

"Labor Day, 2011"  
 Week of August 29, 2011  
 ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY  
 By Rev. Richard P. McBrien

For the past several years this column has observed Labor Day weekend in the United States and Canada by focusing on justice in the Church.

Last year I expressed the hope that the U.S. Catholic bishops would issue an annual Labor Day statement that focused on this aspect of Catholic social teaching. Unfortunately, they failed to do so—again.

Pope Paul VI reminded us in his 1975 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* (literally, “Of proclaiming the Gospel”) that it belongs to the essence of the Church’s mission of evangelization that it must begin “by being evangelized itself” (n. 15)

In the same document, the pope pointed out that people listen “more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if [they do] listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”

“It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world, in other words, by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus—the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity” (n. 41).

The document “Justice in the World” of the Third World Synod of Bishops in 1971 had been even more explicit about the connection between Catholic social teaching and the practice of the Church.

“While the Church is bound to give witness to justice,” the document stated, “she recognizes that anyone who ventures to speak to people about justice must first be just in their eyes....No one should be deprived of [their] ordinary rights because [they are] associated with the Church in one way or the other” (Chapter III, “The Practice of Justice,” paragraphs 2 and 3).

The 1986 statement of the U.S. Catholic bishops, “Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy,” drew directly from the synodal document, “Justice in the World.”

This document declared—in italics: “All the moral principles that govern the just operation of any economic endeavor apply to the Church and its agencies and institutions, indeed the Church should be exemplary” (n. 347).

Neither document, however, properly grounded its argument in the principle of sacramentality. It is because the Church itself is a sacrament, a visible sign of the invisible presence of the triune God, that it has a missionary obligation to practice what it preaches and teaches.

On the other hand, the U.S. bishops have a more immediate problem, as I pointed out in a previous column. One of the main elements of Catholic social teaching is that workers have a natural right to form labor unions and to engage in collective bargaining with their employers.

This right was articulated by Pope Leo XIII in his landmark 1891 encyclical *Rerum novarum* and has been reaffirmed by almost every pope since then, including the current pope, Benedict XVI.

And yet the right to collective bargaining has been voided by Republican governors and legislatures in many of the U.S. states including Wisconsin, Ohio, Florida, Maine, Michigan, Indiana, New Jersey, and elsewhere, but without a table-pounding protest from the bishops of those states or the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The bishops can be counted on to protest gay marriage legislation, but not these direct violations of Catholic social teaching.

Is it because of the changed composition of the U.S. hierarchy? In the 1940s and 1950s it was commonly thought that almost all the American bishops came from households where the breadwinner was an ordinary workingperson.

This meant, as I pointed out in last year’s Labor Day column, that the bishops of those years

were more likely to view social and political issues from the viewpoint of those on the lower end of the economic ladder and to support the rights of workers over the interests of their corporate employers.

One could not imagine the bishops of that era being silent in the face of direct assaults on the rights of men and women in the workforce, whether in the public or the private sectors.

Indeed, some of the bishops of that time assigned one of their priests to run labor schools to instruct Catholic workers on the Church's social teachings and to identify the rights they possess in the marketplace.

Unfortunately, some bishops today tend not only to be more conservative theologically, but politically as well.

On this Labor Day, 2011, many Catholics nevertheless look to their bishops to follow in the footsteps of Pope Paul VI, the Third World Synod of Bishops, and their own predecessors in the hierarchy.

As the saying goes, Hope springs eternal.

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"The Pope John Paul II Cultural Center, etc."  
 Week of September 5, 2011  
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 By Rev. Richard P. McBrien

Cardinal Adam Maida, who retired as Archbishop of Detroit in 2009, first proposed the idea of the Pope John Paul II Cultural Center to the pope when he (Maida) was still bishop of Green Bay, Wisconsin (1984-90). It may or may not have influenced the pope to appoint Bishop Maida to Detroit. Over four years later he was named a cardinal.

The Center was subsequently erected in Washington, D.C., at a cost of \$75 million. It was expected to more than pay for itself as a tourist attraction and a think tank. That never happened, as some predicted at the time.

The Center opened in March, 2001, and has just been sold to the Knights of Columbus for \$22.7 million. That's a lot of money, of course, but it represents a \$34 million loss for the Archdiocese of Detroit.

The archdiocese bore most of the original cost but also loaned the Center more than \$54 million under an arrangement worked out by the former Archbishop of Detroit, Cardinal Maida. (I am relying here on the news story by Tom Roberts in the August 19<sup>th</sup> issue of the *National Catholic Reporter*, "Knights buy John Paul II Cultural Center.")

Within five years of its opening, it was \$36 million in debt to the Archdiocese of Detroit because of the loans. The amount rose to more than \$54 million today, a portion of which included an average of \$65,000 per month for upkeep, which the archdiocese continued to pay even while it marketed the Center for sale during the past 18 months.

Unfortunately, Cardinal Maida made the loans without consultation with the priests or laity of the archdiocese. It was only after the NCR reported on the debt in a February 2006 story that he acknowledged the financial scope of the loans in a letter to the archdiocese. Cardinal Maida's successor, Allen Vigneron, has been left to pick up the pieces.

The Knights of Columbus intends to establish the building as a shrine to the late pope. But it will labor under the same liabilities as the original project.

The 100,00 square-foot Center is located on 12 acres next to The Catholic University of America. However, the location is out-of-the-way and is not convenient to public transportation, unlike the many museums elsewhere in the city.

In any case, no diocese, much less one in which there is so much poverty in its central city, should have been exposed to so much financial risk.

But the wish to honor Pope John Paul II was intense at the time, not least because of ethnic considerations. The pope was a native of Poland, and Cardinal Maida is of Polish-American extraction.

The news story in the same issue of the NCR reminds us that too many U.S. bishops are still obsessed with sexual and marriage issues while not emphasizing enough issues of social justice, such as the recent assault on the rights of collective bargaining in some U.S. states, like Wisconsin and Ohio.

Archbishop Edwin O'Brien of Baltimore sent a private letter to Governor Martin O'Malley of Maryland to protest the governor's support of legislation legalizing same-sex marriages in the state.

Archbishop O'Brien referred to himself and his fellow bishops as "advocates for the truths we are compelled to uphold."

In response to the archbishop, the governor wrote that he and the archbishop agree on many of the moral issues facing both sides of the secular-sacred divide.

Governor O'Malley acknowledged the archbishop's right "to define, to preach about, and to administer the sacraments of the Roman Catholic church. But on the public issue of granting equal

civil marital rights to same-sex couples, you and I disagree.”

O’Malley noted that he was “sworn to uphold the law without partiality or prejudice.” He underscored his conviction that “discriminating against individuals based on their sexual orientation in the context of civil marital rights is unjust. I have also concluded,” the governor continued, “that treating the children of families headed by same-sex couples with lesser protection under the law than the children of families headed by heterosexual parents is also unjust.”

The archbishop insisted that “Maryland is not New York,” where, with Governor Andrew Cuomo’s vigorous support, the state senate passed legislation that legalized same-sex marriage. Archbishop O’Brien urged Governor O’Malley not to be influenced by that development.

Unlike his counterpart in Baltimore, Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York showed much pastoral wisdom in his dealings with Governor Cuomo. Governor Cuomo, in turn, exercised much political prudence in his dealings with Archbishop Dolan.

Both Governor Cuomo and Governor O’Malley ably defended justice and fairness in marriage and family life.

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