

Initiatives

In Support of Christians in the World

National Center for the Laity
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A Catholic Work Ethic

“There is no institution or school of thought [today] that offers a more compelling and integrated understanding of the meaning of human work and its relationship to human nature [than] the Catholic church,” claims Bishop Jose Gomez of San Antonio.

“A distinctive Catholic ethos concerning labor” is nothing new, Gomez details. The Bible has hundreds of positive references to work. Early Christians, uncomfortable with the Hellenistic “disdain for manual labor,” considered work to be a natural part of a holy life. Later, the monasteries pioneered production techniques along with prayerful work.

On the other hand, Gomez admits, Catholicism lacked explicit and sustained “teaching or reflection on the meaning of work until the industrial revolution.” Catholicism began to articulate its gospel of work in the late 19th century in competition with Marxism and with the so-called Protestant work ethic of laissez-faire capitalism.

The Catholic work ethic is poised to make a major contribution in our global economy, Gomez believes. Not only by tackling serious economic and cultural issues, but also because Catholic social thought, as “grounded in a spirituality of work,” addresses the “deeper, underlying crisis in our understanding of the meaning and value of human work.” (*Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics and Public Policy* [Spring/06], Notre Dame Law School, Notre Dame, IN 46556)

Eugene McCarragher of Villanova University also finds in Catholicism one source for a true gospel of work, one that counters the Protestant work ethic. Forego popular books like *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Steven Covey (Free Press [1999], 1230 Ave. of the Americas, New York, NY 10020; \$15) that promote the Protestant work ethic, says McCarragher. U.S. workers already “work longer hours, are more harried, tired and distracted and dislike their jobs and bosses more.” Instead, explore “a sacramental way of being in the

world” by studying books like *Leisure: the Basis of Culture* by Josef Pieper (St. Augustine’s Press [1952], 11030 S. Langley Ave., Chicago, IL 60628; \$12). (*Books & Culture* [8/06], 465 Gundersen Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60188)

Gomez and McCarragher are onto something. But realistically where would an ordinary worker find this Catholic gospel of work? Is there, for example, a course or seminar on the Catholic theology of work (or even theology of the laity) at any seminary, theological center, business school, Newman center, or Catholic Worker house? Are there any small groups or movements dedicated to a Catholic spirituality of work? Please alert INITIATIVES! Even if you presume INITIATIVES knows about your group in Akron or your course in St. Paul or your center in Boston, please furnish an updated report!

Taking the Initiative

Assisting the Unemployed

In Catholic social thought a society is an organism. Its parts are interdependent and the whole is greater than the sum of those parts. In the U.S., by contrast, there is seemingly no such thing as society, merely short-term calculation of costs and benefits. In an organic society, for example, a company invests in its young employees and its equipment, is involved in the neighborhood and avoids layoffs as much as possible, even furloughing workers during slow months. But here in the U.S. John Trani, recently the CEO of Stanley tool products, enjoys his days on an \$8million severance bonus and a \$1.3million annual pension. His accomplishment was closing 43 Stanley factories in six years and firing hundreds of workers in the remaining 40 plants.

The Disposable American: Layoffs and Their Consequences by Louis Uchitelle (Knopf [2006], 1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019; \$25.95) uses Trani and his benefactors as one example of the *layoff culture* that has come to dominate the U.S. economy.

The effects of each layoff gradually impact workers and the surrounding town,

Uchitelle describes. Fulfilling the second law of momentum, the layoff mentality continues long after its initial impact on the company's expenses.

Uchitelle, a *N.Y. Times* reporter, is critical of both Republicans and Democrats. Although he offers some public policy suggestions to reduce layoffs, Uchitelle admits that our society will suffer until short-term "infectious individualism" gives way to a business model that looks ahead and looks around. (*The Texas Observer* [8/11/06], 307 W. Seventh St., Austin, TX 78701 and *Human Rights for Workers* [5/06], www.senser.com)

The earliest Christian writing enjoins believers to create work opportunities for converts or—in today's terminology—those who complete the RCIA process. Creating more jobs was considered an outstanding social achievement by the first Christians. (*The Didache* edited by Harold Attridge (Fortress Press [50-120 A.D.], PO Box 1209, Minneapolis, MN 55440; \$52)

Even the most competent and creative executives might at times have to layoff some workers. But it should be an occasion of sorrow, not one warranting an \$8million severance bonus and a \$1.3million annual pension.

For its part, our National Center for the Laity (PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629) continues to distribute for free *The Spirituality of Work: Unemployed Workers* by Joe Gosse.

