

Initiatives

In Support of Christians in the World

National Center for the Laity
PO Box 291102
Chicago, IL 60629

www.catholiclabor.org/NCL.htm

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50 Years since Vatican II

More sustained and explicit attention to the faith-work connection is beneficial both to the world and to the church, says Richard Bouch (His Church at Work, 4080 McGinnis Ferry Rd., Alpharetta, GA 30005; www.hischurchatwork.org). It is a challenge, however, to get beyond the modern individualistic approach to both faith and work. “Contemporary Christianity speaks predominately to the private self,” Bouch writes in *The Faith Work Window* (Pleasant Word [2009], 1730 Railroad St., Enumclaw, WA 98022; \$17.99). Similarly, the marketplace addresses *meaning* invariably in individual terms. For example, career counseling tells young people to *follow their passion*, which quickly deteriorates into unconnected and temporary self-fulfillment. For all the talk about *teamwork*, *quality circles* and the like, “modern work requires people to frame their experiences as individual actors outside community,” Bouch concludes.

Robert Anthony Bruno of the University of Illinois after conducting scores of interviews with Chicago workers—Catholic, mainline Protestant, evangelical and a few Muslims and Jews—reaches a similar conclusion in *Justified by Work* (Ohio State University Press [2009], 1070 Carmack Rd. #180 Pressey, Columbus, OH 43210; \$24.95).

Bruno, although versed in theology of work, lets people speak in their own terms. The result has a generic feel. The workers bring nothing specific from their particular religious tradition to their reflection. Instead, faith-on-the-job for most workers means individually avoiding disrespect and dishonesty while being kind. Generally, there is no religious critique of the company or any policies. There is no conscious notion of “evil in the world” or social justice reform, even among the union members interviewed by Bruno.

Workers, Bruno finds, do not ordinarily have an opportunity to reflect—although he includes a chapter on how a few parishes occasionally lift work themes out of the liturgy. Most workers do not belong to a support group

or even happen upon informal settings where they might talk about faith at work.

The good news is that most workers are not hypocrites—one thing on Sunday and another at work. Nor do they regard work as a necessary intermission before a later, higher life. Rather there is implicit sanctity about the job, although low-key and usually not reflected upon. Several, given an opportunity, use words like *calling*, *mission*, *service*, *blessing* and even *ministry* regarding their occupation.

Fifty years ago Pope John XXIII (1881-1963) announced a council, known as Vatican II (1962-1965). It envisions a lay-centered church in dialogue with the world of work. Vatican II influenced not only Catholicism, but other Christian denominations and other religions. Yet a lay-church critically engaged with the world often seems remote. Our National Center for the Laity remains committed to lifting up small initiatives taken by lay people in concert with others to improve the world—on the job, in the family and around the neighborhood.

Taking the Initiative

Against Poverty

In contrast to the widespread *It's your own fault* notion, Catholicism does not view poverty as entirely or primarily a moral failing on the part of the poor person. It considers oppressive systems. Avoiding an error at the other extreme, Catholicism says the poor are not *victims of* the system in the sense that they bear no responsibility for their plight. All people—poor and rich—must improve conditions through participation in their ethnic clubs, unions, professional associations, parishes, community organizations, precincts and more.

It is frustrating when a wage-earning family is poor, infuriatingly so when the family is cheated out of pay or benefits. *Broken Laws, Unprotected Workers* by Annette Berhardt et al. (National Employment Law Project, 75 Maiden Ln. #601, New York, NY 10038; www.nelp.org) is a comprehensive study of wage and hour violations in several lower-paid industries, including retail stores and domestic help. A

typical worker in these and other areas brings home about 15% less than what is owed because employers flaunt minimum wage laws, don't pay more for overtime, and even force workers to stay late off-the-clock. The study notes that many employers are honest, but dishonesty is widespread, especially in apparel manufacturing and repair services. By the way, the majority of cheated workers are citizens or legal immigrants. (*N.Y. Times*, 9/2/09)

Wage Theft in America by Kim Bobo (New Press [2009], 38 Greene St., New York, NY 10013; \$17.95) likewise documents wage and hour cheating. Bobo, through Interfaith Worker Justice (1020 W. Bryn Mawr #400, Chicago, IL 60660; www.iwj.org), tries to prevent the problem from spreading. IWJ is a network of interfaith groups and worker centers, each listed on the back page of its newsletter *Faith Works*.

