



Challenges to Private Sector Unionism in the United States and Catholic Social Teaching

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Abstract

This paper tackles the current challenges to private sector unionism in the United States in light of Catholic social teaching (CST). The focus of the study is unionism in the private sector where the fall-off in membership is observed. CST is contained in a wide variety of official documents of the Catholic Church, in particular papal encyclicals, which present ethical norms for economic life in response to the changing realities of the modern world. The study begins with an analysis of the concrete situation: the causes of decline in union membership. It is followed by an ethical reflection on CST's perspectives and exploration of practices, strategies, and policies that can help reverse the ongoing trend of union decline and revitalize the labor movement in the country. The paper argues that unions are good in themselves as an expression of the workers' right to associate and instrumentally good as they invoke such values as the dignity of work, solidarity, subsidiarity, common good, and economic equality. While it has been proven that workers and society as a whole gain material benefits from effective unionization, focus on intangible benefits and moral principles offered by CST may give labor organizing a new impetus and inspiration.

Keywords: labor unions, Catholic social teaching, worker's rights, unionism, private sector, globalization

Introduction

The proportion of unionized workers in the United States has diminished in recent decades. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014) only 6.6% of wage and salary workers in the private sector are unionized. Opponents of unionism claim that unions hurt the economy, lower corporate profitability, cause the stock market to fall, and are

coercive because they require members to pay dues and prevent them from working outside the contract which the union has negotiated. In this era of values-based management, when many business leaders are purportedly becoming aware of the social responsibility of corporations and adapting a multi-stakeholder view, unionism is already obsolete. Without unions, they argue, there would be continued economic growth and business expansion, the benefits of which would eventually trickle down to workers.

Several studies, however, indicate that a majority of Americans are in favor of labor organizing or some form of employee representation (Beyer; Koenig: 8; Matheny 2009: 2; Yamada: 556; Freeman and Rogers). In a national survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2014 (Desilver), 51% of respondents have a favorable opinion of unions. Unfortunately, the decline in union membership is observed in all states and labor scholars predict that this will continue, suggesting a bleak future for labor unionism in the country. Some are of the opinion that this trend is irreversible (Brad; Hirsch).

According to Chaison, “These are hard times for unions in America, and despite so much talk of the need for unions to move in new directions, it is still not clear where they are heading, or even if it is too late to move at all” (178). In response, this paper tackles the current challenges to private sector unionism in the U.S. in light of Catholic social teaching (CST). It has been noted elsewhere that the American labor movement had a traditionally Catholic character in its beginning (Kohler: 978; Seaton). The support given by the Catholic Church to labor organization and collective bargaining exerted certain influence on the shape of the American labor law scheme (Kohler: 889). Catholic clergy and various lay organizations had a major influence on labor organizing, especially during the early struggles of the 1930s through labor guilds/schools organized by Catholic parishes and colleges where many workers learned about their rights in light of CST. These labor schools “produced vast number of young leaders to the U.S. labor movement” (Holland: 159). The focus of the study is unionism in the private sector where the fall-off in membership is observed. Vachon emphasizes the importance of studying private and public unions separately because the factors that affect their growth or decline are distinct. “Public sector unions derive their power from political pressure, often in the form of public opinion, while private sector unions derive their strength from power relations within the labor market” (34).

For the Catholic Church, “the social message of the Gospel must not be considered a theory, but above all else a basis and a motivation for action” (John Paul II 1991: 57). CST presents the Catholic Church’s ethical norms for economic life, which, though rooted in biblical and theological themes, are “subscribed to by many who do not share Christian religious convictions” (U.S. Catholic Bishops: 61). In *Mater et Magistra*, John XXIII suggests three steps “in the reduction of social principles into practice. First, one reviews the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a judgment on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one decides what in the circumstances can and should be done to implement these principles” (236). Using this framework, this paper will start with an analysis of the concrete situation: the causes of decline in union membership. This will be followed by an ethical reflection on CST’s perspectives and exploration of practices, strategies, and policies that can help reverse the ongoing trend of union decline and revitalize the labor movement in the country.

