and that’s after the recession is really over.

In previous recessions companies, while laying off some workers, rode out the times primarily by reducing their profits. This time, writes Charles Morris, “labor bore essentially all of the costs of the downturn...The loyalty employers once felt toward their workers [has given way to] the relentless drive of executives and the investing class to achieve mythic levels of wealth.” (*Commonweal* [9/23/11], 475 Riverside Dr. #405, New York, NY 10115)

Corporations’ current recovery strategy leaves many with large cash reserves. For example, more than 60 publicly traded companies in Illinois have cash on hand that exceeds their short-term and long-term debt. Under a different strategy, companies might use their reserve to hire more workers, and then the economy could revive sooner and stronger. (*Chicago Tribune*, 9/25/11)

Obviously, this country needs an upgrade in education. But the immediate obstacle to a family-healthy economy, says the Economic Policy Institute (1333 H St. #300E, Washington, DC 20005; [www.epi.org](http://www.epi.org)) is “a profound lack of

demand for workers, not that employers can't find the people they need."

For almost 18 months, says the EPI report *Sustained High Joblessness Causes Lasting Damage*, about 45% of those unemployed have been out of work for over six months. Unemployment not only afflicts high school graduates; the unemployment rate for those with a college degree has doubled since the recession began four years ago. (*Human Rights for Workers* [9/3/11], <http://humanrightsforworkers.blogspot.com>)

The EPI report asks the government to rejuvenate the job market. Morris, in his report on the McKinsey study, says improvement "will require a national commitment, determined leadership and large-scale investment."

Perhaps big problems require big solutions. INITIATIVES, however, wants to hear from employers who are acting for the common good by retaining employees or even hiring during this difficult time. Privately owned companies are more likely to think long term, but maybe even a publicly traded company can furnish INITIATIVES with a positive report. What steps does your company take to keep people working? Do you find support among your colleagues, including among competitors?

To open possibilities for people to work is an exercise in the virtue of magnanimity, says St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). Even the earliest Christians were admonished in the *Didache* (100 A.D.) that creating work was better for the poor than direct charity.

## **Taking the Initiative** *For the Environment*

College of St. Benedict (37 S. College Ave., St. Joseph, MN 56374; [www.csbsju.edu](http://www.csbsju.edu)) is one of nine colleges that ban the sale of plastic water bottles. Instead, the school gives a free bottle to each student and provides several hydration stations (back in the day known as water fountains) to refill bottles. The goal is to eliminate the environmental and social costs associated with producing, transporting and selling the bottles.

There is a second goal related to Catholic social teaching, says Judy Purman at St. Benedict. Students who grow accustomed to buying water can conclude that it is a market commodity, available to those who can afford it. But water is really a human right. (*CBS Minnesota*, 9/13/11)

In the fall semester or early spring semester of senior year, a student committee at hundreds of colleges initiates the Graduation Pledge of Social and Environmental Responsibility (Bentley Alliance for Ethics, 175 Forest St., Waltham, MA 02452; [www.graduationpledge.org](http://www.graduationpledge.org)). It commits graduates to "explore and take into account" the environmental impact of any job they pursue. The committee uses the pledge process to educate fellow students and college staff about the environmental impact of various occupations.

Students, other individuals, families and institutions can become more conscious of the environment by signing the St. Francis Pledge (Catholic Climate Covenant, PO Box 60205, Washington, DC 20039; [www.catholicclimatecovenant.org](http://www.catholicclimatecovenant.org)).

## **Taking the Initiative** *Against Slavery*

Dallas Cowboys Merchandising (2500 Regent Blvd., Dallas, TX 75261) produces apparel with logos from several major colleges. However, the company, also known as Silver Star Merchandise, contracts with some sweatshops—one in Indonesia that stole wages from 2,800 workers and one in El Salvador that is unsafe and compels lengthy overtime.

United Students Against Sweatshops (1150 17<sup>th</sup> St. NW #300, Washington, DC 20036; [www.usas.org](http://www.usas.org)), with chapters at 150 colleges, is putting pressure on school administrations to, in turn, pressure the Cowboys to use only reputable contractors. Students have led the charge on this sweatshop issue for many years and they find some administrators are sympathetic to this latest campaign. (*N.Y. Times*, 9/24/11)

Meanwhile, Fair Trade Fund (1610 Harrison St., Oakland, CA; [www.slaveryfootprint.org](http://www.slaveryfootprint.org)) has a website that tells a visitor how many slaves he or she uses in a typical week. The number of slaves is based on answers to 11 questions about lifestyle and specific products, including electronic devices and cosmetics. The site is a consciousness-raising gimmick—similar to [www.carbonfootprint.com](http://www.carbonfootprint.com). (*N.Y. Times*, 9/23/11 & *Human Rights for Workers* [9/26/11]; <http://humanrightsforworkers.blogspot.com>)

## Taking the Initiative

### *Assisting the Unemployed*

INITIATIVES recently printed a prayer for the unemployed by Lorene Hanley Duquin. Because it is “directed to a gracious and loving God it is a *vertical prayer*,” writes Bernard Wheel of Oak Park, IL. Once in awhile there are *horizontal prayers* that “connect the members of the body of Christ to one another,” he says.

