

# Initiatives

In Support of Christians in the World

National Center for the Laity  
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## NCL's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Our National Center for the Laity came into being (30 years ago) during a humanistic wave in business. The post-industrial economy turned attention to the personal qualities and talents of employees and to individual customer satisfaction in a way that previously was often unnecessary. Thus concepts like *quality circles*, *mission statements*, *corporate culture*, *human resources*, *stakeholders*, *employee retreats*, and more entered business practice. This lexicon fit well with NCL's attempt to talk about Catholic concepts like a *spirituality of work*, *solidarity*, *subsidiarity*, *social holiness*, *stewardship* and more.

Back then NCL hosted a forum on humanistic management at the Chicago Board of Trade for several top executives, including four U.S. Catholic bishops. That meeting led to Business Executives for Economic Justice, an NCL project. The NCL also published eight booklets on spirituality and work, each booklet specific to a profession or occupation.

Back in those days INITIATIVES regularly reported on companies that did well by creatively putting a premium on workers and customers. INITIATIVES also gave lots of ink to books that touted new directions in management, the most popular of which was *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies* by Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman (Harper Business [1982], 10 E. 53<sup>rd</sup> St., New York, NY 10022; \$16.95).

Peters and Waterman contrast an older "rational model" of business with what was emerging in the 1970s. Traditional management prized routine and bureaucracy. It focused on quarterly earnings. It abhorred mistakes. By contrast, the new model (which Peters and Waterman emphasize is also rational, but in a more creative sense) reinforces workers' self-image as winners. It consciously frames a company's story around themes and turning points. It wants managers who shape values and who go beyond structure. It wants workers to "find meaning and transcend the mundane." The

post-industrial model treats "the rank and file as the root of quality and productivity gain."

So what happened over these past 30 years? Did the excellent companies set a trend? Has the workplace become a way to find meaning, to make a difference, and to experience solidarity?

In a recent survey 25% of U.S. workers describe their workplace as a "dictatorship." (Zogby International, 901 Broad St., Utica, NY 13501)

There is a marked increase in the mistreatment and exploitation of workers, details Steven Greenhouse in *The Big Squeeze: Tough Times for the American Worker* (Knopf [2008], 1745 Broadway #300, New York, NY 10019; \$25.95). The idea of a *social contract* or *stakeholder relationships* in business is over. Now the emphasis is on minimizing costs (especially labor costs), keeping facilities mobile, making loose commitments, hiring immigrants who are unable to object to arbitrariness, busting unions, cutting the threads in the safety net and shifting risk to individual workers and consumers wherever possible.

Now business uses phrases like *deregulation*, *hostile takeover*, *outsourcing*, *contingent worker*, *downsizing* and *ownership society*.

Is humanistic management for losers; a brief experiment during prosperous times? Has the market proven that a company treating employees and customers with dignity only succeeds in going out of business?

Or is it that today's tumultuous economy is the result of too few humanistic touches in company after company; that today's recession is directly caused by a decline in social trust among stockholders, managers, employees, customers and regulators?

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## Taking the Initiative

*For Economic Progress*

Bob Senser, blog editor for *Human Rights for Workers* (<http://humanrightsforworkers.blogspot.com>), recommends a second reading of *Trust: the*

*Social Virtues and Prosperity* by Francis Fukuyama (Free Press [1995], 1230 Ave. of the Americas, New York, NY 10020; \$18). Sener summarizes the book: "Economic life depends on social trust, the oft unspoken, unwritten bond between fellow citizens that facilitates transactions and underpins collective activities. Fukuyama warns that the drift toward greedy, overly self-centered individualism holds [the most] peril for the future of the U.S."

In other words, the erosion of social capital or basic public trust between one person and the next and then the next is the primary cause of the current collapse of financial institutions in the U.S. and around the world.

Nehemiah Housing, a project of Metro IAF (85-18 61<sup>st</sup> Rd., Rego Park, NY 11374; [www.industrialareasfoundation.org](http://www.industrialareasfoundation.org)) could easily be a casualty of the current economic crisis. Nehemiah, which has grown to nearly 4,000 new single-family homes, began in the most blighted sections of the Bronx and Brooklyn. The families were and are low-income; many are first-time homeowners. These are the very type of borrowers whose homes are being foreclosed, which in turn has turned a spotlight on the hollowness of many mortgage companies, insurance companies, investment firms, professional associations, regulatory agencies and more. Yet not even ten Nehemiah homes has foreclosed over the past 30 years.