Taking the Initiative *In Nursing*

Mary Molewyk Doornbos, Ruth Groenhout and Kendra Hotz are evangelical Christians who teach at Calvin College. There is more to being a Christian worker than *witnessing* or *trying to convert* a fellow worker or client, they write in *Transforming Care: A Christian Vision of Nursing Practice* (Eerdmans Publishing [2005], 255 Jefferson Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503; \$18). Further, they explain, professional ethics is more than following the rule book.

"Nursing is an inherently ethical and dignified vocation" and health care institutions "have a morally good purpose," say the authors. That does not mean that a nurse can go on autopilot, overlooking institutional policies and the structure of health care delivery. A Christian nurse cannot simply put on a demeanor of

sacrificial service, in the sense of being clueless about matters of justice.

Transforming Care, using several examples, suggests language and disciplines for thinking about nursing as a vocation, not only on a personal level but in the flow of a hospital or clinic. Curiously, *Transforming Care* does not mention unions, even though it gives a theological rationale for "collective action."

The Catholic doctrine on unions is misconstrued when interpreted through a U.S. notion of individual, isolated, first-come-first-serve rights, says Tom Schindler. For example, an executive at a Catholic hospital can hire a union-busting consultant under the guise that the nurses' right to speak must respect the administration's right to speak. In Catholicism, however, "the right to organize and bargain collectively is a social right," not like the right to state an individual opinion. Its "purpose is participation." Bottom line: Catholic hospitals violate the principle of participation by retaining union-busting consultants. This is no more a matter of opinion than the immorality of abortion at a Catholic hospital (or anywhere else) is a matter of individual opinion. (*National Catholic Reporter* [8/11/06], PO Box 411009, Kansas City, MO 64141)

For its part, the National Center for the Laity (PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629) has distributed all but 25 copies of a 5,000 press run on *Spirituality of Work: Nurses* by Bill Droel and all but 20 copies of a 30,000 press run on *Ethical Guidelines for a Religious Institution Confronted by a Union* by Ed Marciniak.

Taking the Initiative *In Healing*

Praying for people to recover from an illness is ineffective, concludes a \$2.4million study by Herbert Benson of Harvard University and several colleagues. Nearly 2,000 heart patients were put in three categories: Those who received intercessory prayer from strangers and were told so; those who received prayer but not told so; those who got no prayers. There is no evidence whatsoever that people can improve other people's recovery through prayer. In fact, one group of patients who knew they were receiving prayer did worse physically.

Benson quickly notes that the study did not include praying for or with people that you know. There are plenty of anecdotal accounts of prayer helping family members and friends. For

example, see *Is There a God In Health Care?* by William Haynes Jr. and Geoffrey Kelly (Haworth Pastoral Press [2006], 10 Alice St., Binghamton, NY 13904; \$24.95).

The Benson study comes “as welcome news,” says Rev. Raymond Lawrence of N.Y. Presbyterian Hospital. If there were ever a quantifiable equation between prayer and healing, then religion and God become “like Burger King, where one expects to get what one pays for.” (*American Heart Journal* [4/06], 2414 Erwin Rd. #402, Durham, NC 27705 and *Washington Post Weekly*, 4/9/06 and *N. Y. Times*, 4/9/06 & 4/11/06 and *New England Journal of Medicine* [11/2/00 & 6/22/00], 860 Winter St., Waltham, MA 02451)

So, should Catholics and others quit praying for strangers? Tell INITIATIVES what you think about intercessory prayer.

Taking the Initiative *When Buying Food*

The National Catholic Rural Life Conference (4625 Beaver Ave., Des Moines, IA 50310; www.ncrlc.com), as part of its “Eating Is a Moral Act” campaign, suggests buying “more locally produced food.”

There are more than 4,000 farmers’ markets in the U.S., and the number is growing. Some are sponsored by townships during the summer. A few are downtown year-round. About 54 are right in New York City. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (1400 Independence Ave. SW, Washington, DC 20250; www.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/map.htm) maintains a directory. Several regional groups promote farmers’ markets and sustainable agriculture, including Food Routes Network (37 E. Durham St., Philadelphia, PA 19119; www.foodroutes.org), Local Harvest (220 21st Ave., Santa Cruz, CA 95062; www.localharvest.org) and Rodale Institute (611 Siegfriedale Rd., Kutztown, PA 19530; www.rodaleinstitute.org).

A consumer movement, called Locavores (www.locavores.com) or Localvores, attracts people who buy extensively from farmers’ markets and local vineyards. Its members live in California, New England, the N.Y. Finger Lakes Region and elsewhere. They keep informed through Slow Food (20 Jay St. #313, Brooklyn, NY 10013; www.slowfood.com) and books like *Eat Here* by

Brian Halweil (Worldwatch Institute [2004], PO Box 188, Williamsport, PA 17703; \$13.95).