To illustrate the difference Wheel tries his hand at a *Horizontal Prayer for the Unemployed*.

“Uniting ourselves with the unemployed who seek honest and meaningful work, we share our energy, prayer and vision with them. We share the pain of injustice and rejection with them...May both workers and the unemployed reach their full potential soon. May all live a full life as a just reward for their labor. Let the Spirit of goodness and justice that dwells in us be manifest to all who are in a position of leadership in the workplace...Amen.”

## Taking the Initiative

### *Making Saints*

Vatican II issued a “universal call to holiness.” Yet “why are there relatively few role models [among canonized saints] for the laity?” asks an editorial in *America* (106 W. 56<sup>th</sup> St., New York, NY 10019; 9/19/11).

Among a handful of exceptions, *America* mentions Pier Giorgio Frassati (1901-1925), who was beatified in 1990—one step up in the saint-making process. He was involved in Italian charity groups but often said: “Charity is not enough; we need social reform.” To that end Frassati was involved with Catholic Student Federation, a specialized Catholic Action movement. He also started *Momento* newspaper to popularize Catholic social principles. He died of polio at a young age. There is a stateside Frassati Society (PO Box 50571, Nashville, TN 37205; [www.frassatiusa.org](http://www.frassatiusa.org)).

*America* also mentions proposed saint Dorothy Day (1897-1980) from our country and Zelig Martin (1831-1877) and her husband Louis (1823-1894), the parents of St. Therese Lisieux and her eight siblings. This couple was beatified in 2008.

*America* has reasons why the Vatican slights lay holiness: 1.) “The persistent belief that ordination or taking religious vows represents a higher level of holiness

than...raising a child.” 2.) The ministry of priests and religious is usually public; the devotion of a spouse and parent is “hidden lay holiness.” 3.) The canonization procedure is “time-consuming and expensive” and only dioceses or religious orders have the capability to navigate it.

INITIATIVES does what it can. First, in its regular “North American Spirituality” and its “Rest In Peace” columns it profiles Catholics who juggled their priorities expertly. Second, INITIATIVES invites readers to send along saintly nominations of deceased people who lived in North America and who were not employees of the Church. Please nominate holy people.

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## Work and Art

Maine chose Judy Taylor (1517 Tremont Rd., Seal Cove, ME 04674; [www.judytaylorstudio.com](http://www.judytaylorstudio.com)) to paint a mural depicting the state’s labor history, and then to be displayed in the labor department building. Her 11 panels were completed and installed in 2008. Some occupations are depicted, like textile workers, a wood worker and others. Frances Perkins (1880-1965), whose parents were from Maine and who served as U.S. secretary of labor, is also depicted.

The mural is no longer in the building, however. Governor Paul LePage (1 State House Station, Augusta, ME 04333; [www.maine.gov](http://www.maine.gov)) removed it because he believes there are two classes or two constituencies in our country: business and labor. It is wrong, says the governor’s spokesperson, “if either of our two constituencies perceives that they are not welcome in our administration.” (*CNN Wire Service*, 3/23/11)

Perhaps the LePage administration could reflect on Pope John Paul II’s teaching that all work has dignity because it is a *person* who is working and therefore the honorable title of *worker* applies to all, employers and employees. (*Pope John Paul II’s Gospel of Work*, National Center for the Laity, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$8)

Meanwhile, VisArts Kaplan Gallery (155 Gibbs St. #300, Rockville, MD 20850; [www.visartsatrockville.org](http://www.visartsatrockville.org)) displayed reproductions of Taylor’s mural. Presumably, the exhibit, called *Celebrate Labor: Where Art and Politics Meet*, can come to other galleries. (*Human Rights for Workers* [9/10/11], <http://humanrightsforworkers.blogspot.com>)

## Work Prayers

### *The Modern Paradox*

“We have bigger houses but smaller families;  
more conveniences but less time.

We have more degrees but less sense;  
more knowledge but less judgment;  
more experts but more problems;  
more medicine but less health.

We’ve been to the moon but have trouble  
crossing the street to meet a new neighbor.

We built more computers to hold more  
information to produce more copies than ever but  
have less communication.

We have become long on quantity but short on  
quality.

These are times of tall people but short character;  
steep profits but shallow relationships.

It’s a time when there is much in the window but  
nothing in the room.”