Many sincere people, says Michael Gecan of Metro IAF, advise Nehemiah to lower the down payment, including a proposal for "zero down." Nehemiah resists those temptations, he says, because the buyers must have a stake in their home and in the overall project. Further, Nehemiah recruits buyers through churches that belong to the IAF community organizations. Those churches counsel the buyers before the closing and thereafter. Thus Nehemiah knows its homeowners and they know one another. Social capital is essential to financial success. (*N.Y. Times*, 9/27/08)

In a new booklet, *Effective Organizing for Congregational Renewal* (National Center for the Laity [2008], PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$5), Gecan explains the basic tool IAF uses to increase social capital. The booklet includes examples of internal renewal in a parish, a congregation, a synagogue and a mosque.

## **Taking the Initiative With Coops**

The current financial collapse invites thoughtful people to study alternative ways of doing business. Cooperatives are a miniscule part of the economy, but they suggest crucial points of study for rebuilding our social and then our economic capital.

Alexandria Union Taxicab Company ([www.alexunioncab.com](http://www.alexunioncab.com)) is currently taking reservations for trips to the airport or to an event. Each of its drivers is also an owner of AUTO. Starting this company was not easy. AUTO, a project of Tenants and Workers United (3801 Mt. Vernon Ave., Alexandria, VA 22305; [www.twsc.org](http://www.twsc.org)), had to force city council to clarify a law that requires cabdrivers to be sponsored by a company. The intention is to stop jitney cabs. Well, as AUTO successfully argued, a workers' cooperative is a company. Now, AUTO has more challenges, including one ordinance that limits the total number of cabs and another that limits the number of drivers who can annually change companies. But AUTO is indeed growing, from 143 drivers two years ago to over 200 today.

Women's Action to Gain Economic Security (1904 Franklin St. #801, Oakland, CA 94612; [www.wagescooperatives.org](http://www.wagescooperatives.org)) recruits and trains groups of low-income workers to start their own business, including several successful home-cleaning services. Emma's Eco-Clean (1155 Broadway #110, Redwood City, CA 94063) and Natural Home Cleaning Professionals (3228 Fruitvale Ave., Oakland, CA 94602) eschew chemicals in favor of vinegar, baking soda and natural soap. Their customers marvel at the results and acclaim their dependability. (*Yes!* [Fall 08], 284 Madrona Way NE #116, Bainbridge Island, WA 98110)

Tierra Wools (91 Main St., Los Ojos, NM 87551; [www.handweavers.com](http://www.handweavers.com)) sells yarn, clothing, rugs and other products it makes after buying wool and other raw material from nearby farmers. It is owned by 18 of its workers, who methodically share business skills with one another. The business, now with a guesthouse, also teaches weaving, dyeing, and native culture. Maria Varela, once a leader in Young Christian Students, is a founder of Tierra Wools. (More on her in a future INITIATIVES.)

Grassroots Economic Organizing ([www.geo.coop](http://www.geo.coop)), a cyber-organization, is a

resource for worker-ownership. It keeps track of conferences and has links to regional and national networks of coops.

## **Taking the Initiative** *Among Maids*

Domestic Workers United (2473 Valentine Ave., Bronx, NY 10458; [www.domesticworkersunited.org](http://www.domesticworkersunited.org)) recently hosted a first national congress for maids, nannies, housekeepers and home caregivers. Representatives from about ten similar groups participated in the congress. Workers told horror stories of abuse, of garnished wages and other means of exploitation.

Maids can't easily form a union. First, because the National Labor Relations Board is not enforcing collective bargaining procedures. Second, because maids usually have an individual arrangement with a homeowner or a small agency. Third, maids often have a complicated legal status: some are citizens, some have a worker visa, and some are employed illegally. Maids at the congress in the Bronx told of employers who hold a maid's passport during the term of employment, placing a psychological weight on the worker.