The Current State of Labor Union in the Private Sector: Causes of Decline

Developments in business and the economic landscape in the twenty-first century have changed the dynamics between workers, management, and unions. Critics claim that unions' demands for job security, seniority, and salary standardization are obstacles to global competitiveness and are antithetical to changes in the workplace brought about by globalization that require a flexible workforce. The term "globalization" refers not only to the liberalization of trade restrictions and capital control, but also to the transformation in the organization of production and in the power relations between workers, governments, and corporations. "The rise of a system of global supply chains, with their multilayered set of factories, vendors, and transport links, has created a world system in which legal ownership of the forces of production have been divorced from operational control" (Lichtenstein: 275). Technology enables multinational corporations to efficiently manage a dispersed network of production. The fragmented form of production it creates weakens workers' solidarity by generating competition between workers in advanced countries and those in developing countries with low standards of living. Many jobs are offshored to areas where lower wages are available and deregulated non-union workplaces abound. As a result, globalization "has decreased demand for local suppliers and eliminated many local production jobs – jobs that have traditionally been highly unionized" (Vachon: 9). Many countries have to keep their labor standards low to attract more direct foreign investments. Legal accountability for labor conditions becomes intractable.

"The financial service industry (FSI) has been one of the fastest-growing industries and the biggest profiteer from globalization" (Steger: 221). Like globalization, financialization of the economy is a double-edged phenomenon. It facilitates the conversion of economic products into exchangeable and traded goods resulting in rapid movement of investment capital at the global level. But it also encourages speculation for high-yield but high-risk investment and emphasis on short-term gains at the expense of a stable market. Corporate takeover, downsizing, and restructuring, together with economic insecurities, recessions, and periodic collapse of stock markets continue to plague many countries, creating high levels of unemployment.¹ Thus, even if unions succeed in their recruitment undertakings, the gain in membership is at times offset by the loss of members due to unemployment and layoffs. Further, because of the influence of the financial industry, more attention is given to the stock market as revenue and sales reports are monitored almost on a daily basis while the day-to-day lives of rank-and-file workers are neglected. Despite the proliferation of academic literature on corporate social responsibility and humanism in business, the financialization of the economy continues to pressure many business leaders to maximize shareholder value. One of the greatest risks for businesses according to Benedict XVI (40) is that they are almost exclusively answerable to their investors, thereby limiting their social value.

To cope with global competition and the demand for short-term gains, many companies have maintained the *casualization* of their workforce in order to gain wage flexibility and maximize productivity through functional flexibility. They resort to non-traditional work

¹ In 2009 at the end of the economic recession, the unemployment rate in the U.S. peaked at 10% according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

arrangements such as temporary or seasonal employment, contractual employment, on-call workers, perma-temp employees, day laborers, independent contractors, and indirect employment. “[S]trategies that once characterized only some low-wage workers such as garment and agriculture – have now spread to virtually every area of industry, including high tech and finance” (Smith: 198). Many professional white collar occupations are outsourced to freelancers who work on a contingent basis, isolated and “cut off from labor and working-class organizational traditions” (Greenwald: 118). By 2020, Greenwald (112) projects that as many as 50% of American workers will work contingently. Paradoxically, this happens as today’s average American worker works longer hours compared to European and Japanese workers. But such increase in the number of hours of work does not translate into more full-time jobs. Casualization of the workforce enables many employers not to pay a minimum wage, overtime pay, or retirement and health benefits. But this has a negative effect on union density. A high turnover rate in a firm does not give workers incentive and motivation to organize. “In today’s world of frequent movement, bargaining-unit based unionism means that union gains are increasingly ephemeral from the individual’s point of view” (Stone: 119). Insecure employment loosens the tie between the firm and the workers, and among workers themselves. Because workers’ commitment to unions positively correlates with their socialization in the workplace (Brimeyer: 110), contingent employees tend to have less interest in union activities.

Close to the center of global problems today is the issue of international migration. The wide economic gap between the poor and developed countries induces the movement of numerous workers from the latter to the former. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics (2015a), in 2014 there were 25.7 million foreign born workers in the country, comprising 16.5% of its workforce. With language difficulties and fewer skills, most of these immigrants are employed in low-paying and oftentimes difficult jobs, especially in unorganized sectors of the economy such as agriculture and the service industry. Many migrant workers are undocumented or unauthorized to work in the U.S. and this prevents them from participating in union activities. They are also systematically denied legal protection and a secure working environment, which make them vulnerable to exploitation. “Non-payment of wages and overtime pay, off the clock work, and retaliation against those who complain or attempt to organize their coworkers have become a commonplace” (Milkman: 247).

Another factor that contributes to the decline of union membership is the shift of the American economy from manufacturing to service industry. Currently, 78.8% of workers in the country are employed in service-producing industries (Henderson: 66). Union leaders are aware that service workers are the hardest to organize due to the high turnover rate in the industry and the management practice of subcontracting both to avoid unions and to gain access to cheaper labor (Appelbaum, Bernhardt, and Murnane: 11). Advancement opportunities for service workers are limited. Many positions in the service industry require fewer skills and no more than a high school diploma. Employee behavior can also be monitored easily and underperforming workers are deemed replaceable. Moreover, the service sector is a key employer of young workers, including high school students. Most of these young workers have no long-term career commitment, are still in school, or work

multiple jobs. They have no direct knowledge or experience of unionism, and have low expectation of wages and other benefits like retirement or seniority.