--Tenzin Gyatso, the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama

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## 120 Years

### *Of Catholic Social Thought*

In the search for solutions to the current economic crisis facing the U.S. and the world our political leaders and their economic advisors are at a stalemate with their conflicting policies and world views.

Catholic social thought meanwhile has the values necessary for a just and participatory economy. Catholic principles are drawn from Scripture, from encyclicals dating from Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 *Rerum Novarum* to Pope Benedict XVI’s *Love in Truth* (National Center for the Laity, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$6), from various bishops’ statements and from the reflections of thinkers and activists like Msgr. John A. Ryan (1869-1945) and NCL’s own Ed Marciniak (1917-2004). But these insights and the programs that embody them are nowadays submerged under powerful economic and political assumptions.

To meet the challenge it is necessary to first understand the theories upon which economic and political leaders base their decisions.

One resource is *The Poisoned Spring of Economic Libertarianism* by Angus Sibley (Pax Romana [2011], 1025 Connecticut Ave. NW #1000, Washington, DC 20036; \$19). Sibley of the Austrian School of Economics contrasts the various libertarian schools of thought with

Catholic social-economic teaching. In a dozen chapters he addresses issues like excessive individualism, freedom and the common good, the role of the market, unions and working conditions, government responsibility, inequality and corporate behavior.

Chapter 11, titled “Libertarian Catholicism,” features the ideas of U.S. Catholic scholar Michael Novak whose effort to reconcile prevailing economic theory with Catholicism is “unconvincing,” according to Sibley. “Catholics need to recognize,” he writes, “that libertarianism is a radically faulty doctrine because it grossly overemphasizes the autonomy of the individual while neglecting, sometimes with contempt, the vital importance of community.”

The final chapter is titled “Is Libertarianism a Heresy?” Sibley concludes with a call for a “New Equilibrium...a new balance between our need for individual self-fulfillment and our need for the support and nurture of community. [It is] time to acknowledge our need to lead the good life together as well as on our own.”

Thanks to NCL’s friend Fr. Sinclair Oubre (Catholic Labor Network, 1500 Jefferson Dr., Port Arthur, TX 77642; [www.catholiclabor.org](http://www.catholiclabor.org)) for serving as a catalyst for this valuable book.

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## North American Spirituality

### *Arthur Falls (1901-2000)*

True Christianity, Falls argued, meant respecting the dignity of each person and working to change society’s institutions so they were more just. Falls was a doctor who strove for unity and justice among ethnic, racial and religious groups in Chicago’s Catholic and civic circles beginning in the late 1920s. In 1936, he opened the first Catholic Worker House in Chicago to bring about what Catholics of the time called “interracial justice.”

Falls grew up as a black Catholic in Chicago at a unique moment in the city’s racial and religious history. Black migrants were moving north for work, and they encountered a church struggling (and largely failing) to adapt its universal message to its segregated reality. During the 1919 race riot, Falls and other members of his family nearly lost their lives. Members of Ragen’s Colts, an Irish athletic club, attacked the homes of black people in Chicago’s Englewood neighborhood where the Falls family

lived. Many of the Irish youth were, like Falls, Catholic. But in the U.S. in the early 20th century, standard Catholic practice and theology were powerless to unite people across racial lines.

Falls was a forerunner in the northern civil rights movement and challenged several generations of Catholics to live up to the true message of the Gospel. Falls argued that “the life of our Lord on earth has clearly demonstrated that there can be no such thing as *modified* truth or justice.”

Falls had seen the devastation of discrimination—people who couldn’t find work, couldn’t move out of the black neighborhoods without being attacked, and couldn’t receive the sacraments in any parish in the city.

Falls disagreed with many of the white priests who supported racial justice but believed slow, gradual change was the best way to bring it about. Falls appreciated them but felt he had to settle for “what they could contribute to better human relations but not [count] on them to be up on the firing line.”

By the 1960s, many of Falls’ goals were accomplished with the civil rights legislation of 1964 and 1965, and there was some acceptance by Catholics of racial equality. But Falls would certainly lament the unequal opportunities and intense segregation most lower-class African Americans face today.

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## News and Views

Our National Center for the Laity has long criticized the U.S. Catholic bishops’ document *Faithful Citizenship* (USCCB, 3211 Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20017; [www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship](http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship)). It is regularly reissued to coincide with partisan campaigns.

NCL’s objection is different from that of some conservatives and some liberals who don’t agree with one or another issue. NCL, by contrast, assents to all Catholic teaching on the four topics in the document (Human Life, Family Life, Social Justice and Global Solidarity) and the document’s specific issues, including Catholic opposition to abortion, Catholic care for

the environment, for universal food security, the sacredness of the family and thus the necessity for a living wage and for immigration reform, the option for the poor, the rights of workers and more. Further, NCL agrees that bishops have a duty to teach Catholic social principles.