Peter Singer and Jim Mason evaluate the movement in *The Way We Eat* (Rodale Press [2006], 33 E. Minor St., Emmaus, PA 18098; \$25.95). Family farms will indeed keep more money on the income side, Singer and Mason find, if those farms can minimize “manufacturers, processors, advertisers and retailers.” But, they say, buying locally “is not an ethical principle” in itself. There is “insufficient evidence” to prove that consumers can “relieve poverty by [exclusively] buying locally.” Further, it is “an oversimplification” to say that buying locally is always better for the environment. It could be, for example, more *green* to buy Florida-grown vegetables from the supermarket, than to drive downtown to purchase from a farmer who used a hothouse.

“Buy *locally* and *seasonally*,” write Singer and Mason, is a better slogan “than simply *buy locally*.” In addition, they recommend buying foreign coffee, chocolate, bananas and more—with a “free trade certified” proviso. (*Greater Good* [Summer/06], University of California, 1113 Tolman Hall #1690, Berkeley, CA 94720)

Trans Fair (1611 Telegraph Ave. #900, Oakland, CA 94612; www.transfairusa.org) puts the “certified fair trade” logo (a character carrying two bowls with a yin-yang color scheme) on products from Latin America and elsewhere. The logo means that the farmer or producer received a living wage, regardless of market price. It also means that the farmer is environmentally sensitive and treats his or her employees justly. Fair trade food and beverages are stocked in many supermarkets and available after Mass in some parishes.

Taking the Initiative *In the School Cafeteria*

The Center for Ecoliteracy (2528 San Pablo Ave., Berkeley, CA 94702; www.ecoliteracy.org) and Chez Panisse Foundation (1517 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley, CA 94709; www.chezpanissefoundation.org) are gathering data on the relationship between school lunches and children’s health. So far, writes Lisa Belkin in *N.Y. Times Magazine* (8/20/06), “no one can prove that changes in school lunches will make our children lose weight” and have lower rates of diabetes.

Belkin provides a case study in which Arthur Agatston of the famous South Beach Diet tries a full-scale assault on junk food in a school district. Agatston's campaign is called Healthier Options for Public Schools (HOPS, Osceola School District, 817 Bill Beck Blvd., Kissimmee, FL 34744).

The obstacles are formidable. The HOPS team discovered that cafeteria supplies are ordered months, even years, in advance and cannot quickly be changed. That's because cafeterias get government reimbursement and must abide by regulations which, for example, help food processors not school reformers. The government also has regulations for minimum calories at breakfast and lunch, exceeding what HOPS deems healthy.

The cafeteria itself has to be retooled to cook, not just to reheat food. The culture of the cafeteria cannot be satisfied with simply low fat cheeseburgers, argue Ann Cooper and Lisa Holmes in *Lunch Lessons* (Harper Collins [2006], 10 E. 53rd St., New York, NY 10022; \$22.95). Students, staff and parents must put their trust in fresh, slow food.

Finding role models among parents and teachers is frustrating, Belkin's case study details. A PTA can, for example, campaign against vending machines in the school while simultaneously pushing candy and snack fundraisers.

Despite setbacks and mixed results, Belkin reports, school groups are increasingly trying to change eating habits. After all, they say, the change in our culture around cigarettes was gradual and multi-faceted.

The healthy eating trend is catching-on at colleges, where for over 20 years students have been recruited by featuring round-the-clock buffets. Now, for example, Chartwells Dining Service (1 International Dr., Rye Brook, NY 10573; www.dineoncampus.com), which contracts with 230 colleges, keeps students informed on calories and fat, school-by-school, item-by-item. Purchase College (735 Anderson Hill Rd., Purchase, NY 10577), one of the Chartwell schools, has a very popular vegetarian cafeteria.