DWU supports a Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights, #A00628 in the New York State Assembly (Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12248). Although not as good as collective bargaining, it would give employers and individual maids a baseline for proper conduct. (*N.Y. Times*, 6/9/08)

## **Taking the Initiative** *On the Farm*

The golden age for self-sufficient farming in this country was "the period from 1900 to 1914," explains Dwight Hoover in *A Good Day's Work: An Iowa Farm in the Great Depression* (Ivan Dee [2007], 1332 N. Halsted St., Chicago, IL 60622; \$26).

Technology, markets and other factors soon favored larger farms and demanded hefty quantities of risk capital, says Hoover in a detailed memoir of three generations in his family. Many debt-ridden family farms failed during the Great Depression. Some recovered during and immediately after World War II, but today a family-owned farm is an exception.

Four lyrical interspersed chapters in *Good Day's Work* describe farm life during each

season of the year with paragraphs on the difference between checkerboard and contour planting, the necessary space between rows of crops, animal psychology, machinery maintenance, proper storage or packaging of grains and vegetables, and much more. Hoover indirectly explains why things changed in a chapter about tractors, which seemed like a great innovation in the 1930s. Tractors, however, encourage farmers to buy more land. But more purchasing means more capital at risk. Further, efficient tractors discourage crop diversity. They also perform better without interference from fences. That means fewer horses and cattle, which in turn means no manure and more chemical fertilizer. All of which means a big cash flow, beyond what a single family can sustain.

*Down To Earth: Celebrating a Blessed Life* by Curt Arens (Acta Publications [2008], 5559 W. Howard St., Chicago, IL 60077; \$9.95) is a similar memoir about a multi-generation family farm. Arens' account is more explicitly religious (Catholic, to be precise) than Hoover's. It contains references to the Cursillo movement, to Arens' rural parish and its liturgy. The book has two farming litanies and a closing prayer.

Arens too describes the abandonment of family farms, even as he reveals the happiness his own family finds on their Nebraska farm.

## **Taking the Initiative** *In Labor Relations*

Several years ago our National Center for the Laity published, printed and sold-out 30,000 copies of a booklet, *Ethical Guidelines for a Religious Institution Confronted by a Union*. The booklet is sympathetic toward managers. However, it explains what Catholic doctrine allows and what it prohibits in an oft-tense situation.

The NCL will soon release a completely revised edition of the booklet. The NCL needs your help! Can you tell NCL:

- Of positive examples of a union in a Catholic institution? (*Positive* does not mean *free of tension*.)
- Of resources on this topic as developed by a management association, by one or another Chancery, by a religious order, by a community group, by a business school or by a union?

- Why you think it has been difficult for union leaders and managers to practice Catholic doctrine on labor relations?

Send your information and opinion to National Center for the Laity (PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; [wdroel@cs.com](mailto:wdroel@cs.com)).

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## North American Spirituality

A regular INITIATIVES' reader from Ohio, referring to this feature in our newsletter, writes: "What do you mean by North American spirituality?"

About 25 years ago INITIATIVES attended a conference during which a panelist announced that she could not find any spirituality in this country and so was moving to England. INITIATIVES thought it was an odd comment--especially her choice of England. Smile. The audience, however, seemingly sympathized with her. Subsequently INITIATIVES asked around: Is there any North American spirituality?

The initial responses were individualistic—a little Oprah here, some enneagram there, some piety, maybe a support group. All well and good, but what about a spirituality that is not carved out by an individual but one that is suggested by North American culture itself?

With that question in hand, Russ Barta (1918-1997), first president of the National Center for the Laity, began xeroxing out-of-print talks by Fr. Isaac Hecker, CSP (1819-1888).

Hecker founded the Paulist Fathers (3015 Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20017; [www.paulist.org](http://www.paulist.org)) exactly 150 years ago. He was, says his biographer David O'Brien of College of the Holy Cross, part of a movement set on "exploring the religious meaning of lay experience, of work, politics and intellectual and cultural life." In an authentic North American spirituality, says O'Brien, "secular experience matters, matters greatly."

