

Initiatives

In Support of Christians in the World

National Center for the Laity
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Theology of Work

Many churches bestow a blessing upon their catechists during worship—either weekly or annually on a designated Sunday. Yet, one catechist is not thrilled: “The rest of the week I am a full-time teacher and the church has never prayed for me. That says it all.”

What it says is that parish leaders are preoccupied with in-house matters and consequently—be they liberal or conservative—neglect the world of work, explains Esther Reed in *Good Work: Christian Ethics in the Workplace* (Baylor University Press [2010], 704 Legionaire Dr., Fredericksburg, PA 17026; \$24.95). Reed challenges her readers to “think about work in explicitly theological and spiritual terms.”

Reed’s interests include literature, iconography, sociology and more, plus an acquaintance with the Qur’an and fluency with the Bible—all of which she uses to comment on work. Reed includes an entire chapter on the relation between liturgy and work. The idea of vocation and the dogma of resurrection are threads throughout.

Reed praises Catholic social thought and mentions John Paul II’s (1920-2005) reading of *Genesis*. Work, he says, is not the curse of original sin. But Reed does not seem convinced and dwells on the accursed conditions of work.

Despite what it feels like at 4 P.M. on a Friday, work is (or at least can be) “a catalyst for spiritual growth,” say R. Paul Stevens and Alvin Ung in *Taking Your Soul To Work* (Eerdmans Publishing [2010], 2140 Oak Industrial Dr. NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505; \$15). First, however, menacing forces have to be confronted. Some of these include attitudes of individual workers, others include institutional defects that are “deeply embedded” in the workplace.

Stevens and Ung name nine “deadly sins” of work, adding restlessness and boredom to the traditional list of pride, greed, envy etc. They then describe nine “fruits of the Spirit” to counteract the defects. They conclude with nine spiritual disciplines, like persistent gratitude and joyful relinquishment. Each chapter has examples, including parts of a dialogue between

Ung, an investment executive in Malaysia, and Stevens, a retired professor in Canada. Readers will use this book as a meditation tool.

INITIATIVES also recommends *After Sunday: A Theology of Work* by Fr. Armand Larive (Continuum, 80 Maiden Ln. #704, New York, NY 10038; \$27.95) and *Pope John Paul II’s Gospel of Work* by Bill Droel (National Center for the Laity, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$8.25).

Taking the Initiative

Among Bankers

“There isn’t a more honorable profession than the banking industry,” says CEO Robert Wilmers (M&T Bank, 1 M&T Plaza, Buffalo, NY 14203).

Before INITIATIVES’ readers howl, consider Wilmers’ recent report to stockholders, as summarized by columnist Joe Nocera. Much of the money big banks earn wrongly comes from trading profits rather than prudently serving customers. In particular, trading derivatives and other securities really has nothing to do with the underlying purpose of banking. Further, Wilmers thinks bank executives are overpaid. The top ones at those called “too big to fail” made \$26million on average each year during the recent crisis. Wilmers made \$2million in 2010.

Obviously then Wilmers’ bank is smalltime and going nowhere. Not true. Its assets have grown from \$2billion to \$68billion in Wilmers’ 30-year tenure. “It’s one of the most highly regarded regional bank holding companies,” writes Nocera. “It has also been one of the best performing stocks... M&T was one of only two banks in the S&P 500 that didn’t cut its dividend during the financial crisis.”

Wilmers’ talk to his shareholders is “refreshing,” Nocera concludes. M&T’s mission, says Wilmers, is “to continue to attract deposits, make sound loans and grow in accordance with our historic credit quality standards.” (*N.Y. Times*, 5/31/11)

Small policy reforms won’t do it, says Archbishop Vincent Nichols (Vaughn House, 46 Francis St., London, England EC4N 8BH). “Real

and necessary change” in banking means a different culture among its executives.