The decline in union membership in the U.S. happens at the time when anti-union activities of many employers are increasing. “The level of anti-union activity of U.S. employers appears much higher now than several decades ago” (Lipset and Katchanovski: 234). Some of the largest private employers in the country have always opposed unionization. They would close down their establishments or departments after workers had unionized. Even if workers would like to form unions, they cannot easily do so as management launches a systematic and expensive anti-union campaign, including hiring of firms and consultants that specialize in union avoidance. Although prohibited by law, dismissal of employee organizers or discriminating against them has become widespread.² Laws against labor rights violations are enforced ineffectively. “The remedies for unfair labor practices traditionally are cease-and-desist orders and reinstatement with or without back pay” (St. Antoine: 98). Management has unlimited opportunities to campaign against organizing during work time, and workers can be required to attend anti-union organizing meetings where management speakers are present and union advocates are absent. The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) “permits an employer to express its opposition to union representation as long as it does not threaten reprisal for union support or promises benefits to entice union opposition. Misstatements of fact and even intentional lies are not forbidden” (Matheny 2009: 5). As a result, organizing becomes difficult, contentious, expensive, and time-consuming.

The Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 gives employers the right to demand a secret-ballot election for union certification that can delay and even stymie the employee organizing efforts. “Under the current law, employers are under no obligation to recognize a union unless that union succeeds in garnering a majority vote in an election administered by the National Labor Relations Board” (Kolben 2010: 483). By questioning the majority status of a union, demanding secret ballot election, and making numerous ways to contest the latter’s result, management can buy time to demoralize workers or engage in coercive practices. Studies show that “workers in secret-ballot elections were twice as likely as workers in card-check elections to experience management coercion, and 50 percent more likely to report that management threatened to eliminate their positions in the event of union victory” (Penalver: 2). Even if a union wins certification elections, management can use delaying tactics to frustrate the first bargaining agreement, including surface bargaining, cancellation of meetings, and tardiness that lower the chances of concluding the negotiation. Matheny estimates that “approximately one-third of all newly certified union representatives fail to conclude a first contract, a failure which often leads to the de-certification of the union” (2009: 6).

² Starting at the end of the 1970s, American employers began to engage in the systematic and widespread use of illegal firings and other aggressive legal and illegal tactics in an attempt to undermine the success of campaigns for union representation. At the peak in the early 1980s, almost three percent of pro-union workers involved in union election campaigns were illegally fired in connection with those campaigns. From that peak in the early 1980s, the rate of illegal firings fell smoothly through the end of the 1990s, though remained high by historical standards. From about 2000 on, however, the rate of illegal firings jumped sharply again (Schmitt and Zipperer: 15)

Insights from Catholic Social Teaching

“The modern socio-economic context, characterized by ever more rapid processes of economic and financial globalization, prompts unions to engage in renewal” (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace [PCJP] 2004: 673). CST welcomes the progressive transformation of global mechanisms and structures that can create opportunities for greater prosperity and redistribution of wealth on a world-wide scale. International free trade has created a broader and more efficient market by encouraging the production of goods wherever it can be done at the lowest cost, thereby increasing the purchasing powers of consumers. It brings work to the worker rather than the other way around. “In this way many people will be afforded an opportunity of increasing their resources without being exposed to the painful necessity of uprooting themselves from their own homes, settling in a strange environment, and forming new social contacts” (John XXIII 1963: 102). However, globalization appears to have negative consequences such as lowering of wages, job insecurity, wider social inequality, and exploitative working conditions including the use of child labor. What CST rejects is a deterministic view of globalization. Globalization does not have to be or mean what it does today; it is not evil per se. It is a human reality that demands critical analysis and discernment on account of its complexity and conflicting outcomes.

Rather than outright or reactionary opposition, unions must consider the positive effects of globalization by focusing their attention on the degree of interdependence it facilitates. “Underneath the more visible process, humanity itself is becoming increasingly interconnected; it is made up of individuals and peoples to whom this process should offer benefits and development, as they assume their respective responsibilities, singly and collectively” (Benedict XVI: 42). Because of globalization, socio-economic problems have assumed a worldwide dimension. The global context in which work takes place demands that national labor unions, which tend to limit themselves to defending the interests of their registered members, turn their attention to those outside their membership, to issues that transcend national or regional boundaries, and in particular to workers in developing countries where social rights are often violated. What is needed is a new form of solidarity of workers and cooperation at the international level. Through a continued study of the subject of work and of the subject’s living conditions, this new form of solidarity can be rediscovered and even established on a firmer ground (PCJP 2004: 674). Union organizing must concentrate in industries where exploitation and harsh working conditions predominate. Aware that without a multi-sector cooperation in the international level, unscrupulous investors in collusion with corrupt politicians will continue exploiting vulnerable workers, especially those who are living in less industrialized countries, Benedict XVI (63) echoes the call from his predecessor to all government leaders, international agencies, labor organizations, and civic groups to form a “global coalition in favour of ‘decent work’” that will ensure that the working people would have their fair share of the benefits of globalization.

