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| <h1>Initiatives</h1> <p>In Support of Christians in the World</p> | <p>National Center for the Laity PO Box 291102 Chicago, IL 60629 www.catholiclabor.org/NCL.htm</p> | <p>May 2007</p> <p>Number 164</p> |
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Wanted: A Theology of Work

The topic of human labor “is rather foreign” to theologians, charges David Jensen in *Responsive Labor: A Theology of Work* (Westminster John Knox Press [2006], 100 Witherspoon St., Louisville, KY 40202; \$19.95). They assume that “what *really matters* for the life of faith is the time spent away from work: in church, in prayer, in contemplation.” In consequence too many Christians regard their time on the job as tangential to the claims of their faith.

Jensen, a professor at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, uses *Genesis*, the Trinity and the liturgy to point toward themes in a theology of work. For example, a careful reading of *Genesis* shows that “work is not a result of the fall.” Obviously workers experience alienation, but that “is a curse of our own making, not what God intends.”

“God’s self-disclosure” as a Trinity, Jensen continues, “suggests that each person regardless of age, ability, or status has distinctive work to bring to the world.” This means that work cannot be equated with paid employment. But it also means that any level of unemployment is always regrettable, a blemish on humankind’s ability to arrange a marketplace.

The chapter on work and the liturgy includes reflection on the Eucharistic gifts of bread and wine which are on the offertory table precisely because “we work,” writes Jensen (who, remember, comes from the Protestant tradition). “Without human labor, there is no Eucharist.”

The bread and the wine are not only products from the winery and the bakery. They are our work too: “When an accountant carefully tabulates expense sheets and keeps budgets...he employs his gift with mathematics, gives it to others and in no small manner gives thanks to God. When a janitor vacuums a classroom floor so that children can sit on the carpet for story time, she expresses a gift for detail, gives to children and teacher and responds to...God’s story.”

Jensen repeatedly reminds us that while theologians undervalue work, many lay people—perhaps influenced by the Protestant ethic, which is not the same as Martin Luther and John Calvin’s theology—“tend to attribute too much value to our work.” That’s called *workaholism* and *consumerism*, and it is guaranteed to yield stress and disappointment.

INITIATIVES recently mentioned *Doing God’s Business* by R. Paul Stevens (Eerdmans [2006], 2140 Oak Industrial Dr. NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505; \$14) which, like *Responsive Labor*, uses the dogma of the Trinity in its theology of work. Next month your INITIATIVES’ editor, Bill Droel, will contribute to the theology of work with a book about Pope John Paul II’s *gospel of work*.

Taking the Initiative

Lay Formation

Jeffrey Odell Korgen (National Pastoral Life Center, 18 Bleecker St., New York, NY 10012; www.nplc.org) shares ideas for attracting leaders to social ministry in *My Lord and My God* (Paulist Press [2007], 997 Macarthur Blvd., Mahwah, NJ 07430; \$18.95). Drawing upon his experience, his evident love for the gospels and his many contacts among campus ministers and other Church employees, Korgen champions a style of parish outreach and sacramental preparation that truly forms people in the faith. With a touch of humor Korgen contrasts effective formation with activity that merely gets the task done.

For example, Korgen, a former parish youth minister, supervised community service for confirmation students. He arranged an outing to a homeless shelter, but Korgen did “not set up any opportunities to meet the homeless families [nor did he offer any] reflection opportunities before or after the service experience about the causes and effects of homelessness.” Instead, the students spent a boring day basically removing cigarette butts in the vicinity of the shelter. Their knowledge of homelessness was, at best, unchanged.

Korgen profiles the remarkable JustFaith program (PO Box 221348, Louisville, KY 40252; www.justfaith.org). It is “a 30-week small group exploration of the church’s social mission.” Participants watch and discuss parts of 16 videos, read substantial parts of a dozen books, attend a retreat, pray liturgically, share personal stories and learn Catholic doctrine. To those who say people don’t have time for such thorough formation, JustFaith names about 10,000 U.S. Catholics who have completed the program. Make big propositions; get a big response!

