Initiatives

In Support of Christians in the World

National Center for the Laity
PO Box 291102
Chicago, IL 60629
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NCL's 30th Anniversary

In Advent 1977 several prominent Chicago Catholics, including priests, women religious, journalists, labor leaders, business executives, lawyers, homemakers and more, issued a four-page *Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern*. The reaction, both in the U.S. and overseas, was so substantial that the *Declaration*'s signers opened a little office in 1978 at Mundelein College, now part of Loyola University. They named that small space and a mailbox the *National Center for the Laity*.

The NCL's first task was to answer all the letters, statements and requests for reprints of the *Declaration*. In 1978 the NCL also planned a founding convention, which subsequently occurred at the University of Notre Dame.

The NCL says work (be it on the job, around the home or in the neighborhood; be it paid or not) is the place for spirituality, ministry, Christian service, evangelization and the like. Work, says NCL, does not have to somehow be additionally spiritualized. It is already the milieu for God's creation and redemption.

Believe it or not, our NCL is controversial.

For example, NCL has been seen in suspicious company, including with support groups for executives, with nurses picketing a Catholic hospital, with some workers who object to handling a specific product, with bankers who value neighborhood diversity over the bottom line, and even with young adults disaffected from the church.

Further, the NCL is controversial because it says that young adults are the church in the world. Yet because parish life is understandably preoccupied with internal lay ministry and finances, young adults' concern about careers and relationships are lost to most parish agendas.

To top off its controversial posture, the NCL champions the competence of lay people, who through baptism and Christian formation are the *inside* experts at applying Catholic teaching to complicated situations in social policy, business ethics and electoral politics. Bishops and their employees undermine the laity, says

NCL, whenever (except in emergencies) they support a specific partisan policy or endorse a political candidate, as if a Church employee's judgment is morally superior.

Distinctions can be overdrawn. The NCL does not favor a two-tiered church in which Church employees stay in the chapel and lay people head to the marketplace. All baptized people are *laity*, in the sense that all have responsibility for the world. There is certainly a social justice role for priests and other employees. Likewise, the NCL welcomes non-ordained or non-vowed Christians to rightfully minister inside the Church.

The NCL simply says that workers will better apply their Catholicism on the job, around the home and in the neighborhood when bishops and other Church employees teach Catholic principles and refrain from specificity about candidates or partisan policies.

As part of its anniversary celebration, NCL recently hosted a four-day consultation on faith and work in cooperation with the Coalition for Ministry in Daily Life (2015 NE Loop 410, San Antonio, TX 78217; www.dailylifeministry.org). Several young adults were panelists, reflecting on their careers in business, labor relations and politics. Keynote presenters included Rev. Martin Marty and Kathleen Kennedy Townsend.

Reports from this 30th anniversary gathering will appear in subsequent issues of INITIATIVES. The original *Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern* is reprinted in *Church, Chicago Style* edited by Bill Droel (National Center for the Laity [2008], PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL; \$12). A few copies remain of *Challenge to the Laity*, a book about the NCL's March 1979 founding convention.

Taking the Initiative

On Vocations

Students in some high schools and in colleges *get* the idea "that work should be personally fulfilling," writes Lisa Belkin (*N.Y. Times*, 4/17/08). This notion, as it spreads, is an improvement to our work culture.

However, as Belkin notes, many young adults are so fixated on *meaningfulness* and *passion* they procrastinate or don't easily move past setbacks. For example, a recent college grad judges a prospective job to be a compromise of her true passion. Thus she spends her time at home, not doing much of anything. Another grad is a finalist for *the perfect job*, but is bypassed for another candidate. She too gives up on the tedium of job hunting.

Belkin interviews Daniel Pink, author of *The Adventures of Johnny Bunko: the Last Career Guide You'll Ever Need* (Riverhead Books [2008], 375 Hudson St., New York, NY 10014; \$15): It's not a bad thing for young adults to want jobs "they are passionate about, [and that] they find fulfilling... But it's also not a complete message... Yes, work should be fulfilling, but there are different kinds of fulfillment."

Pink outlines a balanced approach to job-hunting in chapters like "It's Not About You" and "Persistence Trumps Talent."