Many commentaries point to violations by Wal-Mart (702 SW Eighth St., Bentonville, AR 72716), including *Nickel and Dimed* by Barbara Ehrenreich (Henry Holt [2001], 175 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10010; \$13) and *The Big Squeeze* by Steven Greenhouse (Alfred Knopf [2008], 1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019; \$25.95).

The Retail Revolution by Nelson Lichtenstein (Metropolitan Books [2009], 175 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10010; \$25) acknowledges Wal-Mart's innovations but documents how its success is built on skirting the law, even violating it, and on an inferior opinion about human dignity. Sam Walton, Wal-Mart founder, set the pattern early, Lichtenstein recounts, in flaunting minimum wage laws in the 1960s.

Wal-Mart stores have avoided unions. The Teamsters (25 Louisiana Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001) and Change To Win (1900 L St. NW #900, Washington, DC 20036) are focusing on how inexpensive goods get to Wal-Mart shelves. There are large distribution centers where overseas products are sorted and put on trucks. Commercial realtors own the warehouses and lease them to operating companies that, in turn, hire day laborers—all on behalf of Wal-Mart. As roundabout and as difficult as it may seem, the unions are slowly organizing the warehouse workers. Rev. Chris Hartmire, a pioneer in farm worker ministry, is part of the effort. (*The American Prospect* [8/09], 1710 Rhode Island Ave. NW #1200, Washington, DC 20036 and on warehouses *Getting the Goods: Ports, Labor and the*

Logistics Revolution by Edna Bonacich & Jake Wilson, Cornell University Press [2008], 512 E. State St, Ithaca, NY 14850; \$23.95)

Of course at the other extreme end of the Wal-Mart process are consumers who think they are getting a bargain. Those same weekend consumers, however, become weekday workers and taxpayers who subsidize Wal-Mart with their own lower wages and increased tax burden. The bigger picture behind the price tag in several outlets, including restaurants like Red Lobster, is told with fascinating examples in *Cheap: the High Cost of Discount Culture* by Ellen Ruppel Shell (Penguin Press [2009], 375 Hudson St., New York, NY 10014; \$25.95).

The fair trade movement, active in many parishes, is one attempt to educate consumers about the tradeoffs involved in discount shopping. More information from Catholic Relief Service (228 W. Lexington St., Baltimore, MD 21201; www.crsfairtrade.org).

Taking the Initiative *In Labor Relations*

Under the secretariat of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (3211 Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20017; www.usccb.org/sdwp), the Catholic Health Association, Catholic Healthcare Partners and four unions recently published a set of principles to guide organizing campaigns at Catholic hospitals and clinics. *Respecting the Just Rights of Catholic Health Care Workers* covers topics like “equal access to information,” “fair and expeditious process,” “honoring employee decisions” and more. The “consensus” document is the result of 10 years of conversations, reflecting on many experiences. Gerry Shea of the AFL-CIO, who is also an advisor to our National Center for the Laity, was constantly involved. (*Origins* [7/2/09], 3211 Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20017)

The NCL has re-issued its pamphlet on this topic, *Catholic Administrators and Labor Unions* by Bill Droel and Ed Marciniak (1917-2004). See the back of INITIATIVES for ordering information.

Both publications make a crucial point about an initial organizing drive. The NCL booklet, written from the vantage of administrators, quotes one who learns his employees want a union: It is like “you come home and find your spouse has been cheating. You’ve got problems!” Yet that reaction, the

NCL booklet explains, is not ultimately productive. In the words of *Respecting the Just Rights*: the “choice [to organize] does not necessarily represent a negative judgment on leadership or conditions in a particular workplace.” NCL, which closely follows this issue, finds that workers have multiple motives for organizing but also finds that at the outset feelings of betrayal and rejection can harden people’s positions.

Your INITIATIVES’ editor drew upon *Catholic Administrators and Labor Unions* in his recent keynote address to the National Association of Catholic School Teachers (1700 Sansom St. #903, Philadelphia, PA 19103; www.nacst.com).

