

# Initiatives

In Support of Christians in the World

National Center for the Laity  
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## 50 Years since Vatican II

Some now say that Vatican II proponents wrongly “wanted to adapt [the church] to secular culture,” writes David O’Brien in *U.S. Catholic Historian* (Catholic University of America Press [Summer/10], 620 Michigan Ave. NE #Leahy 240, Washington, DC 20064). The Vatican II reformers, their critics charge, “gave away all that makes us Catholic.” Now the slide must stop. Catholic identity must be restored “by getting back to Catholic basics.”

Vatican II reform was “not about assimilation and Americanization for its own sake,” O’Brien points out. The process of Vatican II in the U.S. was not intended to just get “one of our own into the White House and all of us to the [suburban] mall.” Vatican II is about forming Catholics into “faithful disciples and effective citizens” so that they will transform “our U.S. and someday our world.” Vatican II is “a vision in which lay people draw on the spirit of their community of faith for the wisdom and strength to engage and transform the marketplace and the public square.”

The vision of Vatican II, of an intelligent laity in the world, is not yet a reality in the U.S. However says O’Brien, the future is not about retreating into a so-called *pure Catholicism*, not becoming counter-cultural Catholics, not being sectarian “strangers” in our own country. It is a matter of figuring out what did not work well and then with “energy and commitment” trying again to influence our society for the good.

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## Taking the Initiative

### *In the Neighborhood*

People increasingly inhabit “a whole world of machine-mediated relationships on networked devices,” says Sherry Turkle in *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (Basic Books [2011], 387 Park Ave. S., New York, NY 10016; \$28.95). “As technology offers us substitutes for connecting with each other face-to-face,” she continues, people either hardly

realize the substitution or actually prefer it—investing in inauthentic, artificial and disembodied relationships over real live friends, leaving us “lonely despite our connections.”

Technology changes private life. “When technology engineers intimacy, relationships can be reduced to mere connections.” Enamored with electronic social networking, “people take comfort in being in touch with a lot of people whom they also keep at bay.” Soon they are “unsure if they are closer together or further apart.”

It changes public space too, she continues. A campus or a conference, for example, could be a place to casually meet others and exchange ideas. But now most people in those settings choose “to be alone with their [so-called] personal networks.”

Innovation is good. The fault is thinking “it will solve everything, [a] refusal to recognize the limitations of knowledge,” Turkle concludes. “Technology gives us more and more of what we think we want,” but not necessarily what we really need.

The reluctance to admit limits, which has been around for some time, is a companion to the presumption that individuals can eliminate all difficulties with persistent striving, write Peter Block and John McKnight in *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods* (Berrett Koehler [2010], 235 Montgomery St. #650, San Francisco, CA 94104; \$26.95). People over-rely on experts, the authors say. They bank heavily on appointments with professionals, but grow further apart from family and friends who could provide genuine care.

As an alternative to this consumer mentality Block and McKnight celebrate the neighborhood through which people can reasonably leverage a more wholesome family life, a cleaner and safer environment, as well as better nutrition and health. These *common goods* cannot be purchased; they must be enjoyed by like-minded people cooperating with one another.

By *neighborhood* Block and McKnight do not simply mean coordinates on a map. They mean associational life that stands between a person and impersonal bureaucracies. This

concept, which can cross real estate boundaries, is unfortunately foreign to many people: Who carries around a notion of *mediating space* or, in Catholic terms, *subsidiarity*?

*The Abundant Community* includes an annotated list of 26 centers, publications and resources that embody the authors' *neighborhood approach* to life. Curiously, the authors' list has only web addresses. Their own website, [www.abundantcommunity.com](http://www.abundantcommunity.com), is devoid of *postal addresses* (a neighborhood concept). *Neighborhood* or *community* or *public friendship* cannot be the result of one individual after another reading a book and getting interested—although *The Abundant Community* and others like it contribute to change. Eventually, intentional, communal, face-to-face relationships must replace individualism.