Nichols believes that Catholic social thought “has something immensely rich to contribute” to reform of the financial sector. Thus he, with others, is coordinating a dialogue between bankers and church leaders, called “Values and Trust in the City.” Just as some participants belong to both groups, expertise on Catholic thought abides in both. (*Catholic Herald* of London, 3/9/11 and *The Tablet* [10/9/10 & 11/6/10], 1 King St. Cloisters, Clifton Walk, London, England W6 0GY)

Taking the Initiative

Teaching Business Ethics

Al Gini, professor at Loyola University (820 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60611), spent a month this summer in Thailand, seeing everything “from the teeming metropolis of Bangkok, to the rich farmlands around Chiang-Mi and Mae Hong Son, to the jungle covered Himalayas surrounding the Golden Triangle, and finally the white sands of the resort city of Phuket.” However, Gini “was most intrigued by the demeanor and the day to day contact of the Thai people.”

Thais are not perfect people, Gini admits. But even to a casual observer it is clear “that they believe in and try to live out the Buddhist doctrine of the harmony of the mind and body and the need to be thoughtful and fair in all of our conduct with others.”

Gini observed small examples of Buddhism’s *Eightfold Noble Path*: right understanding; right thought; right speech; right action; right livelihood; right effort; right mindfulness; and, right concentration. Through this daily discipline, Gini comments, Buddhists are led to the *Five Precepts*: 1) I will show loving kindness to all living beings. 2) I will respect the property rights of all. 3) I will restrain my desires and be morally good. 4) I will tell the truth and use kind words which are timely and purposeful. 5) I will keep a clear mind.

Gini will share his experience in the classroom this semester. His latest book is a compilation of quotations: *God Can Quote Me On That* (Acta Publications [2011], 4848 N. Clark St., Chicago, IL 60640; \$14.95). It has a chapter on work and another on “business, money and ambition.”

Gini’s experience of Buddhism prompts INITIATIVES to ask: Is there a list of daily

Catholic disciplines that foster proper behaviors in the marketplace? Please send along your suggestions.

Taking the Initiative

In the Classroom

Karen Eifler, teacher in a Catholic grammar school and at University of Portland, has a sacramental imagination. In *A Month of Mondays: Spiritual Lessons from the Catholic Classroom* (Acta Publications, 4848 N. Clark St., Chicago, IL 60640; \$12.95) she describes several situations where some might see problems but where she glimpses the divine lurking beneath chaos, dysfunction and poor management.

There’s the eighth grade class that hates reading. Then one otherwise trouble-causing boy recalls a long ago happy memory and starts a project with his classmates reading to the kindergarten students. Eifler subsequently asks the eighth graders to “recall their favorite books from their first years in school.” Amazingly, the class regains an interest in reading through regular reading to younger students. *Disenchantment*, Eifler reflects, means being *away from the magic*. The antidote to boredom in school is “to reconnect students with the stunning joy they once found in breaking open stories.”

Eifler’s book is not a series of teaching techniques. It is about grace. She believes that “there is a Holy Spirit who breathes life and love and wisdom into us teachers.” One teacher sees only trouble walking down the hall and anticipates only discouragement in the classroom. With sacramental glasses, however, a teacher is “able to witness grandeur that is always harboring in the cells of our students.” (*Portland* [Summer/11], 5000 N. Willamette Blvd., Portland, OR 97203)

Eifler’s meditation will benefit any teacher—Catholic or not. Most sensitive workers know, however, that a good attitude is necessary but not sufficient. There are still administrators that use authority arbitrarily, policies that deplete energy and social conditions that grate against the purpose of one’s work. Thus Catholicism urges workers to prudently apply the virtue of social justice to their specific realm of influence. This often misunderstood virtue is explained in *What Is Social Justice?* by Bill Droel (National Center for the Laity, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$5).

Taking the Initiative *In Labor Relations*

This summer St. Giles Family Mass (1025 Columbian Ave., Oak Park, IL 60302) invited your INITIATIVES' editor to its "Backyard Theology" program. The assigned topic was Catholic doctrine on unions.

