

Initiatives

In Support of Christians in the World

National Center for the Laity
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50 Years since Vatican II

The Road To Vatican II by Sr. Maureen Sullivan, OP (Paulist Press [2007], 997 Macarthur Blvd., Mahwah, NJ 07430; \$8.98) begins with a two-page synopsis of some theologians who anticipated Vatican II (1962-1965), notably Cardinal John Henry Newman (1801-1890) and then others who directly influenced the Council, including Fr. Yves Congar, OP (1904-1995), Fr. Marie Dominique Chenu, OP (1895-1990), and Fr. Karl Rahner, SJ (1904-1984). Sullivan of St. Anselm College returns to those people in subsequent chapters to explore Vatican II's main themes.

Catholicism's "long history of hostility to the modern world" provides the tension at Vatican II. A "defensive mentality" is understandable, given the secularism of the Enlightenment and the anti-religious outcomes of the French Revolution (1789). In fact, Sullivan explains, the "fortress mentality began even earlier, in reaction to the Protestant Reformation." Thus Vatican II marks "a major transition" in the church's self-understanding. Sullivan quotes Archbishop Eugene D'Souza, speaking a few days after the Council's conclusion: "The church's whole approach to the world is [now] one of sincere admiration, not of dominating it, but of serving it, not of despising it but of appreciating it, not of condemning it but of strengthening it and saving it."

Vatican II overcame a longstanding dualism that pitted nature or the world (bad) against grace or faith (good). This dualism leads Catholics to think that they experience God, if at all, away from their jobs and involvements. "This separation," says Sullivan, had serious repercussions in the years between Vatican I (1869-1870) and Vatican II. "We could simply never be good enough, we could never *be perfect as our heavenly Father was perfect*. This great gap between God and us (as we perceived it) led to great deal of guilt and frustration."

Implementation of Vatican II, Sullivan concludes, means "providing the world with opportunities to meet the living Christ." The responsibility is too big for clergy alone. It is well-formed and reflective lay people who must

"by virtue of their baptism" carry the gospel into all the nooks and crannies of modern life.

Attention Readers

Our National Center for the Laity normally requests one donation per year. The NCL's 2011 appeal will arrive in Advent 2010. We hope your collective generous response will yield \$35,000 so that we can publish into December 2011 without major worry.

Thanks to those faithful donors who helped NCL make it through a cash-flow crunch this summer.

Taking the Initiative

Against Predators

William Brennan (Atlanta Legal Aid Society, 151 Spring St. NW, Atlanta, GA 30303; www.atlantalegalaid.org) is a savvy ex-seminarian whose long career is devoted to the poor. He is idealistic, but not naïve. Yet he presumed that a 1991 case on behalf of a defrauded elderly homeowner was an isolated claim against one rotten-apple company. Months of research and more cases revealed the true mega-villain, Fleet Finance. And when Brennan beat Fleet, leading to the 1994 Home Ownership and Equity Protection Act, he momentarily thought the battle was over. Unfortunately, but to his credit, Brennan is still fighting.

The current recession that stagnates retirement portfolios, slows business expansion and impoverishes workers could have been avoided if people had listened to prophets like Brennan, Bruce Marks (Neighborhood Assistance Corp., 3593 Washington St., Jamaica Plain, MA 02130; www.naca.com), who invented the term *predatory lender*, and a few others like Kathleen Keest, formerly of Boston now with Center for Responsible Lending (302 W. Main St., Durham, NC 27701; www.responsiblelending.org).

Several new books expose the greed and fraud on Wall St. that caused our economic fiasco, including *The Big Short: Inside the Doomsday Machine* by Michael Lewis (W. W.

Norton [2010], 500 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10110; \$27.95). It is equally important to know about the fuel for the sinful schemes. That story is told in *Broke USA: from Pawnshops to Poverty Inc., How the Working Poor Became Big Business* by Gary Rivlin (Harper Collins [2010], 10 E. 53rd St., New York, NY 10022; \$26.99). The book's few noble prophets foresaw that the purpose of financial business is changing from providing credit to homeowners, manufacturers and service companies to making more money itself, regardless of tangible goods and real services.

Predatory lending in U.S. neighborhoods became internationally attractive and lucrative after a 1978 Supreme Court decision by which a national bank can charter in one of two states without interest caps and thereafter can operate without caps in the other states. Further, a 1980 Congressional act prohibits states from limiting loan rates in any transaction involving real estate, thus dispensing financial companies from usury limits.