Ernie Cortes (Industrial Areas Foundation, 637 S. Dearborn St. #100, Chicago, IL 60605; [www.industrialareasfoundation.org](http://www.industrialareasfoundation.org)) describes a time-proven process for achieving effective community in his slender booklet, *Rebuilding Our Institutions* (National Center for the Laity, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$5.25). It contains examples of parishioners and neighbors attending to the common good in New Orleans, Los Angeles and Salinas.

## **Taking the Initiative** *Against Child Labor*

Currently it is a violation of international rules for a country to ban the import of goods made by child labor. That would change under a proposal by Dani Rodrik of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government to update global trade rules for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A protectionist idea? No, not under the framework Rodrik describes in *The Globalization Paradox: Democracy and the Future of the World Economy* (W.W. Norton [2011], 500 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10110; \$26.95).

The global economy is actually enhanced by *pluralistic prosperity*. That is, "the core institutional infrastructure of the global economy must be built at the national level." It follows that "countries have the right to protect their own social arrangements, regulations, and institutions to preserve space for national democracy" and they can uphold their own standards "by raising barriers at the border if necessary, when trade demonstrably threatens domestic practices enjoying broad popular support."

Specifically, Rodrik says "globalization's rules should not force [any country] to consume

goods that are produced in ways that most citizens in those countries find unacceptable."

The 320 pages of *The Global Paradox* are loaded with insights. Using both research and analysis Rodrik clarifies the point that the global economy is better off within multiple democracies, rather than with a single self-regulating market. "Globalization works best when it is not pushed too far," he concludes.

All of this suggests that U.S. retailers will experience a gain after eliminating from their shelves all toys, appliances, rugs and apparel made by children.

## **Taking the Initiative** *In Factory Safety*

One of the deadliest industrial accidents in the U.S. occurred 100 years ago this month in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, a ten-story building that is now called N.Y. University Brown Building of Science (23 Washington Pl., New York, NY 10003).

About 500 garment workers, mostly young immigrant women, worked nine hour days making blouses. Near the end of a Saturday shift a fire consumed the building, killing 146. (*Triangle: the Fire That Changed America* by David von Drehle, Grove Press [2003], 841 Broadway, New York, NY 10003; \$14)

Frances Perkins (1880-1965), a staff person for Consumers' League (1701 K St. NW #1200, Washington, DC 20006; [www.nclnet.org](http://www.nclnet.org)), was coincidentally across the street from the building that afternoon. She was already studying many of the issues raised by the tragedy: lack of sprinkler systems, no fireproof stairways, no evacuation plan, plus sweatshop working conditions, no disability insurance or workers' compensation. She formed alliances on all these issues with NY political leaders, including Robert Wagner (1877-1953), Alfred Smith (1873-1944) and Franklin Roosevelt (1882-1945), who later as president appointed Perkins as Secretary of Labor. (*The Woman Behind the New Deal* by Kristin Downey, Nan Talese [2009], 1745 Broadway #2000, New York, NY 10019; \$35)

The fire also directly led to the founding of the American Society of Safety Engineers (1800 E. Oakton St., Des Plaines, IL 60018; [www.asse.org](http://www.asse.org)). Thus the Society will celebrate its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a conference in Chicago, June 13-15, 2011.

There is a comprehensive cyber-exhibit on the fire with photos, a bibliography and more

at Kheel Center (309 Ives Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853; [www.cornell.edu/trianglefire](http://www.cornell.edu/trianglefire)).

The Triangle fire is not ancient history. Unfortunately, INITIATIVES regularly carries stories about today's sweatshops, including those in the U.S. One resource on this topic is Workers' Rights Consortium (5 Thomas Cr. NW # 500, Washington, DC 20005; [www.workersrights.org](http://www.workersrights.org)). It conducts factory safety investigations and maintains a database on negligent places.

