

Initiatives

In Support of Christians in the World

National Center for the Laity
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The Gospel of Poverty in the Land of Plenty

The wage and wealth gaps in this country have become statistical clichés. Hundreds of reports make the point that whereas our society once looked like a diamond with a widening middle-class, it now looks more like a house-shaped figure with a few wealthy sitting on the peak. Further, as detailed in *Class Matters* by Bill Keller et al. (Times Books [2005], 201 E. 50th St. #2200, New York, NY 10022; \$14), economic categories are more tightly fixed or less open than in the past. Children can expect to stay in their parents' income bracket throughout life.

Thanks to "What It Costs To Live Well," a research article posted by *Forbes* (90 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10011; www.forbes.com), working people can learn how much a hypothetical family of four (one child in college, one in eighth grade) really needs to sit near the peak and "lead a comfortable affluent life." A *comfortable family* is not extravagant, says *Forbes*. "Their goals are more grounded." No private jet; no country estate. Just the basics: A primary home and a vacation house in the Hamptons or Cape May, two upscale cars, three vacations, including one to Paris. Their necessary annual income ranges from about \$300,000 in Maine to about \$800,000 in New York City, adding federal tax to *Forbes'* numbers.

Forbes' calculations are quite thorough. However, notes Paul Campos of the University of Colorado, *Forbes* omits "giving anything to charity...The magazine doesn't comment on why people in the top one-half of one percent of yearly income give nothing to charity."

Don't dismiss this as "a silly magazine story," says Campos. On a deep level "stories of this type illustrate the extent to which a complex mix of factors—including the rampant materialism of our consumer culture, the utilitarian dogmas of economists and the decay of genuine religious faith and the sense of moral

obligation that goes with it—is producing...creatures who are genuinely satisfied to live lives dedicated to acquiring an endless stream of shiny new toys." (*Providence Journal*, 8/3/05)

Notice Campos' comment about religion. It is true that a so-called *gospel of health and success* has always infected religion in this country. This perversion of Jesus' message is getting worse, says Bill McKibben of Middlebury College. Many of the "sprawling mega-churches of the new exurbs...focus relentlessly on *you* and your individual needs. Their goal is to service consumers—not communities but individuals. [These churches offer] a reflection of the dominant culture, a culture of unrelenting self-obsession." It is becoming harder to find "a competing creed," one dedicated to Jesus' gospel of poverty. (*Harper's Magazine* [8/05], 666 Broadway, New York, NY 10012)

Taking the Initiative

With Our Eucharist

The Year of the Eucharist concludes on October 23, 2005 after a 21-day Synod of Bishops in the Vatican. (*Origins* [7/21/05], 3211 Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20017)

INITIATIVES looks at lots of Catholic publications, including ten or more weekly parish bulletins, two national newspapers, about a dozen diocesan newspapers, scores of newsletters and several magazines. Over recent months INITIATIVES saw many articles and pictures on the Eucharist and many notices for events related to the Year of the Eucharist. Almost all focused on the Eucharistic elements (actually, the consecrated bread, not the transubstantiated wine), usually apart from the liturgy: Eucharistic adoration, Benediction, special processions, and private prayers. All these devotions can contribute to Eucharistic spirituality.

However, writes Bob McClory, "what's missing is the fundamental connection between

Eucharist as Christ sacramentally present in our midst and the obligation of Christians who partake of this sacred bread and wine to be Christ in the world. The Body and Blood of Christ is supposed to nourish people for action, it's supposed to overcome self-absorption and individualism and greed...It's supposed to form us into the contemporary Body of Christ doing the works of mercy and justice." This "idea of Eucharist as food and nourishment for action in the world," McClory concludes, "is strangely missing in the hype over the Year of the Eucharist."