Are there any vocational materials or programs from a Catholic perspective that present the complexities of matching one's ideals to the world's realities? Let INITIATIVES know.

Taking the Initiative

Against Poverty

Through Opportunity NYC (City Hall, 260 Broadway, New York, NY 10007; www.nyc.gov), poor families can open a no fees account at one of eight banks or credit unions. The account has ATM privileges and no minimum balance. In addition Opportunity NYC deposits \$50 in each account. There are six agencies, including Catholic Charities, funneling families to this program.

If we are serious about addressing poverty, says Mayor Michael Bloomberg, "we have to be serious about helping people fix the smaller problems that contribute to [poverty]... Lower income families often pay [too] much for basic financial services like cashing a check."

Opportunity NYC is different from government programs that provide basics, like food or health care. This program helps people get ahead of the game by avoiding debt and potentially earning capital. It is also unique because its funding partially comes from four foundations, a business, and from the mayor's own wallet.

Are there other social policies that pay people to do good? Do such programs work? Is it ok to give people or institutions financial incentives for what they should be doing anyway? Please inform INITIATIVES. In the meantime INITIATIVES will read a book about the incentive approach, Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth and Happiness by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein (Yale University Press [2008], PO Box 209040, New Haven, CT 06520; \$26). Even though the book jacket features two elephants and even though the word incentive is associated with Republicans, INITIATIVES hears that this book appeals to a variety of social policy thinkers.

Taking the Initiative

For Vets

Warrior To Citizen (Humphrey Institute, 301 19th Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55455; www.publicwork.org) is a church-based program to assist returning veterans with job training, social services, marriage preparation or counseling and more. A parish can host as few as two sessions. The national organizer is Dennis Donovan, known to INITIATIVES as a leader who has creatively resourced Catholic schools.

The National Theatre Workshop of the Handicapped (96 Church St., Belfast, ME 04915; www.ntwh.org) sponsors a summer workshop for wounded veterans. They enjoy one another's company, learn how to write, using their own story as source material, and even perform a skit based on their writing. (National Catholic Reporter [1/25/08], PO Box 411009, Kansas City, MO 64141)

NTWH is led by Bro. Rick Curry, SJ. Other Jesuits serve on its board. It has a second office in Manhattan.

INITIATIVES will appreciate reports from readers about programs for our veterans, including local reports from VFW chapters.

Taking the Initiative

For Kosher

Rabbi Morris Allen (Beth Jacob Congregation, 1179 Victoria Curve, Mendota Heights, MN 55118; http://rabbimorrisallen2.blogspot.com) says kosher (meaning *suitable* or *fit*) is more than a ritual process. It has an ethical dimension. That is, Allen (like previous Jewish teachers) cries

hypocrisy when people get their rubrics correct but their behavior wrong.

Allen's message is only mildly controversial from the bima. But then he got involved in hechsher tzedek (meaning *justice certification*), a movement that applies the kosher law about humane treatment of creatures to workers in meat processing plants. After asserting that workers cannot be exploited, Allen got heavy criticism; especially when the concept is applied to the largest and strictest kosher plant in the U.S., Agriprocessors Inc. (220 N. West St., Postville, IA 52162).

Postville is on U.S. 52, about 40 miles south of Minnesota. U.S. 52, which thrice crosses the Mississippi River, is a few blocks from Allen's synagogue.

On May 12, 2008 Immigration and Customs Enforcement, a division of the Department of Homeland Security, came to Postville and arrested nearly 400 workers at Agriprocessors. The federal agents then discovered that some workers were teenagers even though Iowa law prohibits anyone under 18 in meatpacking plants. Shifts at Agriprocessors were 12-hours or more, six days per week, with no overtime pay.