In reference to globalization, Benedict XVI says, “We should not be its victims, but rather its protagonists, acting in the light of reason, guided by charity and truth” (64). Labor leaders should not be deterred or discouraged by the forces of globalization. Labor movements must follow the direction of globalization by organizing in areas of foreign

direct investments and in industries that benefit from globalization, which include not only labor employed directly by multinational corporations but also workers in construction, communication, tourism, and transportation as these sectors experience increase in demand. Unions might be more open to the idea of limited job rotation to allow cross utilization of employees that most employers need to make quick adjustment in production. Despite the phenomenon of economic globalization, a large part of the U.S. economy, specifically biomedical, health, agriculture, real state, and hospitality, remains rooted at the local level where labor organizing can concentrate. Union leaders should continue to invest on local units. Since it is the labor-intensive aspect of production that is usually offshored, they can also focus on professionals and highly skilled workers and those who engage in technologically dynamic aspects of production (Vachon: 12). As John Paul II (1981: 20) states in *Laborem Exercens*, all workers, not just blue collar but also professionals and knowledge workers, need associations to protect their rights.³

“The *mobility of labour*, associated with a climate of deregulation, is an important phenomenon with certain positive aspects, because it can stimulate wealth production and cultural exchange” (Benedict XVI: 25). When it becomes prevalent, however, it creates financial, physical, and psychological instability on the part of the workers. Many of them are worried about their health and retirement benefits because of their inability to keep permanent and stable jobs. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014), part-time workers are likely to be among those whose income falls below poverty line. Today, CST calls on unions to act in new ways. “The gradual obsolescence of organizational models based on salaried workers in big business makes it fitting to update the norms and systems of social security that have traditionally protected workers and guaranteed their fundamental rights” (PCJP 2004: 309). The on-going *flexibilization* of the workforce⁴ necessitates flexibility of union structure as well. Since *Rerum Novarum*, which is the first encyclical that expresses support for workers’ unions, CST has been open as to the specific form this association will take. Leo XIII remarks, “Such unions should be suited to the requirements of this our age – an age of wider education, of different habits, and of far more numerous requirements in daily life” (84). Decades later, in *Mater et Magistra*, John XXIII reiterates that unions are to be structured “in a way best calculated to safeguard the workers’ legitimate professional interest” (1961: 22). Labor organizations can take many forms, but they are all united by their cause. “No matter what form workers’ association take in the future, Catholic social thought’s powerful endorsement of the human right of workers to form associations . . . will make a powerful contribution to the struggle for justice in the workplace” (Matheny 2014: 35).

Labor organizations will become more relevant as the number of non-traditional and contingent workers increases and employment becomes more insecure and uncertain. For

³ “Pope John Paul II’s statement that representatives of ‘every profession’ can benefit from workers’ associations dispels any notion that *LE* is relevant only to the industrial era, and not relevant in the post-industrial United States” (Matheny 2014: 19).

⁴ “*Flexibilization* refers to the changing work practices by which firms no longer use internal labor markets or implicitly promise employees lifetime job security, but rather seek flexible employment relations that permit them to increase or diminish their workforce, and reassign and redeploy employees with ease” (Stone: 115).

many workers of today, labor organizations could be the only socially and economically stabilizing mechanism in a rapidly changing occupational and industrial pattern. CST recommends the creation of various workers' associations that can serve as participative instruments in management and provide assistance to their members without getting involved in collective bargaining (Paul VI 1967: 38-39). These organizations can "create a fund out of which the members may be effectually helped in their needs, not only in the cases of accident, but also in sickness, old age, and distress" (Leo XIII: 58). In line with this, there are national unions today that provide associate or extended membership to individuals who are temporarily unemployed or who do not have the opportunity to have a union in their workplace but would like to participate in union benefits. To address the issue of flexible employment, contingent workers' unions are currently being formed to protect the interests of non-traditional workforce (freelancers, day laborers, etc.). Amendments are also needed to NLRA in order to expand its determination of a bargaining unit to include being part of a work team or a company (without being limited to a physical location), and to remove the law's definitional exclusion of agricultural workers as employees. *Laborem Exercens* states:

But even in the economically developed countries, where scientific research, technological achievements and State policy have brought agriculture to a very advanced level, the right to work can be infringed when the farm workers are denied the possibility of sharing in decisions concerning their services, or when they are denied the right to free association with a view to their just advancement socially, culturally and economically (John Paul II 1981: 21).