My Lord and My God is written for parish staff and volunteers. In fact, what Korgen means by *social ministry* is *parish-based social ministry* or “parish peace and justice ministries.” What about the vast majority of U.S. Catholics who do not volunteer in their parish but are allergic to injustice in the boardroom, the hospital corridor, the county courthouse, the legislative chamber, the insurance office and more?

There is a danger when rank-and-file Catholics hear the phrase “church’s social mission” applied exclusively to *parish social ministry*. Might lay people feel that their routine ministry in daily life is devalued?

There is also a danger in Korgen’s approach for Church employees. Might they, even subconsciously, equate the church’s social mission with their own public policy opinions or possibly their partisan position on legislation or a candidate? Might “diocesan social action directors” (or even bishops) presume that their policy positions or candidate preferences are somehow more Catholic than those who disagree with them?

Of course, it is not *either/or*: Either be involved through one’s parish or be a workaday instrument of justice and peace—unless parish involvement distracts a person from family and job responsibilities. And certainly JustFaith and other parish-based programs could help participants be more effective at work. And in fairness *My Lord and My God* has a chapter on work, although even there the basic suggestion is for outsiders to be in solidarity with low-wage workers.

For 29 years our National Center for the Laity has been fixated on mainstream Catholic social teaching: That the church best serves the modern world as lay people illuminate the gospel inside their normal workplace milieu.

Admittedly, the NCL is open to criticism too. Despite some quality conferences,

retreats and publications, the NCL has yet to garner enough resources and talent to make the gospel of work a salient feature of U.S. Catholic spirituality. So in reminding others about the proper role of the laity, the NCL applauds the National Pastoral Life Center, JustFaith and other outward looking Church-funded programs. Korgen, to be specific, is not a superficial, one-time warrior. His commitment is permanent—something increasingly rare in our inwardly focused culture.

Taking the Initiative

In Job Training

There is “an innovative approach to job training that is upending the conclusion, widespread in the 1990s, that training programs don’t work,” reports Dale Russakoff. (*Washington Post Weekly*, 3/11/07)

A key, Russakoff says, is “working closely with employers in high-growth sectors of the local economy, tailoring...training to the precise entry level skills...most in demand.” This “sectoral training” contrasts with large training systems (government run or government funded) that use a pre-packaged curriculum.

Per Scholas (1231 Lafayette Ave., Bronx, NY 10474; www.perscholas.org), for example, specializes in computer repair. It thoroughly understands the operation of several investment firms, non-profits and other businesses in the boroughs. Its students not only learn about computer programs and hardware, they learn how to talk knowledgably with clients. By the way, Per Scholas will recycle donated computers.

Russakoff also mentions Project Quest (301 S. Frio #400, San Antonio, TX 78207; www.questsa.com), which includes aviation mechanics and environmental monitoring in its training. Quest likewise keeps close contact with employers. Begun in the early 1990s as spin off from two community organizations, Quest adds another ingredient to job training success: Its students, at least ideally, are funneled through area churches and other member institutions of the community organizations, giving extra support and accountability to the students. For background on Quest: *Investing In People* by Brett Campbell (Civic Renewal Movement, 60 Turner St., Waltham, MA 02154; www.cpn.org).

INITIATIVES also knows about Center for Employment Training (701 Vine St. #209, San Jose, CA 95110; www.cetweb.org), which

was started in 1967 by Fr. Anthony Soto and Russ Tershby. CET, now with branches in Texas, Illinois and elsewhere, also puts emphasis on business partnerships. CET curriculum is very practical, believing that after landing a steady job, workers are better disposed to improve language and math skills.

For more on job training: *Moving Up in the New Economy* by Joan Fitzgerald (Cornell University Press [2006], 512 E. State St., Ithaca, NY 14850; \$35).