Sonia Parras Konrad (515 28th St. #104, Des Moines, IA 50312) is representing several of the workers, trying to keep families together. Most of the workers, however, will soon be deported. (*Washington Post Weekly*, 6/1/08; *National Catholic Reporter* [6/13/08], PO Box 411009, Kansas City, MO 64141; *Wall St. Journal*, 7/1/08; *Kansas City Star*, 7/28/08 and *N.Y. Times*, 7/12 & 7/27 & 7/28/08)

Is there a hechsher tzedek movement in Catholicism, INITIATIVES wonders? Catholics aware that the liturgy (meaning the work of the people) is efficacious not because directives about gestures and phrases are observed but because the worshippers practice justice during the week? Pope John Paul II (1920-2005), for example, calls attention to the presumed continuity between the Eucharist on the altar and the dignity of work: The offertory bread refers not only to baked dough, or even to all the food that sustains our bodies. It is also "the bread of science and progress, civilization and culture." The wine represents all that is harvested by migrants, transported by teamsters, stocked by grocers and also the fruit of justice as negotiated daily by lawyers, police officers, civic leaders and legislators.

Unsurprisingly, there is a Catholic angle to the Postville story. The immigrants are

Catholic, mostly from Guatemala and also from Mexico. Their church, St. Bridget (PO Box U, Monona, IA 52159) is a hub of spiritual comfort and physical assistance. In fact, the parish—its old timers and new arrivals—has already raised and distributed over \$500,000 in relief supplies. The former pastor, Fr. Paul Ouderkirk, walked away from an out-of-town retirement to lend a hand. The parish administrator, Sr. Mary McCauley, RSM, is coordinating several programs and is involved with immigration reform efforts. Bishop Jerome Hanus, OSB of the Archdiocese of Dubuque affirms St. Bridget's efforts.

Catholicism's credibility is low in the wake of recent scandals. INITIATIVES hears that some U.S. Catholic leaders, including several bishops, think that clear support for the dignity of immigrant workers will dispel some negativity about the church and will build a base among a growing and natural constituency. Not all U.S. Catholics are on board with the strategy, but it has the feel of a long-term winner.

For educational and lobbying resources on the topic contact Justice for Immigrants Campaign (3211 Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20017; www.justiceforimmigrants.org). For background on the tensions between new arrivals and older residents in Midwest towns try *Caught in the Middle* by Richard Longworth (Bloomsbury [2008], 175 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10010; \$25.95), particularly chapter seven "The New Midwesterners" and chapter eight "New Blood for Cities" and also read *Postville: a Clash of Cultures in Heartland America* by Stephen Bloom (Harcourt [2000], 15 E. 26th St. #1500, New York, NY 10010; \$15).

Work Prayers

Pray Unceasingly

Some people read the Bible with "focus on a single element," neglecting the context and ignoring other Bible passages, writes Karl Plank of Davidson College. They take "an isolated instruction" and make it "the Christian norm." For example, some people read *1 Thessalonians* 5:17 ("Pray at all times"), while forgetting St. Paul's multiple allusions to the necessity of work. Plank specifically names the Messalians (also known as Euchites or *the praying folks*), a Christian group dating from about 360AD to 800AD. They were devoted entirely to prayer (as they defined it) and were thus fond of *1 Thess*. 5:17. They "prohibited manual work as evil,"

seeing no "potential for reverence" in ordinary tasks. The senses are irrelevant in reaching God, the Messalians taught. So, there is no need for sacraments—which are the sacred within the ordinary.

The Desert Fathers ridiculed the Messalian movement. Here paraphrased is one example:

Abbot Silvanus barely tolerated a young man who belittled the monks for working hard to prepare the evening meal. Said the young man: "Shouldn't we crave things that do not perish? Remember, Mary not Martha chose the better part."

"Very well," replied Silvanus, "go to the empty cell and pray."

The sun set that evening and rose the next morning. That day went and evening came. The young man left his prayer cell and said to Silvanus: "Hey! Don't you people around here eat? I heard no bells for supper."