In addition, "The activity of union organizations opens up many possibilities in this respect, including their *efforts to instruct and educate* the workers and to *foster their self-education*" (John Paul II 1981: 20). Compared to European or Japanese workers, Americans are more likely to be laid off and receive less company based training that can upgrade their skills to enable them to get other jobs (Yates: 123). By giving workers opportunities for training and education, unions can provide them with employability security in lieu of job security. Unions cannot guarantee security of employment nor can they require management not to fire an employee if the employee's conduct justifies termination, but unions can minimize layoffs and casualization through contracts with layoff restrictions, lower hourly requirement to qualify for full-time benefits, generous separation pay that can make downsizing costly, respect for seniority, prohibition of at-will employment, and recall provisions.

In the past, immigrants were central players in the U.S. labor movement, and they will continue to be so as seen by the determination of foreign born workers to organize in recent years. Immigrant workers are projected to be the most rapidly growing portion of the American population over the next fifty years by the end of the century (Zieger and Gall: 242). Unfortunately, many view immigrant workers, not as human persons with dignity or victims of abuse, but as a threat to the nation's integrity or as an economic burden. This is contrary to the stand taken by the Catholic Church. The U.S. Catholic Bishops state, "the presence of brothers and sisters from different cultures should be celebrated as a gift to the Church" (65). This statement is true, not only in its cultural context but also in economic terms. Immigrants "could be powerful bridge-builders between unions in different nations;

they could spearhead cross-border organizing; they could help promote the formation of international unions” (Yates: 182). Having left their homeland to find jobs, most immigrants are hardworking and law abiding, pay their taxes, remit money to their families, and contribute to social security. Yet, most of them have no social security or health benefits.

The right to emigrate and take up residence elsewhere is recognized by the Catholic Church as an inalienable human right. Immigrant workers, regardless of their legal status must be treated with respect and dignity. They cannot “be considered as a commodity or a mere workforce. They must not, therefore, be treated like any other factor of production. Every migrant is a human person who, as such, possesses fundamental, inalienable rights that must be respected by everyone and in every circumstance” (Benedict XVI: 62). They cannot be placed at a disadvantaged position compared to other workers with regard to their rights and benefits. “Emigration in search of work must in no way become an opportunity for financial or social exploitation” (John Paul II 1981: 23). In terms of labor policy, this involves offering working protection to all employed immigrants regardless of their legal status and creating a system that allows foreigners to enter the nation and work legally if jobs are available for them. Studies have shown that “recent immigrants do not compete directly with native labor” (Yates: 171). Legalization of the status of many undocumented workers will provide them with political rights to participate in the labor movement. It has been suggested, too, that community-based workers’ centers for immigrants be established to provide assistance in employment law problems, technical skills training, English language acquisition, and workplace rights education. CST states:

Beyond their function of defending and vindicating, unions have the duty of acting as representatives working for “the proper arrangement of economic life” and of educating the social consciences of workers so that they will feel that they have an active role, according to their proper capacities and aptitudes, in the whole task of economic and social development and in the attainment of the universal common good (PCJP 2004: 671).

The growth of the service industry indicates that the future of private sector unionism in the U.S. is contingent on organizing service workers. Contemporary service workers belong to the low-wage working class. In most cases, they are in the difficult position of protecting the interest of the business establishment and satisfying the customers. “They need to organize to have a voice in political circles as well as in the organs of public administration, for today almost nobody hears, much less pays attention to, isolated voices” (John XXIII 1961: 148). To meet the challenges in the service sector, unions need to be flexible in their structure and membership. Aside from extended membership that was mentioned earlier, another membership strategy is the mixed model plan: “management of a hotel restaurant was subcontracted for brand-name recognition, but the workers remained on payroll, covered by the union contract” (Appelbaum et al.: 16). Organizing unions vertically rather than horizontally⁵ will result in recruiting more members and achieving a critical mass for collective bargaining.

⁵ A vertical labor union, also called industrial union, is organized to include all employees who belong to the same industry, regardless of their occupations or skills, in order to give the union more leverage in bargaining. In contrast, horizontal or craft union is composed of members who share the same skills.