NCL’s objection is *ecclesiological*; that is, the nature of our church and its relationship to God’s world. In the past *Faithful Citizenship* has moved too easily from Catholic doctrine to partisan political positions; from *what* is moral to *how* to implement morality. *Faithful Citizenship*—until now—gave the impression that Catholic truth yields a clear, singular partisan position and that bishops and Church employees are more expert in crafting and naming a moral public policy than are, say, Congressional staff people, think tank researchers, mayors or voters in Rhode Island, Missouri, Oregon or elsewhere. NCL exists on the conviction that lay people because of their baptism are the best apostles in their specific areas of competence. (Yes, bishops and Church employees are baptized and are citizens, but in implementing morality their partisan competence and their sphere of influence is no more “Catholic” or moral than any other informed person.)

The latest October 2011 edition of the document, now titled *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, comes with an interesting two-page “Introductory Note” signed by Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York City and nine other bishops. *Faithful Citizenship*, the note admits, “has at times been misused.” However, “it does not offer a voters guide, scorecard of issues, or direction on how to vote.” Catholic moral concern, Dolan refreshingly continues, cannot be reduced “to one or two matters, or to justify choices simply to advance partisan, ideological or personal interests.” (*Religious News Service*, 10/4/11)

For a U.S. bishops’ document that describes the role of the laity in implementing doctrine, read *Everyday Christianity* (National Center for the Laity, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; free).

## Happenings

Siena Center (7200 W. Division St., River Forest, IL 60305; [www.siena.dom.edu](http://www.siena.dom.edu)) hosts a February 9, 2012 talk on “Catholics in the Public Square” by M. Cathleen Kaveny of the University of Notre Dame.

“Awakening the Heart: the Arts of Faith” is a program at Nazareth College (4245 East Ave., Pittsford, NY 14618; [www.naz.edu/events](http://www.naz.edu/events)). It features artists “whose faith inspires and informs” their music, film, painting, photography and poetry. Among several events, Fr. Robert Lentz, OFM will speak about his iconography on March 29 & 30, 2012.

Peter Steinfels, former columnist for the *N.Y. Times* and longtime friend of the National Center for the Laity, is the featured speaker at “Vatican II Reconsidered,” May 3-5, 2012 at Walsh University (2020 Maple St., North Canton, OH 44720; [www.walsh.edu/vatican2conference](http://www.walsh.edu/vatican2conference)). “Catholic Social Justice” is one of eight topics to be highlighted at the conference. There are student events during the semester tied to the Vatican II theme.

Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership (770 Pawtucket Dr., Westfield, IN 46074; [cknies@greenleaf.org](mailto:cknies@greenleaf.org)) will hold its annual international conference June 20-22, 2012. The Center promotes the notion articulated by Robert Greenleaf (1904-1990) that successful business managers are servants, not dictators.

The Society of Catholic Social Scientists (Nassau Community College Center for Catholic Studies, 1 Education Dr., Garden City, NY 11530; [joseph.varacalli@ncc.edu](mailto:joseph.varacalli@ncc.edu)) holds its 20<sup>th</sup> annual conference October 26-27, 2012.

## Resources, Websites, Research

The Institute for Human Rights and Humanitarian Studies (Webster University, 470 E. Lockwood St., St. Louis, MO 63119 [www.webster.edu/rightingwrongs](http://www.webster.edu/rightingwrongs)) launches *Righting Wrongs*, a peer-reviewed journal by undergraduate students on current issues. *Righting Wrongs* is soliciting undergraduate research papers and book reviews for its upcoming second issue.

Mary Anne McMurray is the new publisher of *Rank and File Catholic* (321 N. Adams St., Henderson, KY 42420; linked on [www.catholiclabor.org](http://www.catholiclabor.org)). The monthly 8.5 X 14” newsletter contains first-hand union news, resources and reflections—all from a Catholic perspective.

Joe Berry (21 San Mateo Rd., Berkeley, CA 94707; [joeberry@igc.org](mailto:joeberry@igc.org)) seeks research material and first-hand accounts on the condition of workers at for-profit colleges like DeVry, Everett, University of Phoenix and others. Berry is a leader in Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor.

Msgr. Marv Mottet (Pastoral Center, 780 W. Central Park Ave., Davenport, IA 52804) is the recipient of the Servant of Justice Award from Roundtable Association of Catholic Diocesan Social Action Directors (1225 Otis St. NE, Washington, DC 20017; [www.catholicroundtable.org](http://www.catholicroundtable.org)). Mottet is a former national director of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development and longtime leader in Iowa on behalf of immigrants, workers, the aged and others. His business card has a quotation from St. Augustine: “Charity is no substitute for justice withheld.”