People have always exploited the poor, but in the U.S. from 1776 until 1978 there were no legal payday loan stores, no ballooning credit card rates, no adjustable mortgages, no tax return schemes and the like. Once upon a time a so-called *respectable bank* would not abet widespread immorality.

Astoundingly and without shame, the predators are still around—now posing as “a debt settlement industry.” As detailed in a feature series, *The New Poor*, several companies fleece indebted people out of “their last dollars with dubious promises.” (*N.Y. Times*, 6/19/10)

Court decisions and legislation are needed, but a moral conversion is crucial. To that end, the Industrial Areas Foundation (637 S. Dearborn St. #100, Chicago, IL 60605; www.10percentisenough.org), drawing upon religious and democratic traditions, launches a national anti-usury campaign, specifically a 10% cap on interest rates.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) says usury is unjust because it evidently leads to unacceptable inequality. While the church gradually loosened total prohibition on charging interest, no authority exists to justify the deceitful and rapacious interest rates of today.

Taking the Initiative *In Youth Sports*

About 15 years ago INITIATIVES, taking a cue from advocacy groups like Save the Children (54 Wilton Rd., Westport, CT 06880; www.savethechildren.net), asked its readers not to buy soccer balls unless they displayed a *no child labor* logo. There has been progress in the soccer ball industry, based in Pakistan, Brazil and Mexico, reports the International Labor Organization (4 Route des Morillons, CH 1211 Geneva 22, Switzerland; www.ilo.org). (*Chicago Tribune*, 5/5/06)

A website of International Labor Rights Forum (2001 S St. NW #420, Washington, DC 20009; www.free2work.org) now makes it easy for coaches to learn the labor rights record for soccer equipment suppliers like Nike, Adidas, Puma and others.

The ILRF site also rates chocolate suppliers on child labor. Another resource regarding the cocoa industry is the International Initiative to End Child Labor (1016 S. Wayne St. #702, Arlington, VA 22204; www.endchildlabor.org).

The complex global economy seemingly makes social justice daunting. But a parish or school sports team can make a difference. There is plenty of up to date information for ethically-minded students from National Labor Committee (540 W. 48th St. #300, New York, NY 10036; www.nlcnet.org). Teachers will benefit from Rethinking Schools (1001 E. Keefe Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53212; www.rethinkingschools.org).

Taking the Initiative *For the Family*

A 1965 report, *The Negro Family: the Case for National Action* (U.S. Department of Labor, 200 Constitution Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20210; www.dol.gov), “was a prescient document [that] drew attention to...the frightening growth of a host of interrelated problems affecting lower-class urban life,” writes James Patterson in *Freedom Is Not Enough: the Moynihan Report and America's Struggle Over Black Family Life from LBJ to Obama* (Basic Books [2010], 387 Park Ave. S., New York, NY 10016; \$26.95).

The 53-page report, authored by Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1927-2003), argues that the Civil War and the civil rights movement did not

eliminate all problems. In addition to legal protections, people need opportunity, which means residual impediments from slavery and segregation must be removed. That is the meaning of “freedom is not enough” in Peterson’s title—a phrase taken from an address by President Lyndon Johnson (1908-1973).

Like Johnson and many others, Moynihan assumes government can make a difference. Hence the phrase, a *case for national action*, in his report’s subtitle. He wants programs that, while not exactly race specific, give blacks a hand up.

Further, the report says, the family “is the key institution for socialization.” But a single-parent family is not up to the task in modern economy. Yet because of slavery and segregation there is an alarming disproportion of black single-parent families.

With originality Moynihan notes a change in AFDC welfare. Prior to 1960 AFDC cases rose as unemployment increased and dropped as employment expanded. Thereafter AFDC increased among urban blacks in spite of economic expansion. That is, a rising tide cannot lift such a large number of single-parent families.

A “tortuous trail of misunderstanding, misrepresentation and destructive controversy followed the release...of the so-called *Moynihan Report*,” Patterson details. Some critics said each individual is capable of competing equally and government should not assist a particular group. Further, any proposed assistance is too expensive. Others claimed Moynihan was blaming the victim. They said a white man should not criticize black culture—even though similar arguments about family dysfunction were previously made by W.E.B. DuBois, E. Franklin Frazier and other black scholars.

In sounding an alarm about fatherless families Moynihan was not moralizing about lifestyle, Patterson makes clear. Nor did he believe that poverty was indelible; it could be overcome. Poverty is “not a trait but a condition,” Moynihan says. “I grew up in Hell’s Kitchen. My father was a drunk. I know what this life is like.” Similarly, Moynihan was not out to abolish AFDC. In 1996 he was among the few Congressmen to oppose President Bill Clinton’s termination of AFDC.