Since the service sector is a key employer of young workers, unions must explore creative ways of educating the public, especially young workers and high school students. The decline in union membership is particularly significant among the youth. With minimal exposure unions get from mainstream media, young people of today have very little knowledge of the nature and activities of labor unions. Labor organizers need to develop recruitment strategies that appeal to the youth, including the use of new media like social networking and other online sites. Educational institutions can provide resources and the instructions needed to reach out to the youth and familiarize them about labor rights and the benefits of unionizing. Unfortunately, few colleges and universities offer programs in labor relations and many students enrolled in Catholic schools are ignorant of Catholic teachings on unions (Holland).

The Role of the State

Labor unions are a form of human association. “From the very fact that human beings are social, there arises the right of assembly and associations” (John XXIII 1963: 23). Human persons are social beings by their innermost nature, “and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential” (Vatican Council II: 12). Human associations combine and coordinate the powers of individuals so that they can achieve collectively what they cannot do separately. When people work together, they do not just form a mechanical unit, but a genuine community of persons and, therefore, need a collective representation. According to *Gaudium et Spes* (Vatican Council II) the right to associate is one of the basic rights of the person, which *Pacem in Terris* declares as “universal and inviolable, and therefore inalienable” (John XXIII 1963: 9). Human rights are categorical expressions of the fundamental moral characteristic of every human being – her dignity. The right to associate is a natural right that the state must protect.

CST is supportive of the right to associate in general as it gives explicit support and encouragement to the right to unionize in particular. According to Leo XIII, workers’ association is the most important of all social organizations, which should multiply and be more effective. Basing his analysis on the historical role of unions, John Paul II argues that the need for workers to secure their rights gives rise to the right to organize. Workers’ rights can also be guaranteed and protected through legislation, but in the absence of appropriate laws, unionism is the only effective way for workers to safeguard their rights. The formation of unions cannot be prohibited by the state because “the State is bound to protect natural rights, not to destroy them; and if it forbids its citizens to form associations, it contradicts the very principle of its own existence for both they and it exist in virtue of the like principle, namely, the natural tendency of man to dwell in society” (Leo XIII 1891: 51). The rights of the workers need political and judicial support so that they can be effectively implemented or enforced. They are to be respected even under difficult economic times (John Paul II 1991: 7).

The principle of subsidiarity enunciated by Pius XI in *Quadragesimo Anno* (79-80) mandates the state to respect and support intermediary civic groups and private institutions like labor unions as agents and organizing principles of social life. John Paul II considers union as an “indispensable element of social life, especially in modern industrialized societies” (1981: no. 20). Under the principle of subsidiarity, “Government should not

replace or destroy smaller communities and individual initiative. Rather it should help them to contribute more effectively to social well-being and supplement their activity when the demands of justice exceed their capacities” (U.S. Catholic Bishops: 124). The state has the moral obligation to support organized labor. In most cases, non-unionized workers are at-will employees with very little bargaining power and no job protection or paid leave benefits. Unionism allows workers to have some control with regard to the conditions of their employment. In non-union workplaces, management fully determines the company’s internal policies after complying with the minimum regulatory standards. Workers are left with legal remedies that can only be availed of through a lengthy and expensive litigation. They are also the ones who mostly bear the cost of economic crises, recessions, and the ups and downs of the business cycle in terms of lay-offs, increased workloads, chronic understaffing, or reduced benefits. Together, workers can exert pressure on powerful businesses to refrain from unjust labor practices and exploitative strategies. Human rights are interdependent. Without unions, other labor rights may become inaccessible.

Unfortunately, while political leaders recognize the legitimacy of private organizations of various kinds and willingly accept the defense of their rights as an essential ingredient of a democratic society, not all of them are open to the principles and exercise of labor union rights. “Governments, for reasons of economic utility, often limit the freedom or the negotiating capacity of labor unions. Hence traditional networks of solidarity have more and more obstacles to overcome” (Benedict XVI: 25). Gross is of the opinion that “U.S. labor law, policy, and practice do not conform to international human rights principles” (2010: 206). Many provisions of the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 limit opportunities for union organizing and activities, and legislative proposals that aim to facilitate unionism in the private sector are not being passed. “[F]ederal and state laws also impose many *limitations* on the behavior of labor unions, which are weak in the United States compared to other industrialized democracies” (Levine: 530). The state cannot require workers to join unions, but it has the moral obligation to ensure that workers can have a union in their workplace if the majority of them have explicitly indicate, according to the process that they chose (whether secret ballot, signed petition, or card check), that they want one.