"Employees are to make a decision for or against a union without paternal or maternal guidance from their employer. That's the doctrine," INITIATIVES told the 30 (bring your own lawn chair) participants. Five corollaries were then named.

Several questions about disputes at Chicago-area Catholic institutions quickly followed.

Specifically, why is St. Xavier University (3700 W. 103rd St., Chicago, IL 60655) asserting that because of its Catholic identity its part-time teachers are not entitled to normal protections under the National Labor Relations Act? The logic is lopsided. Should not fidelity to Catholic identity make respect for workers a desirable management value? (*Wall St. Journal*, 6/24/11 and *Chicago Catholic News* [6/13/11], www.chicagocatholicnews.com)

Similarly, why does Resurrection Health Systems (7435 W. Talcott Ave., Chicago, IL 60631) persist in intimidating its employees who seek a union through AFSCME (5509 N. Cumberland #505, Chicago, IL 60656; www.reformresurrection.org)?

Our National Center for the Laity is sympathetic to administrators of these and other Catholic institutions to whom news of a union feels like a betrayal and a potential threat to mission in difficult economic times. To them NCL offers *Catholic Administrators and Labor Unions* (NCL, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$3). This booklet walks through legitimate concerns and, drawing upon actual administrators, it details what Catholic doctrine suggests and what it doesn't allow.

The Catholic Labor Network (1500 Jefferson Dr., Port Arthur, TX 77642; www.catholiclabor.org) has a Catholic Employer Project that names over 100 Catholic institutions with "mutually rewarding relationship of collective bargaining with their employees."

The National Center for the Laity will celebrate the dignity of work at a Labor Weekend Mass: September 4, 2011, 10:30 A.M. at St. Catherine-St. Lucy (38 N. Austin Blvd.,

Oak Park, IL 60302). Breakfast and discussion will follow.

Taking the Initiative *On Energy*

The Last Mountain (Uncommon Productions, 5301 Rosewood Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90004; www.thelastmountainmovie.com) tells the story of Massey Energy's (4 N. Fourth St., Richmond, VA 23219) attempt to blast off the top of Coal River Mountain in Coal River Valley, WV.

The film's heroes are local residents who say the yield in coal will only enrich company owners--not workers, neighbors, consumers and certainly not the environment. They are aided by Robert Kennedy Jr. (Riverkeeper, 20 Secor Rd. Ossining, NY 10562). There are alternatives to non-renewable fossil energy, says Kennedy. "Local people [must regain their capacity] to participate in the determination and decision of how public trust assets like air and water are allocated." (*N.Y. Times*, 6/2/11 and *National Catholic Reporter* [6/10/11], PO Box 411009, Kansas City, MO 64141)

INITIATIVES covered Massey Energy in a 2010 story about a mine explosion that killed 29 workers. The Mine Safety and Health Administration now finds that Massey, recently acquired by Alpha Natural Resources, systematically kept fraudulent records about the safety of that mine. (*N.Y. Times*, 6/2/11 & 6/30/11)

Taking the Initiative *On Campus*

Students at Creighton University (Center for Service and Justice, 2500 California Plaza, Omaha, NE 68178; www.creighton.edu/ccsj) are studying immigration issues. Ruben Garcia (Annunciation House, 1003 E. San Antonio Ave., El Paso, TX 79901; www.annunciationhouse.org) spoke on campus last semester about giving refuge to immigrants and advocacy on their behalf. Then 216 students participated in spring break service trips, exposing them to immigrants and refugees. Weekly service opportunities do the same. Meanwhile current students and alum are sharing their own immigration experience.

The Dream Act (HR 1842 & S 952), sponsored by Sen. Richard Durbin (711 Hart Senate Bldg., Washington, DC;

www.durbin.senate.gov) and several others, will open a path to permanent resident status for college students whose parents brought them as youngsters here illegally. The legislation was blocked in the Senate this summer and now lingers in the Judiciary Committee. To track lobbying for the Dream Act type www.dreamact.info.