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## The Great Workbench

Russ Barta (1918-1997), founding president of the National Center for the Laity, objected to "invidious comparisons between so-called manual and intellectual work." The corporate executive and the neighborhood plumber both are called to do good work, he says. "Imagine a civilization in which the singular title of honor is that of *worker*," a society in which types of labor are "subsumed (thus subordinated) under the title *worker*." (*Church, Chicago-Style* by Bill Droel, NCL, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$2.25)

Yet certainly in our post-industrial economy there is a bias against manual labor, as if physical work is mindless. Assumptions about intelligence [influence] the way people are defined," writes Mike Rose in *The Mind at Work: Valuing the Intelligence of the American Worker* (Penguin [2004], 375 Hudson St., New York, NY 10014; \$16). To correct matters Rose profiles a waitress who in addition to dexterity and stamina demonstrates a remarkable ability to process information on her feet in fluid circumstances.

Another chapter is about a plumber and his systematic way of using knowledge. He understands the interconnection of many parts, those within one house, in one drain and interestingly in the relation of household members to the plumbing situation. This plumber also teaches students who perhaps did not excel in other areas. Rose marvels that his work is "a vehicle for human relations, the importance of adult mentors in the development of competence, and the continual play of intelligence."

After other chapters on specific occupations, Rose concludes with two chapters on cognition and educational implications, topics which he also explores in *Lives on the Boundary* (Penguin [1990]; \$16).

Rose carefully looks at vocational education classes. They naturally "include

material drawn from work." They do not, however, thereby "preserve respect for the value of work." Instead in many cases vocational education diminishes "the intellectual dimension of common work and of the people who do it." In vocational education—and not by comparison to the liberal arts—"there has been scant attention paid to the intellectual dimension of common work."

"A good deal of modern work," Rose acknowledges, "is characterized by working conditions that limit, often severely, the various forms of meaning one might gain from [work]." Nevertheless, he finds, "most men and women try to find meaning in what they do. [They] seek agency and meaning in the constraints placed upon them... Work provides a means of doing something in the world." The daily routine of most manual laborers "is testament to a remarkable strength of mind."

Matthew Crawford, who owns a motorcycle repair business, makes a similar argument in *Shop Class as Soulcraft* (Penguin [2009]; \$15). People who work in the trades and in other manual jobs find meaning in their work and, according to Crawford, might even have an advantage in vitality of the soul.

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## 120 Years Of Catholic Social Thought

Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Love in Truth* (National Center for the Laity, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$6) uses the intriguing but vague phrase *economy of gratuitousness*.

There is a longstanding argument between those who favor an unfettered market and those who want strong government regulation. But this "binary model" that pits "the private business leader of a capitalist bent" against "the state director" overlooks how the dynamics of society are related to the economy, the pope says.

In addition, says Benedict XVI, the traditional "distinction between profit-based companies and non-profits organizations" no longer matches reality. Lots of companies significantly interact with foundations, charities and non-profits involved overseas. Likewise non-profits routinely seek companies as allies.

Thus, for Benedict XVI the emerging economy is a significant combination of non-profit, plus government, plus private enterprise, something he calls *civil economy* or *economy of*

*communio*. “This is not merely a third sector, but a broad composite reality...one that does not exclude profit, but instead considers it a means for achieving human and social ends.”

The phrase *economy of communion* did not originate with Benedict XVI. Focolare (PO Box 716, Hyde Park, NY 12538; [www.focolare.us](http://www.focolare.us)), an international movement founded after World War II, uses it and counts about 800 businesses worldwide subscribing to the concept. *New Financial Horizons: the Emergence of an Economy of Communion* by Lorna Gold (New City Press [2010], 200 Comforter Blvd., Hyde Park, NY 12538; \$16.95) describes Focolare’s experience. An earlier book, *The Economy of Communion* edited by Luigino Bruni (New City Press [2002]; \$11.95) names the principles involved.

The *social enterprise movement* is also involved with a new model that puts business at the service of the community. There are several hubs for the movement, including Social Enterprise Alliance (5358 42<sup>nd</sup> Pl. NW, Washington, DC 20015; <https://netforum.avectra.com>) and Social Enterprise Coalition (49-51 East Rd., London N1 6AH, England; [www.socialenterprise.org.uk](http://www.socialenterprise.org.uk)). Several business schools are promoting the concept, including Social Enterprise Initiative (Harvard University, Soldiers Field #Loeb 300, Boston, MA 02163; [www.hbs.edu](http://www.hbs.edu)).