Daphne Oz, a junior at Princeton University majoring in Asian studies, has just authored *Dorm Room Diet* (Newmarket Press [2006], 18 E. 48th St., New York, NY 10017; \$16.95) to inform students about nutrition in order to avoid the *freshman 15* weight gain. (*N.Y. Times*, 8/31/06)

Taking the Initiative On Pensions

The number of major companies freezing or terminating pension plans increased again in 2005, according to a study by Watson Wyatt (901 N. Glebe Rd., Arlington, VA 22203). For example, DuPont announced just before Labor Day that hires in 2007 and beyond will not get pensions or any health insurance payment after retirement. Less than 20% of private sector workers now have defined-benefit pension plans. (*Chicago Tribune*, 8/27/06 and *N.Y. Times*, 9/1/06)

Sociologist Malcolm Gladwell, writing in *The New Yorker* (4 Times Sq., New York, NY 10036; 8/28/06), reminds us that pension plans have to spread out "risk" in a large pool over a sufficient time. That is why a system tied to individual employers cannot work. No single company—even one that does reasonably well over 40 years—is adding enough young workers to support its retirees. In fact, many companies do reasonably well at times precisely by delivering services or products with fewer employees; thus guaranteeing they will have an under-funded pension plan.

So how did the current pension system come about? Drawing upon a biography of United Auto Workers president Walter Reuther (1907-1970) and on a case study of a steel company, Gladwell finds that big business itself instituted the system that now weighs heavy on it. (*The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit* by Nelson Lichtenstein, Basic Books [1995], 10 E. 53rd St., New York, NY 10022; \$23.95 and *Sparrows Point: Making Steel* by Mark Reutter, University of Illinois Press [1988], 1235 S. Oak St., Champaign, IL 61820; \$21.95)

In 1950 General Motors offered every employee "health-care benefits and a pension." Reuther surprisingly opposed the offer because he "believed that the safest and most efficient way to provide insurance against ill health or old age was to spread the costs and risks of benefits over the biggest and most diverse group possible." Reuther, who drove his ten-year old Chevy to those negotiating sessions, had the foresight to realize that even a huge company like GM eventually could not honor its pension plan.

That same year, management guru Peter Drucker issued the same caution in an article, "The Mirage of Pensions." No single "company or any one industry" will be "reasonably secure

[enough] for the next 40 years,” Drucker predicted. “The recent pension plans thus offer no more security against the big bad wolf of old age than the little piggy’s house of straw.” (*Harper’s Magazine* [2/50], 666 Broadway, New York, NY 10012)

Logically, concludes Gladwell, GM should campaign today for expanded social security and some type of universal health care. “That’s the only way out of GM’s dilemma.” But for the same ideological reason it instituted the current system, GM and other businesses oppose expanded social welfare.

In the 1950 negotiations with Reuther GM was reacting to a previous UAW proposal in Toledo by which every appliance manufacturer, auto parts supplier, plastic shop and more would contribute 10 cents per hour per worker to a privately managed fund. Workers would earn pension credits, as long as they were employed in the Toledo area. If a company had layoffs or closed, its workers’ retirement would be safe because the pool was large enough. The business owners were terrified of this proposal and immediately offered company pension plans, setting the stage for today’s problem.

For more information on this topic: Pension Rights Center (1350 Connecticut Ave. NW #206, Washington, DC 20036; www.pensionrights.org).

Work Prayers

Looking for full-bodied spiritual reading? Try *Leading Lives That Matter* edited by Mark Schwehn and Dorothy Bass (Eerdmans Publishing [2006], 255 Jefferson Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503; \$24). It is a collection of nearly 70 short stories, essays and poems arranged under headings like “Vocation” and “Virtue” and under penetrating questions like “Is a Balanced Life Possible and Preferable To a Life Focused Primarily on Work?” Many of the selections are written from a Christian perspective and many deal with the topic of work. There’s Immanuel Kant on the slacker lifestyle, Dorothy Day on St. Therese, H.G. Wells on immortality, and more.

Here’s Dorothy Sayers (1893-1957) on the laity:

Work “is, or it should be,” the way people “find spiritual, mental, and bodily satisfaction, and the medium in which [they] offer [themselves] to God... The Church [has] to recognize that the secular vocation, as such, is

sacred. Christian people, and particularly perhaps the Christian clergy, must get it firmly into their heads that when a man or woman is called to a particular job of secular work, [it] is a true vocation.”

Unfortunately, “the Church’s approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him not to be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours and to come to church on Sunday. What the Church should be telling him is this: That the very first demand his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables.”

...The official Church wastes time and energy and moreover commits sacrilege in demanding that secular workers should neglect their proper vocation in order to do *Christian work*—by which she means ecclesiastical work. The only *Christian work* is good work well done.”

North American Spirituality

Cardinal Joseph Bernardin (1928-1996)

In addition to hundreds of accomplishments, Bernardin, who died ten years ago, is best known for his humble response in 1993 to an accusation that he abused a seminarian, followed in 1995 by his fatal struggle with pancreatic cancer. Bernardin discusses these incidents in *The Gift of Peace* (Loyola Press [1997], 3441 N. Ashland Ave., Chicago, IL 60657; \$11.95). (For the record, the seminarian was abused by an improperly supervised priest, not by Bernardin.)