According to Hecker: "Our age lives in its busy marts, in counting rooms, in workshops, in homes, and in the varied relations that form human society. It is there that sanctity is to be introduced—out of the cares, toils, duties, afflictions and responsibilities of daily life are to be built the pillars of sanctity of our age."

The goal is not, as some neo-conservatives have done, to wave an aspergillum over our politics, economics and culture. There are many defects in our society that must be

condemned. But, O'Brien details, church leaders who exclusively rely on anti-cultural images will not communicate the best aspirations of Catholicism to young adults. Instead those young people will be left, one-by-one, to cobble together an individualistic spirituality.

INITIATIVES does not yet have a copyright on--nor even a diagram of--a contemporary U.S. Catholic spirituality. Instead INITIATIVES in this feature profiles deceased U.S. Catholics—people like Emma Tenayuca (see below). Maybe an INITIATIVES' reader or two will digest all the monthly profiles and outline elements of a North American spirituality.

## North American Spirituality

*Emma Tenayuca (1916-1999)*

In 1938 Tenayuca, general secretary of Workers Alliance of America, led a strike of about 12,000 workers in San Antonio when their wages for harvesting pecans were cut in half, to three cents per pound. This strike is "the first successful action in the Mexican-American struggle for economic, social and political justice," writes Elaine Ayala. Before there was a Cesar Chavez, there was Tenayuca. (*National Catholic Reporter* [8/22/08], PO Box 411009, Kansas City, MO 64141)

Yet Tenayuca is not well known among labor leaders, younger Mexican-Americans or U.S. Catholics. Ayala draws attention to a children's level biography: *That's Not Fair!* by Carem Tafolla with Sharyll Teneyuca--a niece with a different spelling—(Wings Press [2008], 627 E. Guenther, San Antonio, TX 78210; \$17.95).

Tenayuca grew up in a devout Catholic family where reading was encouraged. During the Depression she was attracted to essays and stories about poverty. She worked in sales and as an elevator operator, but spent many hours with the Workers Alliance. Her first picket line at age 16 was on behalf of cigar workers. At age 22 she was assigned to lead negotiations with Southern Pecan Shelling, which had just cut wages. The strike was successful, but two years later the company introduced machines that replaced many Mexican-American workers.

Because Tenayuca was briefly married to a Communist official (and just as scandalous, to a white man) she was an easy target for detractors, including Catholic leaders opposed to communism. She couldn't get a job in Texas and

so she moved to California. Eventually she returned, earning a masters' degree at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio. She taught reading and in her late years tutored migrant children.

In addition to Tafolla's book there is a traveling exhibit featuring Tenayuca, "Americans Who Tell the Truth" by Robert Shetterly (6 Maple Ave., Sargentville, ME 04673; [www.americanswhotellthetruth.org](http://www.americanswhotellthetruth.org)). The San Antonio Central Library (600 Soledad, San Antonio, TX 78205; [www.sat.lib](http://www.sat.lib)) maintains a bibliography of encyclopedia entries and news articles about Tenayuca, whom the library calls "La Pasionaria de Texas."

As historians sort out the extent and the meaning of her interest in communism, perhaps our U.S. Catholic church can look to Tenayuca, among others, for elements of North American spirituality.

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## Rest in Peace

*Rev. Don Benedict (1917-2008)*

In the months before World War II Benedict served two jail sentences because he could not in conscience register for the armed services. Yet during those months a riot erupted in Detroit and Benedict was relieved when he saw the National Guard. He experienced more tension between his certitude and his doubts as the horrors of Nazism became better known. I enlisted in the army because I "could not stay out" of World War II, he writes. "I was still a pacifist at heart, but I could never go back to absolutism." (*Born Again Radical*, Pilgrim Press [1982], 700 Prospect Ave. E, Cleveland, OH 44115)

After WW II Benedict completed his seminary studies and was ordained in the United Church of Christ. With other young idealists he began experimental ministry in Harlem. He deliberately used the Catholic term *parish* to challenge the "inbound idea" of Protestants, who often restricted their notion of *church* "as the central place of worship attracting like-minded people" from a nearby neighborhood, a suburb, or "from anywhere." A parish, by contrast, is a hub of worship and an outreach effort "for everyone in a given geographical community." His approach in Harlem--including team ministry, storefront programs, and home visits--was innovative back then, but is widely imitated now.