More examples of Benedict XVI’s vision are needed. An *economy of gratuitousness* does not evolve merely because companies donate to worthy causes, not because employees spend a week volunteering with a non-profit, not because a product or service is *green*, and certainly not simply because some executives belong to one or another Catholic organization.

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## Rest in Peace

### *R. Sargent Shriver (1915-2011)*

Shriver “may have directly affected more people in a positive way than any [North] American since [President] Franklin Roosevelt,” says columnist Bob Herbert. There was “no end to the man’s relentless energy, curiosity, creativity and optimism. [His] commitment to public service has always seemed both joyous and total.” (*N.Y. Times*, 4/23/04 & 1/22/11)

A full list of organizations founded, directed or inspired by Shriver would entirely fill this newsletter. In addition to several government programs for which he is well known,

INITIATIVES especially notes two Shriver groups, both dedicated to handicapped children: Special Olympics (1133 19<sup>th</sup> St. NW, Washington, DC 20036) and Best Buddies (100 SE Second St. #2200, Miami, FL 33131).

Shriver’s connection to the tradition carried on by our National Center for the Laity goes back to the mid-1940s when, in New York City, he helped to start the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists and was a member of the American Newspaper Guild.

Shriver moved to Chicago in 1947 and joined the Catholic Interracial Council here in 1952; he served as its president from 1955-1959. Msgr. Dan Cantwell (1915-1996), who later founded NCL, was CIC chaplain during that time. Shriver served on the Chicago Board of Education from 1954-1960, six years as its president. He also served as a trustee of DePaul University and St. Xavier University.

Shriver wanted Chicago to be a beacon of racial justice and he wanted the church in Chicago, and elsewhere, to be exemplary. He thus pressed Catholic high schools to admit more black students and to establish scholarship funds. He wanted Catholic hospitals to admit black patients and give admitting privileges to black physicians. In fact, by brokering relationships inside the system, he got all of the Chicago Catholic hospital administrators and Cardinal Samuel Stritch (1887-1958) to a meeting on race relations. After blacks had moved into a far Southside neighborhood, Shriver escorted the Catholics among them to Mass at the local church. For that effort the windows at CIC were broken. In 1958 Shriver was instrumental in the formation of the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice in Chicago.

Shriver once compared his church to the Democratic Machine in Chicago where the only *real players* were those “who got their jobs through the Democratic Party.” The bishops “feel very comfortable dealing with persons who are totally committed and totally part of the institutional structure.” However, “the church remains a difficult organization” for those who are not on the payroll. “The spiritual side of Catholicism is another matter. In prayer, at Mass and in receiving the sacraments, especially Holy Communion, Catholics are truly one gathering of equals, all sharing the same Body and Blood of Christ.”

Shriver was a main presenter at the founding convention of our National Center for the Laity. His remarks of 34 years ago (lightly edited for context) are still relevant:

If Christianity is to come alive in this land at this time, the laity must do the job! Not because we are running out of priests and nuns...but because Jesus Christ cannot be fully present in hospitals or courts or workshops or in homes or on college campuses unless lay people, ordinary, rank-and-file followers of Christ, represent Him there and reveal Him there by what they say and do...

The laity must represent the person, ideas, attitude, and reality of Jesus Christ to their fellow workers in the marketplace, in the intellectual life, on the farm, in politics, everywhere in the U.S.

When people in our society reach a certain level in business, law, medicine, politics, education and other professions, many of the problems they face are moral problems... Rarely, if ever, does the president [or any major leader] lack for military advice, scientific advice, civil rights advice or diplomatic advice. He just can't get the advice he needs the most! Therefore, new kinds of institutions [like] the Kennedy Institute of Ethics (37<sup>th</sup> & O Sts. NW #Healy 400, Washington, DC 20057; [www.kennedyinstitute.georgetown.edu](http://www.kennedyinstitute.georgetown.edu)) [are needed] to bring the best moral theologians, moral philosophers, social and religious ethicists [together] with experts [from all the professions] on a permanent basis....