Taking the Initiative For Farms

Agriculture is not “a focused discipline or professional formation in any Catholic university” in the U.S., asserts Chris Thompson (St. Paul Seminary, 2260 Summit Ave., St. Paul, MN 55105). This is a symptom of the modern disconnect between most people and our land. Thompson is promoting *green Thomism*. That is, he encourages philosophy and theology teachers to use nature as a starting point for the Catholic notion of human dignity. (*The Catholic Spirit*, 6/9/11)

Diocesan Peace and Justice Commission (55 W. Clifton Ave. #303, Sioux City, IA 51104) links family farms, small businesses and rural churches to the movement for environmental and economic sustainability. It supplies resources, including videos, and makes referrals.

National Catholic Rural Life Conference (4625 Beaver Ave., Des Moines, IA 50310; www.ncrlc.com) is a premier hub of information on theology for and politics of local farming.

Work and Art

Teachers at Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College (700 College Rd., Cumberland, KY 40823) are researching, writing and producing plays for a series titled *Higher Ground*. The most recent, *Talking Dirt*, is about how young adults assess their future in Harlan, KY where jobs are scarce and becoming more so. Mining policies past and present are in the play’s backdrop, but it is sympathetic toward families who live with the moral and economic ambiguity of strip mining. A few local residents are mixed into the student cast. Others provide musical score, mostly bluegrass. Meanwhile several college students are compiling an oral history of their part of Appalachia—information which may find its way into next year’s play.

Foundry Theater (140 Second Ave. #405, New York, NY 10003; www.thefoundrytheater.org) has revived the 1937 hit musical *Pins and Needles*. The amateur cast performs sketches depicting domestic workers, a social service administrator, a newspaper reporter and more. Many of the songs are blues. *All Together Different* by Daniel Katz (N.Y. University Press [2011], 838 Broadway #300, New York, NY 10003; \$45) tells how and why the International Ladies Garment Workers Union developed the original *Pins and Needles* play. (*N.Y. Times*, 5/15/11 & 6/22/11)

Work Prayers Patient Trust

Above all, trust in the slow work of God
We are quite naturally impatient in everything
to reach the end without delay.

We should like to
skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way to something
unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law of progress
that it is made by passing through
some states of instability ---
and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you.

Your ideas mature gradually--let them grow,
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.

Don't try to force them on,
as though you could be today what time
(that is to say, grace and circumstances
acting on your own good will)
will make of you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit
gradually forming within you will be.

Give Our Lord the benefit of believing
that his hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense and incomplete.

--Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ (Institute of
Jesuit Sources, 3601 Lindell Blvd., St. Louis,
MO 63108)

From the Great Workbench

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) admits that it seems harsh to say a person is nothing other than the sum of his or her choices in life. However, says Sartre, it is a total life that counts: “An artist [or any worker] will not be judged solely on the basis of his [or her] works of art; a thousand other things will contribute toward

summing him [or her] up.” (*Existentialism and Human Emotions*, Kensington [1957], 119 W. 40th St., New York, NY 10018; \$9.85)

Could then a worker slack off once in awhile without overly detracting from a generally noble life? Could, for example, a worker momentarily succumb to boredom or even despair—perhaps a baseball player in a game that goes into a 12th inning, or a 22nd inning, or, wow, even in the 30th inning? Does an umpire’s call on a bunt in the 22nd inning on a cold morning really matter, or can he do what will more likely end the game? Or, later that same inning in a game between the Pawtucket Red Sox and the visiting Rochester Red Wings that began on Holy Saturday April 18, 1981 but is now greeting Easter morning, is Paw Sox manager Joe Morgan morally obligated to vociferously dispute a call and then, upon being ejected, in keeping with tradition must he go to a hidden spot behind the backstop or can he mercifully go home?

Dan Barry takes up these questions in *Bottom of the 33rd: Hope, Redemption, and Baseball’s Longest Game* (Harper Collins [2011], 1000 Ketstone Industrial Pk., Scranton, PA 18512; \$26.99).