In 1956 Benedict was invited to direct the Chicago City Missionary Society, now called the Community Renewal Society (332 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60604; [www.crs-ucc.org](http://www.crs-ucc.org)). Through the 1960s he was involved in race relations in Chicago and elsewhere. He quickly made the acquaintance of Ed Marciniak (1917-2004), a founder of our National Center for the Laity, and John McDermott (1926-1996), an NCL board member. In fact, Benedict hired McDermott to start *The Chicago Reporter* (332 S. Michigan Ave. #500, Chicago, IL 60604; [www.chicagoreporter.com](http://www.chicagoreporter.com)), a cutting-edge newsletter on race and ethnicity.

In 1995 Benedict co-founded Protestants for the Common Good (77 W. Washington #1124, Chicago, IL 60602; [www.thecommongood.org](http://www.thecommongood.org)).

"Some say we come to faith only through worship," Benedict writes. "I came through my concern for the unemployed and alienated... I have found worship [to be] more significant in times of struggle" and when my fellow worshippers are in solidarity with the less fortunate. Christians don't automatically "possess better remedies for the problems of poverty and racism," but true Christians "must be informed and involved" in those issues and others.

## Rest in Peace

*Rev. Dean Hoge (1937-2008)*

Some church leaders presume that the guidance of the Holy Spirit makes sociology irrelevant. By contrast, Hoge was among those who believe the Holy Spirit smiles upon ministry programs and evangelization efforts that pause to study the data before spending money, recruiting volunteers or moralizing about young adults.

Hoge, a Presbyterian, spent most of his career examining trends in U.S. Catholicism, particularly the priesthood. He conducted extensive surveys about Catholic attitudes and behavior. He wrote (or co-authored) more than 25 books and hundreds of articles in his capacity as a professor at Catholic University of America (Michigan Ave. & Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20064), and as director of its Life Cycle Institute (<http://lifecycle.cua.edu>).

Most recently Hoge co-authored *American Catholics Today: New Realities* (Rowman & Littlefield [2007], 4720 Boston Way #A, Lanham, MD 20706; \$25.95).

Those U.S. Catholics born before 1940 differ in attitudes and behavior from those born thereafter, Hoge's team finds. There is more continuity than not among generations thereafter.

Young adults, to the surprise of many, retain a Catholic identity. Young adults say their Catholicism means helping the poor, believing in Jesus' real presence in the Eucharist and calling upon our Blessed Mother Mary. Yet young adults do not include weekly Mass attendance in their Catholic identity.

Despite anecdotal reports, Hoge and his team uncover "no evidence that young adult Catholics are [in any significant number] turning in a more traditional direction."

Hoge never claimed that sociology of religion dictates right or wrong or that popular opinion in any way determines dogma. However, God's will for the church is revealed in part through reason and science, including the social sciences.

## Happenings

A National Center for the Laity visioning session occurs on November 22, 2008 at Dominican University (7900 W. Division St., River Forest, IL 60305). Readers of INITIATIVES are welcome to participate.

The session begins at 2 P.M. with a quick review of NCL's first 30 years (1978-2008) and an election of NCL board members through December 2009. At 3 P.M. the session turns to the topic of immigration reform, featuring Msgr. Marv Mottet of Davenport. Referring to a turning point in the civil rights movement, Mottet says: "Postville, IA is the new Selma."

First, something about Mottet and then an explanation of his rallying cry.

Each year the Quad Cities Pacem in Terris Coalition (c/o Kai Swanson, Augustana College, 639 38<sup>th</sup> St., Rock Island, IL 61201) bestows a prestigious award on an individual; people like Lech Walesa, Dorothy Day, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and others. A few days ago, Mottet joined the list.

Mottet is well known on both sides of the Mississippi River near Davenport. He had a hand in starting dozens of programs, community organizations and social service agencies including Café on Vine, United Neighbors, Center for Active Seniors, Interfaith Housing, Quad City Interfaith and more. He was a pastor, including at the cathedral and a teacher. He was an early director of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (3211 Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20017; [www.usccb.org/cchd](http://www.usccb.org/cchd)), the largest foundation in the U.S. giving grants to organizations that help the poor help themselves.