Taking the Initiative

In Social Work

Back in the day your INITIATIVES' editor was involved with groups asserting rights for the unemployed and those on welfare. It was a temptation in those days to say that social workers were agents of the status quo, while we so-called *Catholic activists* were doing something better. Of course, real life is not so morally simplistic—as your editor learned.

All of which is to explain why INITIATIVES will keep an eye on the School of Social Work at St. Catherine's College and the University of St. Thomas (2115 Summit Ave. #SCB201, St. Paul, MN 55105; www.stthomas.edu/socialwork). The school is hosting a June 3-6, 2007 conference on "Social Work for Social Justice." Participants can earn 11 CEUs.

Students at the school (undergrads and grad students) also have a unique opportunity to concentrate in Catholic social thought. There are four courses specifically about social work and social justice. The theme will be part of other courses at the school too. (*Catholic Spirit*, 2/15/07)

INITIATIVES now kibitzes: the School of Social Work might compliment its new, fully accredited program by adding two or three workaday Christians to an advisory board that already includes two students and three Church employees.

Taking the Initiative

In Social Science

"We have to break down the barriers between our contemporary culture of science...and the domain of spirit," says Charles Taylor, winner of the 2007 Templeton Prize for Progress toward Research or Discoveries about Spiritual Realities. The sledgehammer must be

applied not only to the wall between religion and natural science but also that between religion and the social sciences, says Taylor.

The John Templeton Foundation (300 Conshohacken Rd. #500, West Conshohacken, PA 19428; www.templeton.org) sets its award to exceed the highest Nobel Award. Taylor, who is from Quebec and who currently lectures at Northwestern University, receives about \$1.5million. (*Christian Century* [4/3/07], 104 S. Michigan Ave. #700, Chicago, IL 60603 and *N.Y. Times*, 3/24/07)

Taylor's first book in 1964 was a criticism of behavioral psychology and its tendency to leave out spiritual aspirations or the quest for meaning. His newest book is *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press [2007], 79 Garden St., Cambridge, MA 02138).

In *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Harvard University Press [1992]; \$26.50) Taylor cautions against the notion of self-fulfillment through one's work and lifestyle. The problem isn't selfishness exactly. It's not just that today's workers "sacrifice their love relationships and the care of their children to pursue their careers. Something like this has perhaps always existed. The point is that today many people feel *called* to do this."

Does Catholicism, INITIATIVES wonders, have a compelling alternative to careerism? If so, where would a young adult Catholic hear about a holistic spirituality of work?

Taking the Initiative

In Labor Relations

Ed Marciniak (1917-2004), a founder of our National Center for the Laity, once popped off. A woman religious, speaking at a conference, decried sweatshops and other exploitative labor conditions in Latin America. She detailed how her religious order, using a stock proxy tactic and more, was pressuring U.S. companies to use their influence with their subcontractors in Latin America.

Marciniak, pulling some clippings from his well-worn briefcase, asked a question: Why is your religious order violating the Catholic doctrine on labor at its hospital in Arizona?

Unite Here (744 N. Fourth St., Milwaukee, WI 53203), a union which represents laundry workers, wants to improve safety and increase wages at Superior Health Linens (7905 Syene Rd., Madison, WI 53713). It

so happens that Superior's largest customer is St. Mary's Hospital (707 S. Mills St., Madison, WI 53715), affiliated with Franciscan Sisters of Mary.

So what happened when workers approached St. Mary's for help in countering sweatshop conditions? St. Mary's sought an injunction to keep the workers off its property. (*Union Labor News* [3/07], 1602 S. Park St., Madison, WI 53715)

The adversarial method is part of U.S. law and business culture. It has its place in advancing justice. But, in INITIATIVES opinion, unions sometimes show an adversarial side before they have a relationship with the other parties. And certainly many businesses, including Church-owned businesses, are adversarial toward workers long before and long after it serves the common good.

Can INITIATIVES' readers supply some examples of U.S. religious orders assisting workers and negotiating fairly (which doesn't mean wimpishly) inside or around their own hospitals, schools, nursing homes or retreat centers?