A small pamphlet summarizes our Catholic doctrine on labor relations: *What Does the Church Teach about Workers’ Rights* by James McGinnis (Liguori [2006], 1 Liguori Dr., Liguori, MO 63057; \$1).

Taking the Initiative *In Health Care*

The President’s Council of Economic Advisors (White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20500; www.whitehouse.gov/cea) says controlling costs is the priority in health care reform. A CEA report concludes “that uncontrolled health spending is almost single-handedly determining national priorities. It’s reducing discretionary income, raising taxes, widening budget deficits and squeezing other government programs.” (*Washington Post Weekly*, 6/28/09)

Costly health care, it turns out, doesn’t necessarily improve our health. Some tests, treatments and prescriptions are unneeded; some are ineffective; and some actually make people more ill.

Ivan Illich (1926-2002) warns that *iatrogenic disease*--an illness caused by medical treatment--not only includes infections contracted in the hospital or side effects to pills but also the subtle and overt ways that all of us (including health care professionals) gradually relinquish autonomy and responsibility to medical assumptions and thereby become sicker. (*Medical Nemesis*, Alfred Knopf [1974], 1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019; \$11.96)

The key to lowering costs, argues Atul Gawande of Harvard School of Public Health (677 Huntington Ave., Boston, MA 02155; www.hsph.harvard.edu) is a group of reputable

doctors and executives in a specific locale who turn away from “the culture of money” and thus provide better care with *less medicine*. This point is difficult for everyone to accept, especially doctors and families of the ill. Our whole society runs on the maxim: *More is better*. (*The New Yorker* [6/1/09], 4 Times Sq., New York, NY 10036)

One such economical place, as featured by Gawande, is the Mayo Clinic (200 First St. SE, Rochester, MN 55905; www.mayoclinic.org). Mayo can be replicated.

For example, Dean Health System (700 S. Park St. Madison, WI 53715; www.deancare.com) is slowly, painstakingly bringing down costs through better coordination and a change of mindset among doctors and patients. Dean uses a simple blood test rather than more expensive ultrasound to detect a specific blood clot. This change took time and effort because initially the hospital couldn’t turn around the blood results faster than ultrasound results. Lowering costs, says Bob Palmer of Dean, “is done in the trenches, one test or procedure at a time and one group of doctors at a time.” Dean now offers its own health insurance plan; a further incentive to the hospital not to run up costs against its own company. Of course, not every system is large enough to have an insurance subsidiary. (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 7/19/09)

Bassett Healthcare (1 Atwell Rd., Cooperstown, NY 13326; www.bassett.org) likewise has lower costs. It is an important example because it is a smaller organization: a 180-bed hospital, clinics, including some in schools, with about 260 doctors. Again, coordinating information at all levels is essential. Bassett’s doctors take home a salary, no matter how many tests or procedures are ordered. (*N.Y. Times*, 7/25/09)

Are there other doctors and executives, meeting here and there in clumps of eight or a dozen, who want to make a change? Are there small groups of lawyers, judges, researchers, policy thinkers and others nearby willing to support something new? Significant change will not come merely through a national policy. It will take courageous people moving forward in small groups.

Taking the Initiative

Assisting the Unemployed

St. Francis of Assisi (135 W. St., New York, NY 10001) sponsors a recurring six-week support group for the unemployed at 10 A.M. on Tuesdays. Topics include the skills of job-seeking plus the emotional and spiritual aspects of unemployment. St. Francis, a short distance from Penn Station, also has an immigration center and other outreach efforts.