McClory charges that a segment of Catholics are subverting the Eucharist for their own *restorationist ideology*. The larger fault though belongs to ordinary Catholics who "have utterly failed to create new devotions, ceremonies and activities" consistent with Vatican II's theology of the Eucharist. (*Church Watch* [8/05], 2135 W. Roscoe St., Chicago, IL 60618)

Creative lay people must get a hold on the dismissal rite at Mass, says Greg Pierce, former president of our National Center for the Laity. "If we get the dismissal rite right, we get everything right," he incants.

"The dismissal rite," says Fr. Robert Rivers, CSP (Paulist National Catholic Evangelization Association, 3031 Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20017), "offers us the very explicit reminder that we need to go out and live what we have just celebrated (witness) and share the good news (proclamation)...All the baptized have the responsibility of carrying out the missionary mandate." (*Origins* [8/18/05], 3211 Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20017)

Rivers mentions the old Latin words of dismissal: "*Ite, missa est.*" Your INITIATIVES' editor did poorly in high school and college Latin. But isn't *missa* like *missio*, which is *sending* and isn't *est* possibly from *edo*, which is *give birth to*? Can INITIATIVES' readers, maybe inspired by the old Latin, send along an outward-focused dismissal rite? Can readers tell INITIATIVES about creative dismissal rites in their parish, including those readers at Blessed Sacrament in South Charlestown, at St. Teresa or Holy Redeemer in San Francisco, Our Lady of Guadalupe in San Jose, Our Lady Gate of Heaven in Chicago, Spirit of Peace in Denver and elsewhere?

Taking the Initiative In Health Care

Many religious groups and charitable agencies decry the lack of health insurance for 4.5million people in our country. Labor unions, many businesses and others share the concern. And yet, over the years all attempts to institute universal (government sponsored) access to health care have failed. There are several factors. The deciding one, suggests Malcolm Gladwell in *The New Yorker* (4 Times Sq., New York, NY 10036, 8/29/05), is power brokers who sincerely believe that health insurance itself is the problem—not the lack of insurance.

Their theory is called *moral hazard*—a misnomer perhaps. A manual for insurance underwriters uses the example of arson to state a definition: An increased likelihood of loss and thus of an insurance claim because of deliberate irresponsible action by the policyholder. Similarly, policyholders might neglect to take proper care, leading to more claims. This is called *morale hazard*.

Under the theory of moral hazard, explains Gladwell, restricting access to health insurance likely makes use of the health care system more efficient.

Gladwell is the author of the fascinating *Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Little, Brown [2000], 1271 Ave. of the Americas, New York, NY 10020; \$14.95) and the current best-selling *Blink: the Power of Thinking Without Thinking* (Little, Brown [2005]; \$25.95). For this *New Yorker* essay, he draws upon a textbook, *The Theory of the Demand for Health Insurance* by John Nyman (Stanford University Press [2002], Stanford, CA 94305; \$40).

The moral hazard theory assumes that people with no-cost or low-cost comprehensive coverage wastefully consume medical services. By contrast, people with either no insurance or with big deductible restricted insurance will prudently still "go to the doctor when they really have to," but will not abuse the system. Making insurance precious, the theory says, is certainly good for society and can motivate people to take better care of their own health.

President George Bush responds to the situation of the uninsured by promoting Health Savings Accounts. Like other facets of Bush's "ownership society," says Gladwell, HSA does not believe that society is better off "the more equally and widely the burden of illness is

shared.” Bush’s individualistic philosophy does not square with Gladwell’s opinion of human nature. People simply do not “consume health care in the same way we consume other goods,” Gladwell writes. Referencing *Uninsured in America: Life and Death in the Land of Opportunity* by Susan Starr Sered and Rushika Fernandopulle (University of California Press [2005], 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, CA 94720; \$24.95), he says universal health insurance will not result in frivolous cosmetic surgeries. It will mean more visits to the dentist. And having good teeth is not frivolous. It is a step in the process of preventing illnesses.