CST claims that the object of the state is the common good – defined as “the sum total of those conditions of social living whereby men are enabled to achieve their own integral perfection more fully and more easily” (John XXIII 1961: 71). The decline in private sector unionism does not promote the good of the workers and of our society. Based on the data released by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014), 10.6 million American workers live below the federal poverty line. In general, the minimum wage in the U.S. fails to comply with CST’s standards of a just living wage (see John XXIII 1961: 71). Since the late 70s, the real value of the minimum wage has not risen, despite the growth in workers’ productivity. Furthermore, there has been a dramatic increase in the compensation and benefits of top managers and executives of many companies. The U.S. has the highest level of inequality of wealth and income among advanced capitalist countries; the average CEO in the U.S. makes almost 300 times the average worker (Mishel et al.). Some labor scholars (Levine: 555; Freeman and Rogers; Matheny 2014) are of the opinion that the widening inequality in the country is partly the result of shrinking unions. CST does not envision an egalitarian society but “it sees extreme inequality as a threat to the solidarity of the human

community, for great disparities lead to deep social divisions and conflict” (U.S. Catholic Bishops: 74).

Centessimus Annus (John Paul II 1991: 15) acknowledges the decisive role of labor unions in negotiating minimum wage and other benefits. Research indicates that unions play an important role in determining the quality of front line jobs and in raising the salary of minimum wage earners. “To varying degrees, unions have been able to prevent the squeezing of labor costs that is the first competitive option chosen by many employers. Collective bargaining has been important in maintaining real wage levels and benefits and in preventing increases in workloads” (Appelbaum et al.: 20). Union members enjoy better benefits and healthcare coverage compared to non-union members. “Decades of research demonstrate that the benefits of collective bargaining, through union membership, accrue disproportionately to lower-skilled, blue collar workers and workers of color” (Greenwich, Mendoza, and Wykowski: 31). Unionism is most beneficial to workers of lower social status and that it “reduces the wage gap between whites and blacks, and between whites and Hispanics” (Yates: 41; see also Agnone). However, collective bargaining benefits other non-unionized workers in the long run by creating a spillover effect, i.e. wages and benefits in general tend to rise in areas that have high union density. On the other hand, society suffers when workers’ rights are violated, not only because of increased poverty. Society bears the cost of workers not having social benefits or sufficient income through welfare, subsidized health-care benefits, and other government assistance programs.

The state has to be involved in the well-being of ordinary wage earners, most of whom belong to the disadvantaged members of society. They should be “especially cared for and protected by the government” (Leo XIII: 37). In the same vein, John XXIII declares that those who are in power should “pay more attention to the weaker members of society, since these are at a disadvantage when it comes to defending their own rights and asserting their legitimate interests” (1963: 56).

The Role of Business Leaders

The nature of the employment system in the U.S. is centered on property rights (Block et al. 2006: 6). American courts have proved to be more predisposed towards prioritizing the right to private ownership over the right of free association (Dray: 8). For instance, law prohibits union organizers from having access to the plant or shop, which is the natural venue for reaching out to workers. Today, companies have become both politically and economically powerful. “American employers have much greater freedom to establish the conditions of employment than do their counterparts in other industrialized countries, thanks to extremely low rates of unionization and a legal framework that reflects the national valorization of ‘free enterprise’”(Royle and Towers: 13).

Capital is recognized by the Catholic Church as a form of private property. According to *Rerum Novarum*, private property is a natural right that flows from our rational nature. As rational beings, we have the right to determine what is good for ourselves. Thus, it is necessary that we obtain goods in a permanent and stable fashion so that we can utilize them in a way that will best serve our interests. John XXIII’s *Mater et Magistra* recognizes private ownership as necessary to guarantee human freedom and to increase individual initiative. If private ownership is abolished, other rights of the person would disappear and human

dignity would be diminished. Vatican Council II adds that private property is an incentive for responsible work. If properly managed, it affords opportunities for social and economic services. However, from CST perspective the right to private ownership is neither untouchable nor absolute. God wills that the earth and all its fullness benefit the entire human race. “God gave the earth to the whole of human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favoring anyone” (John Paul II 1991: 31). Natural goods have a universal destination and this takes precedence over the right of private possession, for the latter is always understood “within the broader context of the right common to all to use the goods of the whole of creation: *the right to private property is subordinated to the right to common use*, to the fact that goods are meant for everyone” (John Paul II 1981: 14). Private ownership becomes illegitimate when it is used contrary to the good of all.