"I'm sorry," said Silvanus. "We understood that you were a spiritual person who craves only food that does not perish. We on the other hand are material people who need perishable food for our spiritual journey. We don't think Mary could have listened to Jesus' words if it not for Martha's cooking. (Sayings of the Desert Fathers, Cistercian Publications [1975], Western Michigan University Station, Kalamazoo, MI 49008)

Plank then details how St. Benedict (480-550) further developed the relationship between prayer and work, which for Benedictines "takes on a positive value as a means to glorify God in all things." Though *The Rule of St. Benedict*, "resists identifying [work] with prayer per se," work might be understood as an act of prayer. A Benedictine in the "fields, the cheese factory, or the bakery" is so absorbed "in the rhythm of his work [that] he makes contact with reality and the holiness that sustains it." (*Spiritual Life* [Summer/08], 2131 Lincoln Rd. NE, Washington, DC 20002)

"Working with animals or the land is a way into God," says Sr. Therese Critchley, OSB (Lady of the Rock Monastery, PO Box 425, Shaw Island, WA 98286).

Journalist Jessica Murphy recently visited Critchley's Benedictine monastery where seven nuns tend sheep, lamas, chickens and turkeys, as well as cultivating a large garden. They make mustard for the public; instruct 4H students; and barter for supplies, like trading two of their sheep for a golf cart. The nuns pause

throughout the day for communal prayer, usually sung in Gregorian chant. Murphy was impressed that a large window in the chapel draws the nun's attention "to the fields and the animals." In other words, their work "is a way for them to pray" and their prayer is mostly inseparable from their work. (*Portland Magazine* [Summer/08], 5000 N. Willamette Blvd., Portland, OR 97203)

110+ Years

Of Catholic Social Thought

Is it morally acceptable for cemetery workers (gravediggers, gardeners, clerks and others) to strike, knowing that bereaved families will be inconvenienced? Is it virtuous during negotiations for management to tell its cemetery workers "to take it or leave it" and then refuse further talks or mediation? How are specific labor issues settled while respecting both the right to collective bargaining and the corporal work of mercy to bury the dead?

Such was the situation in January 1949 when 240 workers at Calvary Cemetery in Queens (all of whom were Catholic) went on strike seeking a five-day workweek with the same paycheck they previously earned for six days. Their employer, Cardinal Francis Spellman (1889-1967), offered a 2.6% cost of living increase; participated in two bargaining sessions; then said *take it, or leave it* and never again communicated with the union. Instead, Spellman brought his seminarians to Queens and personally supervised grave digging. He busted the union.

Arnold Sparr of St. Francis College in Brooklyn revisits the newspaper articles, correspondence, documents and commentaries on this sad incident in his article, "The Most Memorable Labor Dispute in the History of U.S. Church-Related Institutions." It is a sad incident because Spellman comes off as a tragic figure, a prisoner to his rigidity and impatience—even though along the way the Spellman team (including a priest director of cemeteries and an attorney) makes innovative suggestions about moral theology. It is sad because our church looks hypocritical; i.e. Catholic principles are binding unless they are inconvenient for bishops. It is sad because Spellman exploits his seminarians. (A further research project might uncover the affect of this incident on the vocations of those young men.)

Sparr thoroughly investigates Spellman's claim that the union was communist.

He concludes that Spellman, who initially recognized the union and regularly bargained with it, knew that the workers were not communist. However, drawing upon a technicality regarding CIO affiliation, Spellman clothed his stubbornness in anti-communist rhetoric.

The heart of the difficulty is Spellman's paternalism, Sparr concludes. Spellman doesn't truly believe that workers have innate dignity, long before they punch the clock. Instead he considers labor relations as a matter of capricious benevolence. His cemetery director says the archdiocese is "not really obligated to recognize the unionization of its employees," and can ignore what the priest admits "is the social philosophy of the church" whenever workers are ungrateful. (American Catholic Studies [Summer/08], 263 S. Fourth St., Philadelphia, PA 19106)

Catholic moral principles can go by the wayside inside Church institutions unless bishops and their managers (regardless of their good intentions and their devoutness) put aside paternalism in favor of public accountably. As the current scandalous mismanagement of deviant Church employees proves, the paternalistic style eventually damages our faith.

A current example of misguided good intentions comes from Scranton, a diocese where former bishops, notably Bishop Michael Hoban (1853-1926) and Cardinal John O'Connor (1920-2000), observed the church's labor doctrines. However, Bishop Joseph Martino (Diocese of Scranton, 300 Wyoming Ave., Scranton, PA 18503; www.dioceseofscranton.org) is now busting a union, the 30-year old Scranton Diocese Association of Catholic Teachers (450 Carey Ave. #200, Wilkes-Barre, PA 18702; www.sdact.com).