Taking the Initiative *In the Classroom*

Teachers looking for a little inspiration as the freshness of school’s opening gives way to the routine of fall and winter, should get *Inside Mrs. B’s Classroom* by Leslie Baldacci (McGraw Hill [2003], PO Box 182604, Columbus, OH 43272; \$22.95). Baldacci describes the challenges she faced and the joys she experienced after she left her prominent position with a major newspaper to teach in a Chicago public school.

Teachers Have It Easy: the Big Sacrifices and Small Salaries of America’s Teachers by Daniel Moulthrop et al. (The New Press [2005], 38 Greene St., New York, NY 10013; \$25.95) tells readers “that we need to pay teachers more.” Not, the authors amply demonstrate, that teachers “are in it for the money.” No matter the size of the paycheck, “teaching can be the most emotionally rewarding, intellectually invigorating and soul-satisfying job on earth,” they write. Nonetheless *Teachers Have It Easy* makes a convincing case that a salary increase is an essential ingredient to better education.

The book’s first section contains voices from the front lines. Several teachers describe their part-time jobs. In a section titled “Look Dad, My Teacher Is Selling Stereos,” a history teacher in Texas, a father of three, says “Football season is pure chaos because I have games two or three nights a week, and then I work at Circuit City...Will I ever be able to stop working two jobs?” Several teachers explain that their job, unlike many other professional jobs, has few breaks and constant interruptions. “There is no *Give me a second*,” says a fifth grade teacher in

Arizona. “It’s the ultimate multitasking occupation,” says another.

The book’s second section gives the rationale for higher pay and its third gives case studies about more pay leading to better education. The authors fully support unions, but not the adversarial model of negotiations. Salary, they suggest, cannot be determined 100% by academic background and years of service. Departing from the position of many unions, they favor incentives—more pay for improved test scores, positive evaluations, difficult assignments, continuing education and more. To change the salary schedule, teachers and administrators have to commit to a process of research and conversation—let’s say a five-year process. It isn’t enough to borrow ideas from another school district. The long process builds trust that, in turn, allows both teachers and administrators to do things differently. *Teachers Have It Easy* includes a 14-page annotated bibliography to get the process started.

One big hitch, of course, is taxpayers. Parents and employers want better students. But when those same people vote on a school budget that includes incentives, they vote no.

Teachers Have It Easy does not mention Catholic schools, some of which are unionized, including at least 22 affiliated with the National Association of Catholic School Teachers (1700 Sansom St., Philadelphia, PA 19103; www.nacst.com). A consideration of the Catholic experience would, it seems, enhance the argument for higher teacher salaries.

Taking the Initiative *Against Global Poverty*

To get out of poverty, says Thomas Friedman in the best selling *The World Is Flat* (Farrar, Straus [2005], 19 Union Sq. W., New York, NY 10003; \$27.50), get a modem and the education it takes to work in cyberspace. For, Friedman says, technology fuels the economy, which in turn shapes society. Today’s technology is the Internet, which nearly erases geographical boundaries, blurs national identities, diminishes the importance of particular cultures and opposes religious intolerance. The consequent globalization will override backward politicians and oppressive religious leaders, opening the way to the elimination of poverty while also promoting freedom, democracy and peace.

Friedman is a self-described “technological determinist.” He is called a “most enthusiastic guru of globalization” and “the most powerful contemporary publicist of neo-liberal ideas.” (There is overlap between the terms *neo-liberal* and *neo-conservative*. In some Catholic documents the two are synonymous.)