St. Raphael (830 S. Westhaven Dr., Oshkosh, WI 54904) recently began a Monday morning support group for the unemployed. About 60 people are in the group, although about 15 are present at one time. So far the group has scored 16 job offers. Its leaders include Vinal VanBentem, an advisor to our National Center for the Laity. (*Oshkosh Northwest*, 8/13/09)

St. Odilia (3495 N. Victoria St., Shoreview, MN 55126) has a twice-monthly unemployment support group that sometimes features a speaker on job skills. The Basilica of St. Mary (PO Box 50010, Minneapolis, MN 55405) pairs an unemployed person with a volunteer coach plus a monthly workshop. St. Hubert (8201 Main St., Chanhassen, MN 55317) has seven year's experience with its group, now meeting twice each month. (*The Catholic Spirit*, 8/13/09)

St. Germaine (9711 S. Kolin, Oak Lawn, IL 60453) only began its support group in June yet felt blessed enough to facilitate a regional session for other parishes interested in doing likewise. Speakers at the Saturday morning event, hosted by St. Xavier University, included Buzz Van Hecke who has written a nearly out-of-print manual on how to run a parish-based group for the unemployed. He advises groups to meet at a "hard time," that is, something like 8 A.M. on a Friday to impart the lesson "that finding a job is a full-time job." Anita Jenke (Career Transitions Center, 703 W. Monroe St., Chicago, IL 60661; www.ctcchicago.org) also spoke. CTC, a spin off from Old St. Patrick's church, offers a retreat, "Finding Work without Losing Heart," in addition to its sophisticated coaching service. Your INITIATIVES' editor attended the session and walked away with lots of helpful handouts, including a 17-page "prayers and tips" compiled by Carol Conway of St. Germaine and an 8.5" X 17" pamphlet, *When Someone Is Unemployed* (Our Sunday Visitor Press, 200 Noll Plaza, Huntington, IN 46750).

Work and Art

Writers keep a style book or two on or near the desk. For encouragement they also usually keep nearby a reflection or two on their craft by other writers. Your INITIATIVES' editor, for example, frequently thumbs through *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* by Anne Lamott (Anchor Books [1994], 1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019; \$19.95) and *Writing To Learn* by William Zinsser (Harper Collins [1988], 10 E. 53rd St., New York, NY 10022; \$11).

A Syllable of Water edited by Emilie Griffin (Paraclete Press [2008], PO Box 1568, Orleans, MA 02653; \$20) contains 20 reflections by writers "on their art." The 20 belong to an ecumenical support network.

Most contributors do not explicitly dwell on their faith but rather describe their reading habits, research methods, different types of writing and the like.

Other *Syllable of Water* contributors use spiritual language. Harold Fickett is a founder of *Image* (3307 Third Ave. W., Seattle, WA 98119; www.imagejournal.org), a journal about art and religion and he is an editor of *God Spy* (www.godspy.com), a Catholic cyber-magazine. He explains why "writing, when undertaken rightly, can assist in our own redemption" and why the writer's *vocation* has "particular affinities with the Christian life."

Griffin, a former board member of the National Center for the Laity, likewise refers to her profession as a *calling*. "The faith of a writer," she says, "comes from a deep conviction that some truth of experience cries out to be expressed." Her own experience is of "a world infused by God with meaning, a world under girded by God's grace."

Work Prayers

Fr. Michael Tessman (Episcopal Church of the Holy Spirit, 4150 Old Post Rd., Charlestown, RI 02813) started a weekly prayer chain for situations or people at work, school or significant volunteer time. Prayers for intra-church needs were excluded. "At first it didn't go over," Tessman writes INITIATIVES. It was "as though to pray for someone in their place of work was not *the church's business*. But I explained the importance of *lay apostolate* and the vocation to serve Christ in the marketplace. Our prayer chain is catching on."

This “St. Bride’s Prayer” comes from St. Bride’s Cathedral (Fleet St., London, England EC4Y 8AU; www.stbrides.com):

Managers, commuters, workers stuck behind computers... Lay your burdens down, come to me and rest.

Laborers on the soil, all who dig and sweat and toil... Lay your burdens down, come to me and rest.

Overstretched and overstressed, underpaid, abused, oppressed... Lay your burdens down, come to me and rest.

Unemployed or long-term ill, those with too much time to fill... Lay your burdens down, come to me and rest.

In the home, on the road, those with dangerous overload... Lay your burdens down, come to me and rest.

Those who never get a break, those who give while others take... Lay your burdens down, come to me and rest.