North American Spirituality

Archbishop Edward Hanna (1860-1944)

"If I can help you to be apostles of the things that are worthwhile, if I can help you to rise above the race for power and live for the things that never die, I shall be happy," Hanna told San Francisco lay leaders upon becoming their archbishop in 1915.

Hanna had been on the San Francisco scene since 1912, arriving from Rochester with a reputation as a gifted confessor, a scholar and a friend of immigrants, particularly Italian-Americans. Hanna, as describes Fr. Richard Gribble, CSC in a flattering biography (*An Archbishop for the People*, Paulist Press [2006] 997 Macarthur Blvd., Mahwah, NJ 07430; \$24.95), for 20 years served on numerous civic and ecumenical committees dealing with legal aid, labor relations, education, immigration policy, child welfare and more. All the while Hanna administered a growing diocese, paying special attention to his seminary, Catholic schools and clergy morale. Hanna, who was once blacklisted by the Vatican over alleged modernist views, was also one of the first chairs of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, now called the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Hanna often stated the Catholic doctrine on labor, as in a radio address during a longshoreman's strike in the Pacific ports: "We believe in the right of the workingman to organize within their vocations, and to choose their representatives and to bargain collectively with their employers. [Further], the bargain cannot be just unless the human character of the worker is fully recognized [and] the wages and conditions...make it [possible] for the worker to support a family in reasonable and frugal comfort." Hanna backed up his teaching by serving on many wage arbitration boards, where small details were negotiated. The outcome, by the way, did not precisely match the initial demands of striking workers because, as Hanna also explained, workers have duties; employers and investors have rights and "the mighty operations of industry must go on" for the sake of the common good.

A U.S. bishop today would not consider his time well spent serving as an equal on civic committees, ploddingly designing charitable efforts and municipal policy. Yet, as U.S. Catholics think about how to recover some respect for our episcopate, Hanna's example is suggestive.

North American Spirituality

Fr. Louis Putz, CSC (1909-1998)

Specialized Catholic Action, begun in 1913 by Cardinal Joseph Cardijn of Belgium, was for decades a successful, laity-centered formation movement among youth and young adults. It produced worldwide networks of small groups, including the Young Christian Workers, the Young Christian Students, the Christian Family Movement and more. Vatican II in its *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* "earnestly endorses" the movement.

Putz is among the handful of leaders who brought this form of Catholic Action to the U.S. A new book, *You Are Church: the Life and Times of Louis J. Putz, CSC* by Bob Ghelardi (Goal QPC [2006], 12B Manor Pky., Salem, NH 03079; \$15), provides interesting information about Putz' early life. Uniquely among the U.S. leaders, Putz had direct exposure to the Cardijn movement and to pre-Vatican II theologians during his studies and parish work in Paris.

Escaping the horror of Nazi Europe, Putz settled at the University of Notre Dame and in 1939 he convened the first student cell in the U.S., with undergrads Martin McLaughlin, Jim

Cunningham, Burnie Bauer, Gene Giessler and Julian Pleasants.

Cells used the Social Inquiry Method, or in Europe the “Review of Life.” The participants, sometimes called Jocists (a French/Flemish acronym for *Jeunesse Ouvriere Chretienne*), might address a set question about ethics or relationships to two or three fellow workers or students during the week. Then at the section meeting they would share their information about work life, culture, race, sexuality and the like. **Observe.**

The cell leader, a fellow student or worker, would gradually turn the conversation: What should be happening at work or in the neighborhood? **Judge.**

The dynamic of the meeting is an enabling tension between what participants observe at work or school and what they believe should happen. The tension evokes an apostolic impulse to improve matters. **Act.**

At the conclusion of the meeting a chaplain, until then quiet, reflects on some aspect of Scripture or Catholic social doctrine.