Friedman, who uses lots of little stories, is fun to read—although more so in his *N.Y. Times* column than in a long book. He is on target in challenging U.S. taxpayers and students to radically upgrade education in math, science and engineering. He tells business leaders that the elimination of disease and ignorance is in their self-interest. But Friedman assumes that globalization inherently binds communities together in peacefulness. In fact, notes reviewer Ronald Steel, by alienating workers from their particular culture, globalization potentially intensifies “rage that finds an outlet in terrorism.” (*The New Republic* [9/5/05], 1331 H St. NW, Washington, DC 20005 & *New York Review of Books* [8/11/05], 1755 Broadway #500, New York, NY 10019 & *N.Y. Times Book Review*, 5/1/05)

The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid by C.K. Prahalad (Prentice Hall [2004], 240 Frisch Ct., Paramus, NJ 07652; \$28.95) is a call to multinationals to alleviate poverty by selling low-cost goods in far reaches of the globe. Prahalad, who is associated with the World Economic Forum (91-93 route de la Capite, CH 1223 Cologny, Geneva, Switzerland; www.weforum.org), argues that the poor become more productive once they are exposed to consumer goods. Many well-known companies are joining this *treat the poor as consumers* movement.

Prahalad, says reviewer G. Pascal Zachary, “presents a seductive alternative reading of the multinational corporation—as an agent of transformation and empowerment, not a force for exploitation and the concentration of wealth.” But Prahalad has faulty assumptions, Zachary continues. Don’t the poor often want things that don’t make them productive but only further impoverish them? For example, one of Prahalad’s main examples is Avon selling cosmetics in jungles. Further, imported goods must certainly threaten local manufacturers in developing areas. Along those lines, Zachary notes, some emerging economies export their way out of poverty, relying not on little consumers but on their government. (*The New Republic*, 3/7/05)

Jeffrey Sachs, also associated with the World Economic Forum, is like Friedman and Prahalad optimistic about the ability of free market capitalism to eradicate poverty. However, his *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time* (Penguin [2005], 375 Hudson St., New York, NY 10014; \$27.95) says the free market alone is not enough. It also takes tailored assistance from prosperous countries, world agencies and charitable entities like the Live Eight Concerts. (Bono of U2 writes the foreword to *The End of Poverty*.) Sachs, says reviewer John Cassidy, convincingly argues that “targeted carefully, aid can reward responsible governments, encourage individual initiative and alleviate suffering.”

Sachs, who was a controversial advisor in Poland and in Russia during the transition from communism to capitalism, wants the market to respect local cultures. He criticizes the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund for not adapting around unique historical, political and religious situations. Sachs is nonetheless a believer in progress through capitalism. He wants fewer people on farms, more people in industries. Everything in the ecosystem is negotiable for the sake of development, he assumes. Somehow the concentration of new wealth cannot possibly cause new poverty. And, he says, some exploitation of workers in sweatshops is temporarily justified for the sake of long-term returns. (*The New Yorker* [4/11/05], 4 Times Sq., New York, NY 10036 & *Christian Century* [5/31/05], 104 S. Michigan Ave. #700, Chicago, IL 60603 & *Time*, 3/14/05 & *N.Y. Times Book Review*, 4/24/05)

Catholicism can admittedly be too cautious about technological progress. Catholicism can preach about distribution of wealth to the neglect of how creating capital tackles poverty. But Catholic social thought resists sanctifying capitalism, neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism or any other ideology. For Friedman, Prahalad and Sachs (and for some Catholics in the U.S.) capitalism or globalization is about pragmatic results; it is not an ideology. It is moral when it works; it is, presumably, immoral when it doesn’t.

Not so, says Catholic social thought. Economic ideas are judged both by consequences and by principles. Thus for example, sweatshops are never moral, even if protesting against them slows so-called progress. And *outsourcing* is not just the latest

technological necessity, but is the potential destruction of organic communities.

The caution of Catholic social thought in regard to globalization, neo-liberals and neo-conservatives should understand, is similar to Catholicism's experience with Marxism, another theory of technological determinism that was supposed to override national and religious identities in the cause of a new world order and the elimination of poverty.

Work and Art

To compensate for labor shortages during World War II and thereafter, a U.S. program brought about two million agricultural stoop laborers and factory hands here from Mexico. This guest worker program ended in 1964. Many of those *braceros* eventually became U.S. citizens and are now regarded as the pioneering generation by the millions of recently arrived Mexican-Americans.