Martino thinks that violating a Catholic doctrine is necessary for the greater good of the church. After all, reports Suzanne Sataline, Martino's schools "are grappling with a financial crisis brought about by several factors: plunging enrollments as families choose to send their children to more modern, high-tech secular schools; the growth in tuition-free charter schools; mounting benefits costs; and financially troubled parishes that don't have extra money to prop up parish schools." (Wall St. Journal, 7/10/08)

Martino desires the best in a difficult time and admittedly his behavior might buy a little time for a few schools. It is not obvious though how destroying a union will significantly change Pennsylvania demographics, young adult Mass attendance rates, parish finances and other real causes of the school deficits.

Martino is "engaged in a self-fulfilling prophecy," Bob Wolensky of the University of Wisconsin and an expert on Pennsylvania labor relations tells the *Wall St. Journal*. "By denying the teachers this right [to collective bargaining] and closing the schools, he has eroded additional support for Catholic schools and therefore the Catholic church."

The self-defeating paternal approach is not unique to Martino.

About six years ago INITIATIVES began reporting on Resurrection Health Care (7435 W. Talcott Ave., Chicago, IL 60631; www.reshealth.org), a system of hospitals and other facilities sponsored by Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth (310 N. River Rd., DesPlaines, IL 60016; www.csfn.org) and Sisters of the Resurrection (35 Boltwood Ave., Castleton. NY 12033; www.resurrectionsisters.org). Nurses and service workers there want to collectively bargain under the auspice of AFSCME (5509 N. Cumberland Rd. #505. Chicago, IL60656: www.reformresurrection.org). The hospital leaders refuse to meet with the workers' committee.

Workers at St. Joseph Health System (500 S. Main St., Orange, CA 92868; www.stjhs.org) want to be represented through SEIU West (560 Thomas Berkley Way, Oakland, CA 94612; www.voiceatsaintjoes.org). The Sisters of St. Joseph (480 S. Batavia St., Orange, CA 92706), who sponsor SJHS, are elsewhere in relationship with unions, including at Kaiser Permanente and Catholic Healthcare West. At SJHS they are blocking an election.

Providence Health System (4805 NE Glisan St., Portland, OR 97213; www.providence.org), which has a relationship with the Sisters of Providence (9 E. Ninth Ave., Spokane, WA 99202; www.sistersofprovidence.net) and Sisters of the Little Company of Mary (9350 S. California Evergreen Park, IL www.lcmh.org), is blocking its nurses and other workers from forming a union.

Obviously, orders of women religious face many difficulties in fulfilling their ministry within our society's dysfunctional health care system. Retaining union-busting consultants is not, however, an ingredient for healing the sick. For its part our National Center for the Laity (PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629) has distributed

all but a dozen copies of a 30,000 press run of *Ethical Guidelines for a Religious Institution Confronted by a Union* by Ed Marciniak. This booklet is sympathetic to administrators trying to make ends meet. Yet the booklet explains what a manager of a Catholic institution (whether she or he is Catholic or not) is allowed to do. As soon as NCL raises a little money, the booklet will be updated and re-issued.

North American Spirituality

Msgr. John A. Ryan (1869-1945)

American Catholic History Research Center (Catholic University, Michigan Ave. & Fourth St. NE #101 Aquinas, Washington, DC 20064;

http://libraries.cua.edu/achrcua/bishops/1919_wel.html) recently posted an extensive section on its website regarding Ryan's *Program of Social*

Reconstruction, which in 1919 was officially adopted by the U.S. Catholic bishops. It contains several policy ideas later championed by President Franklin Roosevelt (1882-1945), including the concept of a living wage, a role for unions in industrial management, prohibitions on child labor, job training programs and more.

Ryan's legacy is alive in his home state through John A. Ryan Institute for Catholic Social Thought (2115 Summit Ave. #55S, St. Paul, MN 55105; www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/cst). The Institute sponsors academic conferences, including a recent one on management education and Catholic thought. The conference talks are on the website and likely will soon be published. The website also contains the original 1919 *Program of Social Reconstruction*. Given our slow economy and the growing income disparity, it reads contemporaneously.