Catholic Action, says *You Are Church*, seeks “the correct and best solution” to a situation “through the interaction inside [a small] group and between it and its environment.” The *Christian thing to do* is “unknown at the start of the inquiry.” This Inquiry Method contrasts with a top-down attitude by which it is enough to proclaim dogma and moral principles. Specialized Catholic Action is not relativism or situation ethics. However, it strongly asserts that the experience of lay people within their families and workplaces is essential to Christian formation and evangelization. Its special character is simply that it is an apostolate of like-to-like (milieu specialization).

When Putz first visited Notre Dame in 1923 he saw six or more priests each simultaneously celebrating a so-called *private Mass*. Even though he was only a teenager, this struck Putz as wrong. “The Mass,” he later wrote, “is not an individualistic act of piety. It is a family or social act.” Putz devoted his life to hundreds of small groups of students, workers and senior citizens, encouraging them to live the Sunday Mass, Monday through Saturday.

News and Views

INITIATIVES dislikes the phrase *dead end job* because, first, all work that cooperates with the plan of God is dignified. Second, U.S.

liberation practice is a story about millions of immigrants and other young workers moving from an entry-level job to the mainstream.

At the same time INITIATIVES knows that many workers never *make it*, not just because of personal failings but because the system itself is defective. The U.S. economic system requires some unemployment, has gender and racial bias and allows exploitative remuneration.

In 1993 Katherine Newman of Princeton University interviewed over 300 young workers in New York City’s fast food industry. Some were behind the counter; others only had an application on file. Newman recently caught up with many of those workers. Her report “on the nature of low-wage work” is titled *Chutes and Ladders* (Russell Sage Foundation [2006], 112 E. 64th St., New York, NY 10021; \$35).

Newman admits up front that her sample size is small. However, she compares her results with national data to conclude “that a subset of food service workers from poor and near-poor households experience substantial mobility.” Of the original 1993 workers about 33% are now unemployed; about 42% are employed, but not advancing much; about 20% to 25% are Newman’s “high flyers,” earning more than \$15 per hour in New York City.

Newman mentions common characteristics of workers stuck in poverty: lack of education and thus inability to *trouble shoot* on the job; fusion of private life with public life and thus overreaction to personalities on the job; coming from a broken home and on-going responsibility for extended family members; having an illegitimate child; remaining unmarried; too involved with social service agencies and the court; too much time on a cell phone and in front of a TV; fixated on a get-rich-quick scheme; an addiction or an illness. Nonetheless, several of Newman’s workers surprisingly *make it*.

“Family is critical,” Newman finds. In many cases an overbearing parent or a family member’s problem holds a young worker back. In some cases a supportive family is “a spur to greater achievement.”

Finding and retaining jobs with internal *ladders* or quickly jumping on a *chute* to another job is the major key, Newman discovers. In New York City a *ladder* means a wage gain of \$2 or more per year, adjusted.

The best *chutes* are to union jobs, Newman’s survey shows. Many of the high

flyers went from a fast food job to the public sector: a janitorial position in a school, a clerk in a municipal office, or a guard in a county hospital. Other high flyers are with a unionized delivery company or a unionized retail chain.

Progress does not “follow a straight line” for those who eventually make it. But for those who don’t, the pattern is set early. They wait too long to return to school. They stay with

an employer who, over six to twelve months, awards no raises.

So while INITIATIVES dislikes the *dead end job* phrase, maybe there are *dead end employers*. For the working poor, “loyalty to a mediocre employer is foolish,” Newman concludes.

Happenings

Interfaith Worker Justice (1020 W. Bryn Mawr #400, Chicago, IL 60660; www.iwj.org) has a national conference June 16-19, 2007 at North Park University in Chicago. The conference formally begins Sunday evening, but there are workshops earlier that day and on Saturday.

2008 is the 150th anniversary of the Paulist Fathers (3015 Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20017; www.paulist.org), the first U.S. religious order. Several events are planned, including a June 22-24, 2007 retreat in Oak Ridge, NJ and a Hecker Walk and motor coach tour around Manhattan on June 9, 2007 and again September 21-23, 2007. And, of course, there will be several events in 2008. Register on line.