The National Museum of American History (Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 20560; <http://americanhistory.si.edu>) is assembling an exhibit, "Bittersweet Harvest: the Bracero Program 1942-1964." Peter Liebhold, curator at NMAH, is eager to talk with any former bracero. Interestingly, he finds that many children of the braceros have completed college. The children of more recent Mexican-American immigrants, by contrast, are not accelerating through school as well.

The NMAH exhibit, including 1,700 photographs of the workers taken in 1956, will travel around the country in cooperation with other museums, including the Mexican Fine Arts Center (1852 W. 19th St., Chicago, IL 60608; www.mfacmchicago.org). (*Chicago Tribune*, 8/18/05)

North American Spirituality

Dorothy Day (1897-1980)

The Guild of Dorothy Day (Msgr. Gregory Mustaciuolo, Chancery Office, 1011 First Ave., New York, NY 10022) was founded in June. Its purpose is to advance Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement (36 E. First St., New York, NY 10003; www.catholicworker.org), through the process at the Vatican's Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

The late Cardinal John O'Connor of New York launched the campaign to make Day

an official saint back in 2000. She "is a saint," O'Connor said. "Not a *gingerbread saint* or a *holy card saint*, but a modern day, devoted daughter of the church." (*Catholic New York*, 7/05)

Claretian Publications (205 W. Monroe St., Chicago, IL 60606; www.uscatholic.org) is also on the bandwagon for Day's official sainthood. They distribute a "Prayer for Canonization."

Not all fans of Day, it should be noted, support her official canonization. They recall Day saying, "Don't call me a saint; I don't want to be dismissed so easily." In fact, what Donald Spoto writes about St. Francis of Assisi might also already apply to Day: Canonization "can be a cunning way to appropriate, to tame, and to isolate remarkable people and turn them into the property of official Catholicism." (*Reluctant Saint*, Penguin [2003], 375 Hudson St., New York, NY 10014; \$14)

The Catholic Worker Movement by Mark and Louise Zwick (Paulist Press [2005], 997 Macarthur Blvd., Mahwah, NJ 07430; \$29.95) contains a concise biography of Day and her Catholic Worker co-founder Peter Maurin (1877-1949). The book also explores the deep roots and the distinct approach of the Catholic Worker, especially the philosophy of personalism. Separate chapters are given to Emmanuel Mounier (1905-1950), Jacques (1882-1973) and Raissa (1883-1960) Maritain and others. In a chapter on Nicholas Berdyaev (1874-1948), for example, the Zwicks explain how the Catholic Worker notion of *freedom* differs from *asserting my selfish agenda*. Freedom, to Catholic Workers, is the power to do good for others. That's an idea that could really liberate those young adults who are mired in the frustrations of consumerism and apathy on the job.

Some of today's young Catholic activists are not sufficiently schooled in the roots of Catholic social philosophy, lamented Ed Marciniak (1918-2004) a founder of our National Center for the Laity and 42 years before that a founder of the Catholic Worker in Chicago. Thus some promising young adults only partially engage the tradition and fade away when things become tense. *The Catholic Worker Movement* would be a good introduction for Catholic young adults who desire to stay with it for the long haul.

110+ Years

Of Catholic Social Thought

The Challenge and Spirituality of Catholic Social Teaching by Marv Mich (Sowers Books [2005], PO Box 22208, Louisville, KY 40252; \$20) is a 203-page primer on Catholic social principles like solidarity, the option for the poor, the dignity of work and more. Mich combines his background in Scripture, his knowledge of social policy and his interest in Catholic biographies to keep the text moving. Case studies of businesses or groups and profiles of individual workers are weaved into each chapter. There are several real life vignettes like the one about a tool-and-die company in Minnesota that changed its production process in order to pay a living wage. Mich offers some startling interpretations of familiar Scripture passages, including *Matthew 20* about laborers in a vineyard. The landowner, Mich convincingly argues, may not have been as generous as most preachers assume.