The severe reaction to the report, combined with events of the day, effectively silenced the topic of social policy and family life.

Only recently, says Patterson, are conservatives and liberals gradually coming back to meaningful “public dialogue about the ills of

lower-class black family life.” For example, sociologist William Julius Wilson puts aside victim language in his analysis of urban life. Bill Cosby urges young blacks to abandon promiscuity.

Moynihan and his 1965 report were not perfect, but the trends he spotted have only accelerated. The overall non-marital birth rate has increased to 41%, but disproportionately so among blacks—over 50% in 1980, and now in excess of 70%. (*The New Demography of American Motherhood*, Pew Research Center [5/6/10], 1615 L St. NW #700, Washington, DC 20036; www.pewresearch.org and other reports)

Moynihan is better at detailing the situation than naming solutions. He does, however, mention twice-a-day mail delivery to increase black employment. He repeatedly calls for a European-style *family allowance*, whereby a family, regardless of income level, gets a monthly check for each child in recognition that children are a social investment.

Today, as in 1965, the best anti-poverty program yet devised is a two-parent family.

110+ Years

Of Catholic Social Thought

Current domestic policy “must consider again the lessons of American Enterprise Institute’s mediating structures project,” writes William Schambra of the Hudson Institute (1015 15th St. NW #600, Washington, DC 20005; www.hudson.org). (*National Affairs* [Summer/10], 1730 M St. #910, Washington, DC 20036)

During the 1970s, he explains, AEI (1150 17th St. NW, Washington, DC 20036; www.aei.org) invited several policy experts to consider how “locally rooted” institutions might be an alternative to “distant, alienating bureaucracies.” For example, Schambra mentions Michael Novak, who in *Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics* (Macmillan Co. [1971], 175 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10010) and in subsequent AEI publications, says public policy must turn away from unaccountable “bureaucratic rule of experts...toward the organic networks of communal life...family, ethnic groups and voluntary associations.”

Other contributions to the AEI project include *Housing and Public Policy* by Msgr. Jack Egan (1916-2001) et al., *Child Care and Mediating Structures* by Brigitte Berger and Sidney Callahan, *Mediating Structures and Law*

Enforcement by Robert Woodson and other titles. AEI's 1977 summary pamphlet is titled *To Empower People: the Role of Mediating Structures* by Peter Berger and Fr. Richard J. Neuhaus (1936-2009).

Shortly after its 1978 founding, the National Center for the Laity asserted an equation between this mediating structures approach and the Catholic principle of *subsidiarity*, which says that a decision should be made as close as possible to those affected by the decision. Catholicism celebrates particularity as the means for guaranteeing freedom, responsibility and efficiency.

NCL asserted the link between mediating structures and subsidiarity during a process leading to the U.S. Catholic bishops' 1986 document *Economic Justice for All* (USCCB Publishing, 3211 Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20017; \$14.95). It contains a paragraph on the similarity of the concepts with a footnote to the Berger and Neuhaus' pamphlet. In a preface to a 1996 edition of the pamphlet, Berger and Neuhaus likewise note that their concept is "included in the [Catholic] principle of subsidiarity."

INITIATIVES regularly highlights examples of the mediating structures/subsidiarity approach in education, health care, economic development and more. While the approach can make a significant contribution in the days ahead, a strong cautionary note is warranted: Subsidiarity or mediating structures is not a true alternative when wielded in partisan fashion.

- Schambra, for example, seems to employ mediating structures to advance an agenda, the renewal of conservatism.
- A few U.S. bishops and lay leaders recently used subsidiarity to oppose Democratic Party proposals on health care reform—isolating the principle from the complementing range of Catholic social thought. Subsidiarity does not say *government is best which governs least*. It says government does not have to directly deliver all of the services for which government is obliged.
- President George Bush and President Barack Obama give the mediating structures concept a formal home in the White House (Office of Faith-Based Partnerships, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, DC 20500; www.whitehouse.gov). However, some leaders in both political parties look upon

that office as a way to sway evangelical and some Catholic groups to their side.

Subsidiarity is about civil society, the neglected region between *leaving it to the individual* and *relying on the state or big business*. It is not liberal or conservative, Democrat or Republican.

North American Spirituality

Fr. Vince Giese (1923-2000)

Giese was a journalist, editor and activist in Northwest Indiana and Chicago, serving as editor-in-chief of *Our Sunday Visitor*, and in positions with *Catholic New World*. In the late 1940s Giese helped Fr. Louis Putz, CSC (1909-1998) found Fides Publications, which brought pioneering books by European theologians to a North American audience. In 1965, at 42-years old, Giese was ordained a Chicago priest.