(*The Marketplace* [6/09], 1821 Oregon Pike #201, Lancaster, PA 17601; www.meda.org)

North American Spirituality

Cesar Chavez (1927-1993)

It surprises some to learn that the 1935 National Labor Relations Act explicitly excludes farm workers and domestic workers. This partially explains why Chavez had such difficulty in starting the United Farm Workers (PO Box 62, Keene, CA 93531; www.ufw.org) and thus why he so needed consumers and church leaders to help the effort.

Now the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (1221 Broadway St., Toledo, OH 42609; www.floc.com) and National Domestic Workers Alliance (1201 Broadway #907, New York, NY 10001; www.domesticworkersunited.org) have a campaign for farm workers and domestics; not to belatedly include those job categories in the NLRB but for new laws and new employer protocol. Labor Justice (5131 Pleasant Dr., Sacramento, CA 95822; www.farmworkermovement.org/laborjustice), a coalition of individuals and groups, is coordinating the effort. (*Labor Notes* [6/09], 7435 Michigan Ave., Detroit, MI 48210)

Some progress is occurring at the state level. For example, there is now a Farm Workers Fair Labor Practices bill under consideration in the New York Assembly. For updates contact

Labor Religion Coalition (800 Troy Schenectady Rd., Latham, NY 12110; www.labor-religion.org).

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers (PO Box 603, Immokalee, FL 34143; www.ciw-online.org) is further tribute to the involvement of consumers and to the ability of business to voluntarily improve practices. CIW is not a union; it does not negotiate collective bargaining agreements. Instead, CIW uses direct service and consumer campaigns to assist farm workers. Although restaurant chains do not directly employ tomato pickers and other farm workers, they can influence the small produce farms and harvesters. CIW has won small increases in pay-per-bushel through its lobbying of Taco Bell and later Subway, Burger King and others. Currently CIW needs cooperation from Chipotle Mexican Grill (1543 Wazee St. #200, Denver, CO 80202).

Immokalee’s Fields of Hope by Carlene Thissen (I Universe Star [2002], 2021 Pine Lake Rd. #100, Lincoln, NE 68512; \$21.95) gives background and first-person testimony to the lives of the Mexican-American, Guatemalan-American and Haitian-American farm workers. Thissen, who owns a computer business, volunteered at a pre-school for migrants and subsequently researched and wrote this inspiring book.

Meanwhile new books about Chavez himself regularly appear. *Why David Sometimes Wins: Leadership, Organization and Strategy in the California Farm Worker Movement* by Marshall Ganz (Oxford University Press [2009], 198 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016; \$34.95) treats the years 1962 to 1967 when Chavez launched *la causa* among grape pickers. Interestingly, the initial union members were Filipino-Americans, with Mexican-Americans quickly joining thereafter. Ganz describes a reflective and spiritual organizing process, different from some other unions.

Beyond the Fields: Cesar Chavez, the UFW and the Struggle for Justice in the 21st Century by Randy Shaw (University of California Press [2008], 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, CA 94704; \$24.95) begins with a summary of the UFW under Chavez. Its main chapters, however, tell about recent efforts inspired by him, including campaigns for janitors and others. It also describes how some of Chavez’ themes are being adopted, including the connection between faith and work, the need for unions to include the least powerful and the mutual interests of consumers and workers. Shaw concludes with notations on scores of

former UFW organizers who now work for other unions, community organizations, legal aid centers, schools and non-profits. This list of Chavez' disciples is impressive.

100+ Years

Of Catholic Social Thought

Pope Benedict XVI recently released a social encyclical, *Charity in Truth* (National Center for the Laity, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$6).

It is a serious error to enclose Benedict XVI's teaching in a box of its own, a proprietary *final answer* to the issues of our times. Instead, specific solutions depend, as he says, on "upright men and women...financiers and politicians, whose consciences are finely attuned to the requirements of the common good." Toward that end, Benedict XVI encourages the "fraternal collaboration between believers and non-believers in their shared commitment to working for justice and the peace of the human family." Indeed, he emphasizes "the duty of believers to unite their efforts with those of all men and women of good will, with the followers of other religions and with non-believers, so that this world of ours may effectively correspond to the divine plan." Further, "the church's social doctrine," Benedict XVI declares, is "open to the truth from whichever branch of knowledge that it comes."

