Solidarity in Catholic Social Teaching  
Tim Gabrielli, Ph.D., March 2018

“Open to the truth, from whichever branch of knowledge it comes, the Church’s social doctrine receives it, assembles into a unity the fragments in which it is often found, and mediates it within the constantly changing life-patterns of the society of peoples and nations.” ~ Pope Benedict XVI, Caritas in Veritate, no. 9

I. CST Themes

i. Life and Dignity of the Human Person
ii. Call to Family, Community, and Participation
iii. Rights and Responsibilities
iv. Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
v. The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers
vi. Solidarity
vii. Care for God’s Creation

II. Phone Story: http://www.phonestory.org/game.html  
Created by Paolo Pedercini, Associate Professor of Art at Carnegie Mellon

What was the experience like? What is the importance of perspective in the game? Anyone fail a stage? What was that like?

III. 3 Aspects of Solidarity in CST

a. Solidarity is a basic fact about humanity

“We all need each other, none of us is an island, an autonomous and independent ‘I,’ separated from the other.” – Pope Francis, TED Talk, 2017

b. Solidarity is a virtue

“Solidarity… is not a vague feeling of compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both far and near. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say the good of all and each individual because we are all really responsible for all.” – Pope John Paul II, Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (1987), no. 38.

c. Solidarity is embodied in good structures and institutions

“workers and employers should regulate their mutual relations in accordance with the principle of…solidarity [in contrast to both] unregulated competition in the liberal sense, and the Marxist creed of class warfare” – Pope John XXIII, Mater et Magistra (1961), no 23.
The Journey Outward

There are perhaps 1,000 happiness apps, reports Ruth Whippman, author of America the Anxious (St. Martin’s [2016], 175 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10010; $15.99). One sends a picture of a puppy each morning. Several are programmed to send pithy positive affirmations or inspiring quotations, as frequently as each hour. These apps, says Whippman, are part of our individualistic culture. The entire happiness advice industry pitches “the search for contentment as an internal, personal quest, divorced from other people.”

Our “isolationist philosophy” contends that “the search for happiness should be an individual self-focused enterprise,” writes Whippman. She readily admits that “self-reflection, introspection and some degree of solitude are important parts of a psychologically healthy life.” Yet, “every piece of research...agrees [that] our happiness depends on other people.” (N.Y. Times, 10/29/17)

Long before satellites and mobile devices, Christian tradition promoted several practices for genuine solitude and interior growth, including private morning and evening prayer, meditation, examination of conscience with a fearless moral inventory plus spiritual reading. Christian tradition insists, however, that the journey inward be accompanied by care for one’s family, solidarity with one’s co-workers and action to improve the world. Spirituality’s outward direction is mandatory even in a cloister, where prayers are offered for other people and the needs of the world.

Sargent Shriver (1915-2011) was the founding director of the Peace Corps, the head of the Office of Economic Opportunity, among the founders of Special Olympics and many more involvements. “Go back to your dorm and break some mirrors,” Shriver often told college students. That is, quit primping. Quit looking at reflections of yourself, including those on social media. Turn away from the mirror; lock out the window. Get involved. Take the journey outward.

“The most significant thing we can do for our well-being is not to find ourselves or go within,” says Whippman. “It’s to invest as much time and effort as we can into nurturing the relationships we have with the people in our lives.”

Start with face-to-face relationship; start with involvement. Happiness and holiness can follow.

Taking the Initiative Against Sweatshops

It is not easy to buy apparel “Made in the USA.” For example, many uniforms worn by Secret Service and TSA agents are made in Mexico. Most ICE and Customs agents wear uniforms made in Latin America or Cambodia. This occurs despite a 2009 regulation that tells federal agencies to purchase domestic products.

Compliance is difficult because several trade agreements override or make exceptions to the 2009 requirement. Further, supply chains are complicated. Parts of a uniform (the buttons, logo, zipper etc.) might be made here, other parts over there. Plus, consumers, including the government, prefer convenience and bargains. (N.Y. Times, 11/25/17)

A baseball cap from Trump Inc. goes for $7.99. It bears the slogan Make America Great Again. Presuming yours is not a knockoff, its label says “assembled in the USA.” The use of the word assembled instead of made sounds like an alternative fact. Smile.

All other Trump apparel is foreign. His other cap, the one for golf, is from Bangladesh. Suits are from Mexico or Indonesia, shirts from Latin America and Asia, etc. The items in Ivanka Trump’s apparel line, including her shoes and accessories, are made in Indonesia, Bangladesh, China and other overseas places. Some of the factories doing business with her are sweatshops. One in China has 24 outstanding labor violations, others pay less than their country’s minimum, and wage theft occurs. (Dollars & Sense [10/17], 89 South St. #LL02, Boston, MA 02111)

Eliminating overseas sweatshops makes increased production and purchase of U.S. apparel more likely.
Fair competition (with consideration to local wage rates and in compliance with international standards) benefits everyone, including consumers.

Several advocacy groups monitor sweatshops, including Clean Clothes Campaign (Postbus 11584, 1001 GN Amsterdam, Netherlands; www.cleanclothes.org) and China Labor Watch (147 W. 35th St. #406, New York, NY 10001; www.chinalabowatch.org).