Through Putz, Giese acquired a fundamental understanding of specialized Catholic Action. He was a leader in Young Christian Workers, Young Christian Students, and Black Christian Students. He explained the movement's approach in many columns and in books like *Training for Leadership*, *Patterns for Teenagers*, and *The Apostolic Itch*.

Worthwhile lay formation, Giese writes, is a "difficult problem." The experience of Catholic Action, he continues, finds that "a small group is uniquely geared to training leaders...A small group discussion [however] will not train leaders. Minds might be sharpened, but unless the discussion leads to action—unless members themselves begin to accept small responsibilities and carry them out—there will be no training of the will...Any small group which does not build social actions into its programs is incapable of training leaders."

Giese supplies many examples. The topic for a youth group meeting one week is "high school clubs." It begins with a short Scripture reading, followed by what he calls "bull session." The leader, a fellow student who is prepared, moves into "what did I see?"—**observe**. The leader asks: "How many informal groups do your friends belong to, cliques or gangs? How many formal school or neighborhood clubs do they belong to?"

Then the leader moves the group into "what should it be?"—**judge**. "What is the difference between a clique and a club?" "Are cliques good or bad?"

Then the apostolic tension between the world-as-it-is and the world-as-it-could-be emerges. “What can we do?”—**act**. “Can we talk this week to three people about cliques?” “Can we make a few new people feel welcome at a club meeting?” A reflective report on the action occurs at the next meeting.

This method can start with almost any topic and can be used by any like-to-like group where friendship is valued, including professional people, homemakers or teachers.

Giese was an original signer of the National Center for the Laity’s 1977 charter, *A Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern*. In one of his several columns Giese mentions NCL while lamenting that young Catholics know little about Vatican II. Yet Church leaders in the U.S., seemingly oblivious to the outward thrust of Vatican II, preoccupy themselves with internal matters. There is too much energy spent on internal reform, Giese writes. “We are so busy trying to renew the Church we have forgotten that the primary vocation of the lay person is to transform the world...We are turning in on ourselves.”

News and Views

In September 1960 John Kennedy (1917-1963), while campaigning for the presidency, spoke to a Texas gathering of Protestant leaders. “I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute,” he said.

Looking back on the 50th anniversary of the talk, Russell Shaw concludes that Kennedy “opened a door to Catholic politicians who find it convenient to ignore [the doctrines of] the church.” (*Our Sunday Visitor* [7/4/10], 200 Noll Plaza, Huntington, IN 46750)

Archbishop Charles Chaput (Pastoral Center, 1300 S. Steele St., Denver, CO 80210) makes a similar argument. Kennedy’s speech was “wrong about American history and very wrong about the role of religious faith in our nation’s life... It began the project of walling religion away from the process of governance in a new and aggressive way.” Some public officials now assume their Catholic values are a totally private matter. They cannot, continues Chaput, “coherently explain how their faith informs their work.” (*Origins* [3/18/10], 3211 Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20017)

Turning the problem onto its other side, the National Center for the Laity says: When bishops impatiently wade into the technical details of partisan politics, they usurp the role of the laity and unwittingly make it easier for elected officials and citizens to consign the imperatives of public morality to the drawer of non-obligatory individual conscience.

Chaput says: “Christian political engagement is never mainly the task of the clergy. That work belongs to lay believers who live most intensely in the world.”

In chiding some bishops for crossing into partisan politics the NCL is not proposing a dual Christianity in which clergy are relegated to the sanctuary and laity plunge headlong and unsupported into the world. All baptized Christians have a peace and justice obligation. Simply, that when it comes to partisan political details the wisdom of Church employees is no more privileged than any competent layperson.

Since at least May 2009 the U.S. bishops have been heavily involved in lobbying over health care reform. Their guiding principles reflect sound Catholic teaching on human dignity, concern for the poor, respect for life and the common good. The bishops correctly link those principles, not sidelining one to advance another. However, the bishops mix opinions on specific proposals, legislative maneuvers, versions of bills, legal strategies and more into their proclamation of gospel values.

Following the March 2010 adoption of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, three U.S. bishops released a statement challenging the political competency and even the morality of Catholics who in an imperfect world favor the legislation. Disagreement with us “has resulted in confusion and a wound to Catholic unity,” they say. (*Setting the Record Straight*, Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, Chancery Office, 1700 San Jacinto, TX 77002 & *Commonweal* [6/18/10], 475 Riverside Dr. #405, New York, NY 10115)

The legislation may indeed be flawed, but having crossed into lobbying the bishops cannot credibly revert to moralizing. It is a temptation to shortcut tedious lay formation, to directly enter the political fray. Such behavior on the part of bishops, however honorable their intentions, reduces preaching the gospel to the tactics of any other lobby group and impedes the causes for which the whole church stands.