Barry, a *New York Times* columnist, uses Holy Week and Easter themes to recount this historic game. His protagonists include not only the players (two of whom are now in the Hall of Fame), managers and umpires, but also two improbable radio broadcasters from Rochester, a newspaper writer, a youngster responsible for the clubhouse, a few fans, the unusual owner of the Paw Sox, and even the stadium, plus the cities. Barry deftly supplies background on each protagonist, summaries the innings and tells what happened to each protagonist over the 30 years since the game. In each case there are setbacks, doubts, redemptions and resurrections.

To judge by Barry’s case study, God has apparently implanted in workers the capacity and willingness to attend to detail, even when the goal seems far removed. Most workers (including parents, students, volunteers and citizens) normally go about the daily routine in a competent way. Once in awhile there is an extraordinary day, an emergency situation, a poignant moment, a major crisis or an unreasonably tedious ballgame. Yet most workers handle these things because they “have been faithful in the little things.” And, Barry suggests, that if a worker is not invested in each inning, then life itself is probably meaningless.

Normally grace (God’s love in the world) is not overtly manifest on Tuesday afternoon on a hospital floor or on Monday in the office or on Easter morning as a radio broadcaster pleads for any indication that anyone back in Rochester cares about his work. But upon reflection a person can appreciate that God was lurking amid the phone calls, the deadlines, the school assignments and the lunchroom chatter, and yes, during a fatigued broadcast. With reflection God’s grace removes seemingly disconnected moments from the boundaries of time. In fact, out of love, in her home on Lake Ontario the broadcaster’s girlfriend taped the entire game, erasing some of her favorite music.

First baseman Dave Koza had the winning RBI. Without spoiling the story, Koza stands for the whole: Great aspirations, total dedication, a small hitting deficiency, a little bad luck, a small sin, then a life out of control, just enough forgiveness, redemption and new hope.

“It is this at bat that counts. This moment now,” Barry writes.

120 Years

Of Catholic Social Thought

Catholicism does not insist on strict equality in income and wealth. Nor is Catholic morality opposed to a market economy. In fact, details Stefano Zamagni, Catholicism is “linked to the birth and establishment” of the market, years before the Protestant Reformation—a movement that Max Weber associates with the rise of capitalism. (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Dover Publications [1904], 31 E. Second St., Mineola, NY 11501; \$9.95)

However there is a difference between “civil market economy” and “capitalist market economy,” says Zamagni, who advised Pope Benedict XVI on the encyclical *Charity in Truth* (National Center for the Laity, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; \$6). The capitalist market is interested in the total good, “the sum total of *individual goods*.” The Catholic concept of a civil market, by contrast, attends to the *common good*.

Catholicism should not condemn the market, says Zamagni and his collaborators in the True Wealth of Nations Project (102 Religious Center, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA 90089). Catholicism should instead announce “economic and cultural criteria” that point to “sustainable prosperity” for all participants in the

market. (*The True Wealth of Nations* edited by Dan Finn, Oxford University Press [2011], 198 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016; \$35)

So when does a market's wage and wealth gap become so wide that it is an obstacle to the Catholic *principle of universal participation*?

After commissioning two studies, the *N.Y. Times* (7/3/11) reports that the median pay for the top 200 U.S. executives in 2010 was \$10.8million, a 23% increase from 2009. Executives from TV, cable and other communication companies dominate the top paid. "Most ordinary Americans aren't getting raises anywhere close to those of these chief executives," writes Pradnya Joshi. "Many aren't getting raises at all—or even regular paychecks... [Yet] as long as shareholders think the top brass is doing a good job, executives tend to be well paid, whatever the state of the broader economy."

U.S. companies, "the major force in the global economy," scandalously undervalue work and working people, writes Bob Senser. There is a presumption that underemployment naturally accompanies a recession and that economic recovery means better wages. Senser reprints a chart from St. Louis Federal Reserve (PO Box 442, St. Louis, MO 63166; www.stlouisfed.org) showing that nowadays workers' portion of national income drops persistently—through the recession and even in a recovery. (*Human Rights for Workers* (<http://humanrightsforworkers.blogspot.com>; 6/16/11).