Now, background on Postville: In May 2008 Immigration and Customs Enforcement raided a meat processing plant in Postville, IA. The federal agents arrested about 400 workers, who are now in deportation process. Interestingly, the plant is explicitly religious. It markets products on the basis of its strict religious principles. Yet the federal agents and now officials from two other federal departments find several labor, health and safety problems at the plant and its satellite in Brooklyn. Subsequent to the May raid, nearly 10,000 criminal charges have been filed against the company. Two *N.Y. Times* reporters, at the urging of Mottet and others, have filed several stories on the continuing ruckus.

The incident raises several questions, including: What is the best way to secure our country's borders? What is the responsibility of employers who recruit low-wage workers to verify legal status and proper age of the workers? Is the strategy of raiding workplaces, as currently used by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, effective? And, obviously, how do God and/or religion hold accountable people who boast of their faith while they treat other people shabbily?

Meanwhile, the Postville community is suffering. Nearly all of the affected families are Catholic, so naturally their parish, St. Bridget (PO Box U, Monona, IA 52159), is a hub of assistance. Donations from INITIATIVES' readers are needed.

NCL's November 22, 2008 session in River Forest, IL on Postville and other items concludes with a modest 30-year celebration featuring one or two drinks and some food at a nearby establishment. For parking details e-mail [wdroel@cs.com](mailto:wdroel@cs.com) or call 708 974 5221.

Fr. John Coleman, SJ will speak on "Globalization and Sustainability" on February 10, 2009 at the Siena Center (Dominican University, 7200 W. Division St. #Priory 115, River Forest, IL 60305; [www.siena.dom.edu](http://www.siena.dom.edu)).

Coleman spoke at the National Center for the Laity's founding convention 30 years ago. He now teaches at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, where former NCL president Greg Pierce sends tuition payments. Smile.

The Siena Center under its new director, Claire Noonan, and new board member, Elizabeth Droel, plans more events of interest to INITIATIVES' readers, including an April 29, 2009 lecture on "Catherine [of Siena] and the Voice of the Laity."

"Christ Our Hope: Healing a Broken World" is the theme for a February 22-25, 2009 Catholic Social Ministry Gathering in the District of Columbia. The National Pastoral Life Center (18 Bleecker St., New York, NY 10012; [www.catholicsocialministrygathering.org](http://www.catholicsocialministrygathering.org)) acts as secretary for several groups who sponsor the annual event.

"Liturgy, Justice and Social Reconstruction" is the title of an April 24, 2009 conference at the Liturgical Institute (University of St. Mary of the Lake, 1000 E. Maple Ave., Mundelein, IL 60060; [www.liturgicalinstitute.org](http://www.liturgicalinstitute.org)). Fr. Richard J. Neuhaus (*First Things*, 156 Fifth Ave. #400, New York, NY 10010; [www.firstthings.com](http://www.firstthings.com)) is the featured speaker.

Fr. Anthony Shonis of Henderson, KY is a columnist for *Rank and File Catholic* (141 Bruce Ave., Paducah, KY 42001; [www.thecatholicjourney.com](http://www.thecatholicjourney.com)), a one sheet, 8.5" X 14" newsletter "connecting the teaching of the [Catholic] church with the struggles of labor." Each issue includes reflection on Catholic philosophy, reports from Kentucky labor leaders and more.

Shonis recently wrote INITIATIVES. He says former National Center for the Laity president Greg Pierce (and on occasion this newsletter) use phrases like *spirituality of work*. This kind of talk is never used by working people, Shonis asserts. He wonders: Is there some truly Catholic language about work that makes sense to the rank and file? Any suggestions from INITIATIVES' readers?

The specific vocation of the laity "consists in instilling the Christian spirit in the temporal order and transforming it according to the divine plan." A significant part of the laity's "mission is the exercise of politics." Specifically, the laity must get involved to promote "justice, honesty and the defense of true and authentic values."

– Pope Benedict XVI (*Zenit*, 9/11/08)