Happenings

Protestants for the Common Good (77 W. Washington St. #1124, Chicago, IL 60602; www.thecommongood.org) hosts ten-sessions on Fridays under the topic "Bringing Faith To Public Life." One session is on "A Public Congregation," another on "Exercising Leadership for the Common Good," and more.

INITIATIVES regrettably lost contact with the path-setting Institute for Theological Encounter with Science and Technology (ITEST, 20 Archbishop May Dr. #3400A, St. Louis, MO 63119; www.faithscience.org) when its co-founder, Fr. Robert Brungs, SJ, died in 2006. But ITEST is still alive and now back on INITIATIVES' radar. ITEST celebrates its 40th anniversary with a September 19-21, 2008 conference on Faith, Science and Culture at Our Lady of the Snows Center in Belleville, IL.

Member Mission (www.membermission.org) conducts a Leadership Institute on October 6-11, 2008 in Greenwich, NY. Designed for pastors and parish leaders, it presents a theology and practical steps for turning a congregation outward, from Sunday through Saturday.

The Mexican American Cultural Center (PO Box 28185, San Antonio, TX 78228; www.maccsa.org) hosts a symposium on immigration, October 10-11, 2008.

Christians in Commerce (2853 Meadow View Rd., Falls Church, VA 22042; www.christiansincommerce.org) celebrates its 25th anniversary with a conference on October 24-25, 2008 in Phoenix.

Websites

A new edition of *The Servant As Leader* by Robert Greenleaf (Greenleaf Center, 770 Pawtucket Dr., Westfield, IN 46074; www.greenleaf.org; \$9) is available. Inspired by this book, many executives have planted the concept of *servant leadership* into their companies.

Transform Work (Brook House, Ouse Walk, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, England PE29 3QW; www.gg2w.org.uk) is a clearinghouse of information and materials relating to the faith and work movement in England and elsewhere.

Joe Berry (Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations at University of Illinois, 504 E. Armory Ave., Champaign, IL 61820; www.chicagococal.org) is a champion of part-time college teachers. His latest effort is a booklet, *Access to Unemployment Insurance for Contingent Faculty*. His Chicago-area COCAL group (Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor) is part of a national network.

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

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

Bob Senser, longtime friend of our National Center for the Laity, edits a unique and very informative cyber-newsletter *Human Rights for Workers* (www.senser.com). Its blog is http://humanrightsforworkers.blogspot.com.

Senser admits to a moral dilemma regarding *Human Rights for Workers*: "I do not like to be connected with a company that helps a government [China] torture people." Yet my newsletter depends "on Yahoo for its e-mail and research services."

Senser explains that Yahoo (701 First Ave., Sunnyvale, CA 94089) "works closely with China's security forces in censoring the Internet" and gives the government information about dissidents. It isn't possible to simply switch to a competitor, he says, because the others are doing much of the same. And unless everyone switches from an objectionable company, a lone protest doesn't change anything.

Senser finds an opening through the *insider's approach to social justice*; an approach that requires degrees of tolerance for mixed motives. Google (1600 Amphitheatre Pky., Mountain View, CA 94043), whose slogan is "Don't be evil," is looking for a way to make lots more money in China without totally corrupting itself. It is exploring a back door: international law, which outlaws barriers to trade. China's censorship is in a sense hampering free trade of information. So, says Google, the U.S. government should go after China on the basis of multilateral trade agreements, including some specific to membership in the World Trade Organization.

The tactic is among "a broad range of ideas that ought to be on the table," Senser concludes. He supplies references on this specific topic, including the California First Amendment Coalition (534 Fourth St. #B, San Rafael, CA 94901; www.cfac.org). (America [8/11/08], 106 W. 56th St., New York, NY 10019)

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Editor: Bill Droel (wdroel@cs.com)

"A *just wage* is the legitimate fruit of work." A young adult might take a job that pays below market wages, saying that the job is part of his or her vocation or ministry. Such an "agreement between the parties is not sufficient to justify morally the amount to be received in wages."

–1994 Official Catechism of the Catholic Church