Happenings

Christians Supporting Community Organizing (PO Box 60123, Dayton, OH 45406; www.cscoweb.org) holds its annual meeting October 10-11, 2010—this year in Pasadena. The group suggests community organizing to Evangelical, Holiness and Pentecostal churches as a means for fulfilling Biblical mandates and advancing justice.

For its part in community organizing, our National Center for the Laity (PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$8) distributes *Activism That Makes Sense: Congregations and Community Organizations* by former NCL president Greg Pierce.

Also, NCL intends to publish a relevant booklet, *What Is Social Justice?*—after NCL raises some money for the project.

Just Faith (PO Box 221348, Louisville, KY 40252; www.justfaith.org), which sponsors training in social ethics and public skills “among Catholics throughout the U.S.,” announces a partnership with Bread for the World (50 F St. NW #500, Washington, DC 20001; www.bread.org) and with Pax Christi USA (532 W. Eighth St., Erie, PA 16502; www.paxchristiusa.org). Just Faith, popular in parishes, is supported by Catholic Charities USA (66 Canal Center Plaza #600, Alexandria, VA 22314; www.catholiccharitiesusa.org) and other Church organizations.

As INITIATIVES as commented previously, Just Faith is a promising program. However, as yet it inadequately focuses its participants’ attention on their workplaces—the milieu in which mainstream Catholic thought says lay people best advance justice.

Websites, Blogs and Resources

Center for Concern (1225 Otis St. NE, Washington, DC 20017; www.educationforjustice.org) launches a site replete with film discussion guides, reading lists, materials on the BP Oil fiasco and other topics, texts and summaries of encyclicals, and more.

Princeton University Faith & Work Initiative (5 Ivy Ln., Princeton, NJ 08540; <http://faithandwork.princeton.edu>) has posted a video from its April 2010 conference, *Civilizing the Economy*. The meeting was based on *Love in Truth* by Pope Benedict XVI (National Center for the Laity, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$6). NCL participated in the conference.

The Center for Integrity in Business (Seattle Pacific University, 3307 Third Ave. W., Seattle, WA 98119; www.spu.edu/cib) website announces events and directs readers to magazine articles of interest, including one by its Al Erisman on technology and the mission of the church and another by CIB leader John Terrill on civility in baseball.

National Center for the Laity advisor Bill McGarvey is web-editor for *Busted Halo* (Paulist Ministries, 405 W. 59th St., New York, NY 10019; www.bustedhalo.com). The site has film reviews, comments on relationships and careers, author interviews, a couple blogs on the sacred dimension of daily life and more. *Busted Halo* spills into You Tube and Sirius Radio.

McGarvey’s own website (www.billmcgarvey.com) tracks his band, The Good Thieves. They perform on the Lower East Side and have a CD, *Beautiful Mess*.

Former National Center for the Laity president Greg Pierce hosts an interactive e-mail, *Faith and Work*. Join by sending your electronic address to gpierce@actapublications.com. Pierce moves his base of operation, Acta Publications (4848 N. Clark St., Chicago, IL 60640; www.actapublications.com), to within blocks of Wrigley Field, where he perpetually “waits until next year.” Smile.

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Financial Report 7/1/09-6/30/10

Income

Individual Donations	40,922.25
Resale of Books	1,537.45
Program Income	375.00
Interest	<u>22.30</u>
Total	42,857.00

Expenses

Printing, Postage & Editing	36,335.23
Books for Resale	3,078.10
Office supplies & Equipment	2,260.35
Audit & Govt. fees	1,875.00
Travel & Meetings	738.94
Secretarial assistance	<u>746.00</u>
Total	45,033.62

Pope Benedict XVI has launched the Pontifical Council for New Evangelization to promote Christianity "in the countries where the first proclamation of faith has already resounded...but which are living through a progressive secularization of society and a kind of *eclipse of the sense of God*." Presumably the pope means Europe because he targets places where "churches of ancient foundation [are] present."

Nonetheless, INITIATIVES asks its readers:

- Is the U.S. experiencing "a progressive secularization" and an "eclipse of the sense of God"?
- What new or revived strategy might possibly promote Christianity in the U.S.?

In a subsequent issue INITIATIVES will summarize readers' response.