Some students have found a clever way to break into the seemingly impenetrable harshness of the global economy. Under the banner of United Students Against Sweatshops (1155 Connecticut Ave. NW #500, Washington, DC 20036; www.usas.org), they go to their college bookstore. They ask the store manager to name the factory that produces the school’s sweaters, shirts, jackets and the like. They simultaneously push their administrators to require that bookstore vendors have humane labor codes. They get their school to sign on with an independent apparel monitoring organization, Worker Rights Consortium (5 Thomas Cr. NW #500, Washington, DC 20005; www.workersrights.org). There is an educational benefit to the USAS campaign when a few faculty members object to the campaign.

Several websites, like www.americansworking.com and www.apparelsearch.com locate USA clothing. Chain stores at the mall, like Macy’s, Target, Dillard’s and others, might have some USA items squeezed onto their racks. Managers at retail outlets are ready for questions about USA clothing.

Not to say that all overseas manufacturers are sweatshops. Sewing Hope by John Kline and Sarah Adler Milstein (University of California Press [2017], 210 American Dr., Jackson, TN 38301; $26.95) tells about Alta Garcia. It is located in Dominican Republic and makes clothes for U.S. retailers. Customers must be willing to pay a tad more per item to get justice with their purchase.

Taking the Initiative

With Coops

The word economy is equated with capitalist markets, says Penn Loh of Tufts University. Under that assumption “value is measured only in money terms.” Yet alongside “the official capitalist economy [there] are all sorts of thriving non-capitalist economies.” Loh says homemade cooking, volunteering, bartering and lending within extended family circles “add up to a significant portion of all economic activity.” (Yes [Winter/18], 284 Madrona Way NE #116, Bainbridge Island, WA 98110)

Loh also mentions worker-owned coops. In addition to money, coops value solidarity, democracy and justice. He is aware of Wellspring (143 Main St., Springfield, MA 01105; www.wellspringcoop.org). It upholsters furniture, repairs windows and maintains a hydroponic greenhouse. From there going east on I-90, he finds Solidarity and Green Economy (3 Pleasant St. #3, Worcester, MA 01609; www.worcestersegaalliance.org). Its divisions include bookkeeping, honey processing, robotics, a greenhouse and an energy supply service. Loh is associated with Center for Cooperative Development and Solidarity (675 Massachusetts Ave. #800, Cambridge, MA 02139; www.solidaritymass.com), a hub that provides grants, training and sponsorship for worker-owners.

INITIATIVES knows about Inter-Valley Project (95 Fair Oak Ave., Newton, MA 02460; www.intervalleyproject.org), a tri-state community organization. IVP launched two worker-owned home health firms and helped workers who bought out their employer.

Catholicism teaches that an economy that values only money cannot even be an efficient market, much less a humane one. A market needs what Loh calls “all sorts of thriving non-capitalist” activities. Pope Benedict XVI uses fresh terms to describe these activities—an economy of communion, a culture of gift, or commerce of gratuitousness. The gift economy “does not merely sit alongside” the money economy, says Benedict XVI. It has to be interwoven so that all normal economic activity has some friendship, solidarity and reciprocity. Without voluntary agencies, without mutual assistance in extended families and without coops (both worker-owned businesses and consumer buying clubs), social trust evaporates. The 2008 crash is one stark manifestation of defects in a money-only economy. (Charity in Truth, National Center for the Laity, PO Box 291102, Chicago, IL 60629; $8)

Taking the Initiative

In Restaurant Management

Carolyn Brown has an unusual business model, reports Ted Gregory. She has “a restaurant in a long-shuttered dilapidated structure in the middle of windswept farm fields” and runs it as “a non-profit, community-building establishment where customers pay what they decided they could afford.” Nonetheless, her Kitchen Table (7034 S. Klondike Rd., Rochelle, IL 61068; www.kitchentablerochelle.org) is going strong after 18 months. So strong that Brown now has a benevolent fund to help people pay for medication,
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Some Resources

Brief video from Catholic Relief Services and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2DjhDMyoLg


** A window into the Catholic Worker (CW) movement founded by exemplar of solidarity, Dorothy Day in the early twentieth century. CWs live with the poor in houses of hospitality and regularly challenge the structures that make people poor. Day’s autobiography, The Long Loneliness and another of her books, Loaves and Fishes are both excellent resources for understanding her and the CW.


** Beyer provides a very nice overview of the significance of solidarity in CST. It has some depth—with an excellent collection references in the notes—but is accessible to non-experts.


** Boyle is an exemplar of solidarity. He lives among the gangs in LA, learns from them, practices the works of mercy, and transforms structures of hopelessness.


A few years ago, CRS began an initiative of collaboration with universities to promote CST education. Each year they choose a theme and offer a variety of resources on that theme, connected to their international relief work. The theme for 2018-2019 is “Human Trafficking.” They have also done years on Climate Change, Migration, and Global Hunger.


** Clark has a good podcast explaining solidarity here:
https://www.americamagazine.org/media/podcasts/understanding-solidarity


** A brief article that gives an overview of some of the exercise of solidarity of Cardinal Joseph Tobin (nicknamed “Big Red”) with Immigrants and Refugees in the U.S. This has brought him into some conflict with political leaders. Tobin also welcomed a group of LGBT Catholics to the Newark cathedral with the words, “I am Joseph, your brother.”
Kammer, Fred, SJ. “Catholic Social Thought and Solidarity.” JustSouth Quarterly (Summer 2013): 3. 


** Contains stories of particular lives in regions where CRS has done its profound work on behalf of victims of a variety of social and natural disasters. It’s an engaging and substantive book suitable for the classroom. Not to mention the natural fit between its title and our mission statement!


http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html


** Provides some key excerpts from a variety of CST documents as well as an overview and some relevant biblical texts.