Our National Center for the Laity is fond of the Paulists and their founder Fr. Isaac Hecker, CSP because they, like the NCL, are interested in developing an indigenous U.S. spirituality by affirming the best in our culture—only then criticizing its defects.

Websites

National Farm Worker Ministry (438 N. Skinker Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63130; www.nfwm.org) is an advocacy resource with current information about boycotts and pending legislation. Its founding director, Rev. Chris Hartmire, is profiled in March 2007 issue of *Presbyterians Today* (100 Witherspoon St., Louisville, KY 40202; www.pcusa.org/today). Hartmire, now retired in California, was an early supporter of Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers Union (PO Box 62, Keene, CA 93531; www.ufw.org).

Alliance for Fair Food (1107 New Market Rd., Immokalee, FL 34142; www.allianceforfairfood.org) is a new coalition that pushes for improved labor conditions in vegetable and fruit fields. The Alliance’s tactic is to pressure major groceries and fast food chains into enforcing labor standards with their suppliers.

Bob Senser, longtime friend of our National Center for the Laity, edits an informative cyber-newsletter *Human Rights for Workers* (www.senser.com).

In the late 1980s Senser made a job-related trip to Bangladesh. While there he spoke to garment workers, mostly women, as well as two girls ages eight and nine. They worked seven days a week, 65 to 70 hours a week.

Prior to that trip, Senser writes in April 2007 issue of *U.S. Catholic* (205 W. Monroe St., Chicago, IL 60606; www.uscatholic.org), “I didn’t really care where things came from. If I liked a product...I bought it.”

Now Senser stays away from Wal-Mart. He avoids “buying anything made in China.” He keeps current with consumer campaigns against sweatshops through Child Labor Coalition (National Consumer League, 1701 K St. NW #1200, Washington, DC 20006; www.stopchildlabor.org).

Sweatshops not only hurt children overseas, Senser notes. U.S. workers have inadequately remunerated jobs without health benefits in part because of exploited labor in Bangladesh and elsewhere. Thus Senser, in addition to shopping with a conscience, also supports living wage campaigns, which according to business owners associated with Responsible Wealth (29 Winter St. #200, Boston, MA 02108; www.responsiblewealth.org) “is good for business, creating stronger communities and better customers.”

To keep current on the living wage movement Senser recommends Living Wage Resource Center (739 Eighth St. SE, Washington, DC 20003; www.livingwagecampaign.org).

Greg Pierce, former president of our National Center for the Laity, hosts a cyberspace “Dialogue on the Spirituality of Work.” Send your e-mail address to his secure site: gpierce@actapublications.com.

Fr. Sinclair Oubre (Catholic Labor Network, 1500 Jefferson Dr., Port Arthur, TX 77642; www.catholiclabor.org) hosts our National Center for the Laity website (www.catholiclabor.org/NCL.htm).

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The NCL is a center of information, research, publications and talent. It does not claim to speak on behalf of “all the laity.”

The NCL is not a bookstore. As a service to INITIATIVES’ readers, NCL distributes select titles in limited quantities and at a discount.

Is Pope Benedict XVI listening to Greg Pierce, former president of our National Center for the Laity?

Pierce, atop his well-used soapbox, says, “If we get the dismissal rite right, we get everything right.” In other words, the Mass is supposed to propel Catholics into the world, where they act for justice and peace.

“Christian laity, formed at the school of the Eucharist, are called to assume their specific political and social responsibilities,” says Benedict XVI in a recent apostolic exhortation, *Sacrament of Charity*. In this context “of the missionary nature of the church,” Benedict XVI continues, it might “be helpful to provide new texts, duly approved, for the prayer over the people and the final blessing in order to make [the] connection...between the Mass just celebrated and the mission of Christians in the world.” (*Origins* [3211 Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20017])

Pierce, by the way, has a book forthcoming in October on this topic: *The Mass Is Never Ended: Rediscovering Our Mission to Transform the World* (National Center for the Laity, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$10.25).