Bernardin spoke and wrote extensively on the liturgy, morality, politics, education, ecumenism and more. Among many interests, Bernardin often turned his attention to the role of the laity and to lay spirituality. He knew our National Center for the Laity well, even quoting an NCL book in 1982 upon leaving the Archdiocese of Cincinnati and again upon arriving in the Archdiocese of Chicago. In 1987 Bernardin hosted a reception in Rome for the NCL in conjunction with a World Synod of Bishops. Here are a few Bernardin comments on themes of interest to our NCL:

On Vatican II. Prior to Vatican II, the Catholic church sometimes understood itself to be “a fixed treasure or museum piece that is to be guarded until the end of time.” But with Vatican II, the church enters “into dialogue with the world in which it lives... The church does not see the world...as a danger from which to flee,

or a flawed reality to be transformed, but as a possible partner in dialogue... The church does not go to the world; it is a community of Jesus' disciples in the midst of the human family."

"Prior to Vatican II, the church was rather slow to engage in dialogue" and when it did so, "the basic objective of dialogue was conversion to the Catholic faith." Of course, the church "cannot be satisfied with an uncritical acceptance of whatever the world offers." But, a post-Vatican II church is "a learning church."

On Laity in the World. Since Vatican II "more attention has been given to the formation of people for ecclesial ministries [than] to providing the formation, support and encouragement needed by the laity to fulfill their responsibility to the world." We must "give greater visibility to the truth that all members of the church have an authentic vocation to the apostolate. All are called and empowered to carry on the mission of Jesus and to spread the good news according to their circumstances. Catholics live out their vocations, professions and occupations in the world."

"The danger of *clericalizing* lay people should not be dismissed lightly. *Clericalizing* the laity means conveying the impression, usually unintended, that the more nearly they come to resemble the clergy by carrying out liturgical and other ecclesial ministries, the closer they approach the ideal." Bishops and Church employees can help the laity "by listening to them" and by "a willingness to *let go* and not try

to control or direct their initiative, by not trying to *clericalize* them."

On the Catholic Approach. "Taking [church] statements out of context, certain people in our country" promote an evangelical or privatized Catholicism. "The church should return to the business of saving souls," they say. Or, the church "is no place for anything that might be considered social or political in nature." Contrary to these people, "the church must defend the dignity of the human person; it must use its influence to protect the rights of the poor and oppressed...The promotion of social justice [is] a constitutive dimension of the church's mission."

"I am not suggesting that, in the final analysis, religion should dictate all public policy. I am not advocating a theocracy. This would be both impossible and unacceptable."

"The church does not claim any special expertise in the political, economic or social order... There may be a number of legitimate ways to [reach] a common goal."

But the church is "an expert in humanity. [We] offer moral analysis and wisdom, not technical solutions or economic and political programs. The church's social doctrine is not an ideology... As a partner in dialogue with the world, the church's aim is to interpret complex realities, evaluate them in light of the gospel and be a reliable guide for human behavior." (*The Chicago Catholic*, 1/7/83, 6/20/86, 5/1/87 & 5/8/87 and talks of 11/6/85, 6/16/86 & 12/7/90)

Happenings

WEORC (1241 Anvil Ct., Addison, IL 60101; www.weorc.org), a support network for resigned priests, will host "Social Justice: Living the Legacy" on October 28, 2006 at DePaul University in Chicago.

The Coalition for Ministry in Daily Life (2015 NE Loop 410, San Antonio, TX 78217; www.dailylifeministry.org) holds its annual conference April 13-15, 2007 in Cleveland. Our National Center for the Laity is a CMDL partner and a co-sponsor of the conference.

Websites

The Rank and File Catholic, an occasional newsletter, comes in hard copy but publisher David Grief prefers to send a cyber-copy. Send your e-mail address to dmgrief@peoplepc.com.

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

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.

The National Center for the Laity exists:

- As a catalyst to keep alive the discussion of church-laity-world provoked by Vatican II and the 1977 *Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern*, reprinted in *Full-Time Christians* by Bill Droel (National Center for the Laity, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$8.25)
- As a facilitator of a network of people and institutions that search for a spirituality that grows out of daily occupations and professions.
- As a ginger group to invigorate parishes, schools, agencies and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, encouraging them to sponsor conferences, retreats and support groups on the connection between work and the Christian life.
- As a center of information on the role of the Christian in the world; specifically by publishing the acclaimed INITIATIVES newsletter and by assisting others in writing and research on church and world.