Our present pope mentions that "Pope John Paul II issued an appeal for a global coalition in favor of decent work, supporting the

strategy of the [U.N.] Labor Organization." What, INITIATIVES wonders, is *decent work*?

Here is Benedict XVI's answer: "It means work that expresses the essential dignity of every man and woman in the context of their particular society; work that is freely chosen, effectively associating workers, both women and men, with the development of their community; work that enables the worker to be respected and free from any form of discrimination; work that makes it possible for families to meet their needs and provide schooling for their children...work that permits the workers to organize themselves freely and to make their voices heard; work that leaves enough room for rediscovering one's roots...[and] work that guarantees those who have retired a decent standard of living."

Benedict XVI expresses concern for the poor and vulnerable throughout the 3,000-word document, and sometimes adds interesting specifics. For example, "an excessive zeal for protecting knowledge through an unduly rigid assertion of the right to intellectual property" cannot outweigh the need for affordable, essential medications in poor countries.

Press reports mention influences on Benedict XVI's thinking, including Stefano Zamagni, an economist in Italy and co-author of *Civil Economy: Efficiency, Equity, Public Happiness* (Peter Lang [2007], 29 Broadway #100, New York, NY 10006; \$67.95), Ernst Wolfgang Bockenforde, a controversial political scientist in Germany and Bishop Reinhard Marx of Munich, Germany and author of *Das Kapital* (not yet available in English).

To be continued...

Happenings

On October 29, 2009 at noon the National Center for the Laity (PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; vscott2103@aol.com) hosts Vince Rougeau of University of Notre Dame Law School discussing his book *Christians in the American Empire* (Oxford University Press [2008], 198 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016; \$29.95). The lunch discussion will be aboard the Columbia Yacht Club out in Lake Michigan—although only a few feet from the dock. Reservations are required.

Villanova University (202 Vasey Hall, Villanova, PA 19085; www.villanova.edu/mission) hosts "Catholic Social Teaching and Worker Justice," March 22-24, 2010.

Websites

Once upon a time INITIATIVES regularly received a newsletter titled *Boycott*, or something similar. It was a one-stop source for consumer information on campaigns around a multitude of issues. Clayton Sinyai (Catholic Labor Network, 1500 Jefferson Dr., Port Arthur, TX 77642; www.catholiclabor.org) writes to inform INITIATIVES of www.unionlabel.org, a site that includes information on labor disputes. Sinyai

admits that it doesn't identify every kind of boycott, but "it is regularly maintained and has a pretty big list." Any other suggestions for becoming an informed consumer (without substantially adding to INITIATIVES' mound of publications)?

Greg Pierce, former president of the National Center for the Laity, hosts *Faith and Work in Cyberspace* at www.mycatholicvoice.com/faithandwork. He regularly posts a few sentences that invite comment. He then edits the comments and continues the dialogue. Once on the site, a reader can respond by clicking "join now." It is free and secure.

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Editor: Bill Droel (wdroel@cs.com).

Contributing to this issue: Bob Senser, editor of *Human Rights for Workers* (www.humanrightsforworkers.blogspot.com).

Fr. Sinclair Oubre (Catholic Labor Network, 1500 Jefferson Dr., Port Arthur, TX 77642; www.catholiclabor.org) hosts the web version of INITIATIVES at www.catholiclabor.org/NCL.htm.

Board Members of NCL include Tom Donnelly, Bill Droel, John Hazard, Phil Moore, Terry Mambu Rasch, Lauren Sukal, Frosty Pipal, Vince Rougeau and Vaile Scott (president).

Our NCL, an independent 501-C-3 organization chartered over 30 years ago in the State of Illinois, survives entirely on donations.

"I want a laity not arrogant, not rash in speech, not disputatious, but [lay people] who know their religion, who enter into it, who know just where they stand, who know what they hold and what they do not, who know their creed so well that they can give an account of it, who know so much of history that they can defend it. I want an intelligent, well-instructed laity."

—Cardinal John Henry Newman (1801-1890), *Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England* (University of Notre Dame Press [1851], 310 Flanner Hall, Notre Dame, IN 46556; \$29.95)