The long hard task [in our world requires] scholars as much as saints. [Holiness is crucial, but a worldly type of holiness,] one relevant to our contemporary problems. [Unfortunately] *holiness* has probably become too ecclesial, too *churchy*, and too ethereal. [The word] *holiness* to many Catholics today...probably would mean withdrawing in life, praying, being uninvolved in conflict situations in this world. Yet the task for lay Christians has much to do with all manner of high conflict, highly technical, highly political situations in which intelligent, decisive and perhaps even quite aggressive action is required...

[Christian holiness is not] apolitical. Jesus is a political figure... Jesus stood for a reign, a kingdom, a wave, a movement that was novel in the world of his time and, for that matter, novel in our time. His goal affected human society, human life and the structuring of human possibilities. To strive for Jesus' goals is to strive for political as well as spiritual realities...

One of the main obstacles in the path of lay spirituality is *Gnosticism* [which separates] the world of matter and the world of spirit... We must recover the passionate conviction that to follow Jesus is to be concerned about the reign of God now, in this world. Not that we produce the reign of God; it is the gift of God... But we must ask for it, work for it, accept it, welcome it—by doing what is within our grasp to restructure the social system...

We need the help of each other in the professional fields, in politics, in citizenship, in neighborliness, in ways of functioning in society, in lifestyle, in spending and budgeting patterns, in budgeting of our time as well as material resources. [There are] no ready-made answers... The National Center for the Laity is a starting point. We commit ourselves to NCL [and other similar groups,] not so much for the purpose of specific action, but for the purpose of maintaining the impetus, the spirit, the enthusiasm, the vision, the hope, the *chain of grace* that links us to our source of grace in Christ. (*Challenge To the Laity* edited by Russ Barta, National Center for the Laity, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$2)

Shriver was convinced "that no one need be spiritually unemployed when there was so much to be done in the word," writes Bill Moyers in his introduction to a terrific biography, *Sarge: the Life and Times of Sargent Shriver* (Smithsonian Books [2004], 245 Fifth Ave. #1003, New York, NY 10016; \$32.50). Shriver was a recruiter of unconventional people, "a powerful magnet to talented, creative, idealistic, iconoclastic personalities."

To a group of young activists, Shriver drew this distinction: "The politics of death is bureaucracy, routine, rules, status quo. The politics of life is personal initiative, creativity, flair, dash, a little daring. The politics of death is calculation, prudence, measured gestures. The politics of life is experience, spontaneity, grace, directness. The politics of death is fear of youth. The politics of life is to trust the young to their own experience."

Later in life Shriver told some college students to break the mirrors in their dorm rooms. "Shatter the glass. Learn more about the face of your neighbor and less about your own."

## Happenings

“United Nations Millennium Goals, the Global Compact and the Common Good” is a March 20-22, 2011 conference at the Mendoza College of Business (University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN 46556; <https://business.nd.edu>).

“Celebrating 120 Years Since *Rerum Novarum*” is a March 24-26 conference sponsored by the Center for Social Concerns (1212 Geddes Hall, Notre Dame, IN 46556; <http://centerforsocialconcerns.nd.edu>). Our National Center for the Laity is a co-sponsor of this conference.

Goshen College (1700 S. Main St., Goshen, IN 46526; [www.goshen.edu](http://www.goshen.edu)) hosts a conference on “Religion and Science,” March 25-27, 2011.

To stay current on science/religion topics and events, connect with Institute for Theological Encounter with Science and Technology (20 Archbishop May Dr. #3400A, St. Louis, MO 63119; [www.itest-faithscience.org](http://www.itest-faithscience.org)).

Collegeville Institute (14027 Fruit Farm Rd. #2000, Collegeville, MN 56321; [www.collegevilleinstitute.org](http://www.collegevilleinstitute.org)) hosts “Believing in Writing,” August 9-15, 2011. Writers will explore religious themes in their work.