But is there a cause-effect relationship between outlandish CEO pay and worker stagnation? Is it a coincidence that income for the top 1% rose 30% in the past six years, remained about the same for 9% and fell 4% for 90% of families? "A mounting body of economic research indicates that the rise in pay for company executives is a critical feature in the widening income gap," reports Peter Whoriskey. During economic growth in the 1950s and 1960s "executive pay was flat." Precisely when executive pay skyrocketed so did income inequality. (*N.Y. Times*, 5/15/11 and *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 6/22/11)

Change, though tedious, is possible. Tax legislation, regulatory enforcement, shareholder resolutions and conscientious employees, especially secondary executives, can address this situation. So too can consumer pressure, like Mind the Gap Campaign

(Network, 25 E. St. NW #200, Washington, DC 20001; www.networklobby.org), which has a petition, a blog and more information on the topic. And so can the union movement, through efforts like Executive Pay Watch (AFL-CIO, 815 16th St. NW, Washington, DC 20006; www.aflcio.com), which tracks trends, provides case studies and has a disparity ratio.

But as Whoriskey says, the culture of the wealthy must also improve. They must act modestly and with social responsibility. Drawing upon Dan Finn's True Wealth of Nations Project and many other efforts, business leaders must operate by criteria that encourage "sustainable prosperity" for all. The times call for application of Catholic principles like *common good*, *solidarity*, the *universal destination of goods* and especially *participation*.

Rest In Peace

Al Belanger (1921-2011)

Belanger was a signer of our National Center for the Laity's 1977 charter *A Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern*. He signed many other statements and petitions, contributed to many groups, spoke at hearing and rallies.

It started at a young age. Belanger was a CISCA (Chicago Inter-Student Catholic Action) leader in high school and college, through which he learned to keenly observe the people and institutions in his path, to judge situations in light of his faith and to collectively act with wisdom for improvements.

In the Marines (where he spent several years), Belanger trained the first all-black unit. He was thereafter always involved in race relations, particularly in Oak Park, IL—a pioneering example of integration. With his late wife Patsy and others, Belanger developed the Cana Conference for engaged and married couples—a program now used nationally. He was also the first lay chair of the Board of Catholic Education. His business career included many years with Inland Steel and then assistance to Morton Salt among other companies.

Belanger possessed a rare leadership quality. Some leaders are totally enamored with their organization. Some, after an initial phase, bolt the group in a pique. Belanger with steady loyalty to an organization was perceptive and confident enough to discreetly offer criticisms. Our NCL valued him for this and for his lifelong witness.

Happenings

The annual gathering and Poverty Summit for Catholic Charities (66 Canal Center Plaza #600, Alexandria, VA 22314; www.catholiccharitiesusa.org) is September 18-21, 2011 in Fort Worth.

Vesper Society (115 Sansome St., San Francisco, CA 94104; 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@gmail.com). The Society intends to gather representatives from participating congregations and groups on November 19, 2011 at University of Illinois Student Center (750 S. Halsted St., Chicago, IL 60607). The National Center for the Laity is a cosponsor for the event.

The first Fair Trade Towns and Universities conference will be September 9, 2011 in Philadelphia. More information: Fair Trade USA (1500 Broadway #400, Oakland, CA 94612; www.fttuconference.eventbrite.com).

“Theological, Moral and Scientific Concepts of Early Human Life” is an October 12-14, 2011 symposium at St. Louis University and sponsored by Institute for Theological Encounter with Science and Technology (20 Archbishop May Dr. #3400A, St. Louis, MO 63119; www.itest-faithscience.org)

Siena Center (7200 W. Division St., River Forest, IL 60305; www.siena.dom.edu) begins its new series of programs on October 27, 2011 with a talk by novelist Mary Gordon. Several other talks follow, including “Catholics in the Public Square” by M. Cathleen Kaveny from the University of Notre Dame on February 9, 2012.

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