At one time a Catholic book like this would have drawn upon many examples from Chicago. Mich finds examples from all around the country and indeed from overseas. In fact, INITIATIVES--which is written and printed near Chicago's Midway Airport—finds only two Chicagoans in the book. Cardinal Joseph Bernardin is credited with giving fresh language to Catholicism's regard for the innate dignity of each human life, womb to deathbed. Msgr. George Higgins, who actually lived in Washington not Chicago, is mentioned in a section about unions in Poland. (There could be more Chicago-types in *The Challenge and Spirituality of Catholic Social Teaching*. The index is unreliable.)

INITIATIVES previously mentioned the new *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, an approved catechism. It is available from USCCB Publishing (3211 Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20017; \$24.95) or from Baker & Taylor (501 S. Gladiolus St., Momence, IL 60954; \$24.95). Likewise INITIATIVES recommends *Modern Catholic Social Teaching* edited by Fr. Kenneth Himes, OFM et al. (Georgetown University Press [2005], 3240 Prospect St. NW, Washington, DC 20007; \$39.95). Both books will get more treatment in a subsequent edition of INITIATIVES.

Happenings

The United Farm Workers (PO Box 62, Keene, CA 93531; www.ufw.org) asks INITIATIVES' readers to boycott Gallo Wines. The UFW contract with Gallo expired two years ago. Since then the company has tried to decertify the union and is hiring many vineyard workers through contractors. In addition to the Gallo label, the company's wines include the popular Carlo Rossi, Redwood Creek, Turning Leaf and other less known brands.

The UFW has contracts with several winemakers, including Chateau Ste. Michelle (14111 NE 145th St., Woodinville, WA 98072) and Scheid Vineyards (305 Hilltown Rd., Salinas, CA 93908).

Pax Romana (3025 Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20016; www.paxromana.org) is hosting an academic symposium on Catholic social teaching on October 10, 2005. The event will be held at St. Thomas University in Miami. Bishop Celestino Migliore, Vatican ambassador to the United Nations, will speak.

The Vincentian Center for Church and Society (St. John's University, 8000 Utopia Pkwy., Jamaica, NY 11439; <http://vincenter.org>) is sponsoring an October 22, 2005 conference, "Hope: the Foundation of a Civilization of Love and Justice." Presenters include Art Simon, founder of Bread for the World, Judith Mbula Bahemuka, ambassador from Kenya, Oscar de Rojas from the United Nations and more.

The Coalition for Ministry in Daily Life (708 W. Eighth St., Claremont, CA 91711; www.dailylifeministry.org) will hold its annual conference April 21-23, 2006 at Fuller Theological Seminary (135 N. Oakland Ave., Pasadena, CA 91182). Our National Center for the Laity is an institutional member of CMDL.

"Catholic Social Teaching and Work: Reflections on the 25th Anniversary of [Pope John Paul II's 1981 encyclical] *On Human Work*" is a September 25-27, 2006 conference at Villanova University. More information: Office for Mission Effectiveness (800 Lancaster Ave. #202 Vasey, Villanova, PA 19085; www3.villanova.edu/mission).

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The NCL is an institutional member of the Coalition for Ministry in Daily Life (708 W. Eighth St., Claremont, CA 91711; www.dailylifeministry.org) and cooperates with several other organizations, including the Sienna Center at Dominican University, Interfaith Worker Justice, Catholic Labor Network, Peacebuilders Initiative at Catholic Theological Union and more.

The NCL has no payroll obligation. Its volunteers help network about 4,500 people and about 80 institutions interested in the connection between faith and daily life.

For more from your INITIATIVES' editor, go into cyberspace at www.sacredheartpalos.org. Look in the *Let Us Rebuild* section for articles on the Eucharistic Year, young adults, race relations, Islam and other topics.

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