Vesper Society (115 Sansome St., San Francisco, CA 94104; [www.kingdomofGodonline.com](http://www.kingdomofGodonline.com)) has a team of presenters making the rounds in Chicago area parishes, congregations, and young-adult groups to discuss *A New Way of Seeing: Living Authentically in the Here-and-Now Kingdom of God* by Greg Pierce (Acta Publications, 4848 N. Clark St., Chicago, IL 60640; [gfapierce@aol.com](mailto:gfapierce@aol.com)).

The Society will then gather representatives from participating congregations before Thanksgiving 2011 for broader discussions on the topic of faith in daily life.

For ecology, Seattle University (900 Broadway, Seattle, WA 98122) has removed all bottled water on campus. Instead, students obtain reusable bottles in the bookstore. To replicate this action at other schools contact Corporate Accountability (10 Milk St. #610, Boston, MA 02108; [www.thinkoutsidethebottle.org](http://www.thinkoutsidethebottle.org)).

Siena College (515 Loudon Rd., Loudonville, NY 12211) is the first Catholic college (and the third overall) to become a certified Fair Trade College. That means fair trade products replace their counterparts in all the school’s dining areas in order to promote decent conditions for agricultural workers in Latin America and Africa. Other schools and parishes interested in the concept can contact Catholic Relief Services (228 W. Lexington St., Baltimore, MD 21201; [www.crsfairtrade.org](http://www.crsfairtrade.org)).

INITIATIVES applauds the fair-trade concept by which farmers make a better living precisely through family and social responsibility. INITIATIVES would be disappointed, however, to learn that a college or parish that promotes fair trade unwittingly violates Catholic doctrine in dealing with its own employees. For clarity on this matter Catholic institutions can order *Catholic Administrators and Labor Unions* by Bill Droel & Ed Marciniak (National Center for the Laity, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$3).

*The Catholic Spirit* (244 Dayton Ave., St. Paul, MN 55102; [www.thecatholicspirit.com](http://www.thecatholicspirit.com)) celebrates its 100<sup>th</sup> Year of publication. Many blessings to Bob Zyskowski and his crew.

Keeping local Catholic papers relevant and solvent is a challenge these days. (The same is true of Catholic magazines and newsletters like INITIATIVES.) If the church in this country has a future, however, a well-informed laity is essential. Electronic means of publication are part of the picture. But the printed page is still important. Blessings to all our colleagues in the Catholic press.

*Religion Watch* (PO Box 652, North Bellmore, NY 11710; [relwatch1@msn.com](mailto:relwatch1@msn.com)) celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> issue anniversary. This 12-page newsletter, drawing upon hundreds of sources, tracks sociological trends in all the world’s religions.

## Websites, Blogs and Resources

*The Anglican Theological Review* (600 Haven St., Evanston, IL 60201; \$15) devotes most of its 290-page Fall 2010 issue to “Building An Ethical Economy.” Contributors include Gary Dorrien on “turbo-capitalism,” Richard Gillett on the place of local workers in a global economy and others. The collection includes a case study on a job training program in San Antonio, sponsored by Industrial Areas Foundation (637 S. Dearborn St. #100, Chicago, IL 60605; [www.industrialareasfoundation.org](http://www.industrialareasfoundation.org)).

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Contributing to this issue: Bob Senser, author of *Justice at Work: Globalization and the Human Rights of Workers* (National Center for the Laity, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$15) and editor of *Human Rights for Workers* ([www.humanrightsforworkers.blogspot.com](http://www.humanrightsforworkers.blogspot.com)), a blog about international labor relations.

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

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

NCL is a 501-C-3 organization, chartered in Illinois. It relies entirely on donations.

“Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope... Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint. Therefore, we must be saved by a final form of love, which is forgiveness.”

—Reinhold Niebuhr (*The Irony of American History*, University of Chicago Press [1952], 1427 E. 60<sup>th</sup> St., Chicago, IL 60637; \$17).