CST recognizes the right of businesses to accumulate profit. Gains and profits are nothing but wages in a different form. “Those who engaged in production are not forbidden to increase their fortunes in a lawful and just manner” (Pius XI: 136). Profit is one of the aims of economic production and its increase is an indicator that the business enterprise is doing well. Accumulation of profit could lead to expansion of business, more employment, and higher benefits for the workers. But CST also states that business owners cannot concern themselves solely with the interest of stockholders, but “must also assume responsibility for all the other stakeholders who contribute to the life of the business: the workers, the clients, the suppliers of various elements of production, the community of reference” (Benedict XVI: 40). “In fact, the purpose of a business firm is not simply to make a profit, but is to be found in its very existence as a *community of persons* who in various ways are endeavoring to satisfy their basic needs, and who form a particular group at the service of the whole of society” (John Paul II 1991: 35). Business incomes and revenues must serve the good of all by being used to create employment and to improve the conditions of the workers.

CST points out that the right to private ownership should undergo “constructive revision, both in theory and in practice” in order to promote the rights and the workers and the dignity of human work. Owners of capital are not free to exercise their property rights without any regard for the rights of the workers. Capital by its very nature is material and an instrument of production; it must be at the service of human workers who, as subjects, cannot be merely used as means to an end. “Everything contained in the concept of capital in the strict sense is only a collection of things. Man, as the subject of work, and independently of the work that he does – man alone is the person” (John Paul II 1981: 12). Human work is always the primary efficient cause of production. Despite the use of automation, every company is still dependent on human workers for its daily operations. Understood as the whole collection of means of production, capital itself is a product of human work. Thus, John Paul II writes, “the principle of the priority of labor over capital is a postulate of the order of social morality. It has key importance both in the system built on the principle of private ownership of the means of production and also in the system in which private ownership of these means has been limited even in a radical way” (1981: 15). In his analysis, Matheny argues that for the pope, “ownership of the means of production is legitimate only insofar as it serves labor” (2014: 10).

The principle of the priority of labor over capital implies a moral obligation on the part of businesses to respect the right of the workers to organize. This means letting the workers decide whether they want to have a union or not, and leaving it upon them to figure out the organizational structure and rules which they deemed essential to promote their welfare. “Included is the right of freely taking part in the activity of these unions without risk of reprisal” (Vatican Council II: 68). Workers have “the right to give the societies of which they are members the form they consider most suitable for the aim they have in view, and to act within such societies on their own initiative and on their own responsibility in order to achieve their desired objectives” (John XXIII 1963: 23). The right to unionize involves the right to freely decide on the process of organizing a union, whether it is through secret ballot or card check. If many workers believe that there is something anomalous in the process of establishing their union, it is up to them as well to initiate protest or decertification. Workers may or may not be represented, but this decision is up to the workers alone, this is not a justification for union busting. The moral position of employers is to adopt a hands off policy or neutrality when it comes to union organizing.

The Role of Unions

Just like other institutions, labor unions are subject to human sin and imperfections. Many union leaders in the past have abandoned organizing and recruitment of new members, converting unions into highly centralized structures run by national leaders and paid staff. There are national unions that operate like corporations who compete for the affiliation and resources of local unions, rather than organizing and protecting workers. Internal problems due to rivalries between leaders and their failure to reconcile their differences to form a united front that will represent the interest of all workers also contribute to the decline of union membership and influence. Some labor leaders betray the trust of their members and use union resources for their own personal advantage. These damaged the reputation of many labor organizations, and made many workers cynical and apathetic about union operations (Jacobs: 4).

Despite their shortcomings, the Catholic Church cannot give up on unions. “The Church has confidence also in man, though she knows the evil of which he is capable. For she well knows that – in spite of the heritage of sin, and the sin which each one is capable of committing – there exist in the human person sufficient qualities and energies, a fundamental goodness” (John Paul II 1987: 47). The existence of bad unions does not negate the moral legitimacy of unions in general. It calls for the need for revitalization of workers solidarity, removal from office and/or prosecution of incompetent and corrupt leaders, and more vigilance, monitoring, and participation on the part of union members. According to Chaison (19), a major reason for the emergence and perpetuation of corruption in the union is the absence of democratic governance and participation. Like other private associations that have legal status, unions are accountable to their members and to the civil authority, but “unless proven otherwise, we are obliged in justice to presume that most union leaders are well intentioned and are trying to provide ethical leadership for their legitimate institutions” (Holland: 3).

CST’s support of labor organizing is not a blanket endorsement of all unions. The fact that something is called “labor organization” does not mean it is a morally good institution.

Rerum Novarum emphasizes the responsibilities of unions to their members and to the society as whole. Labor unions should be organized and governed in order to provide the workers the best and the most suitable protection of their rights and dignity. “The common funds must be administered with strict honesty, in such a way that member may receive assistance in proportion to his necessities” (Leo XIII: 58). Workers must not be pitted against each other, and no individual union member should suffer any harm. While forming consolidations or meg-unions by industry enables unions to gain more political influence and to pool their financial resources together, the strength of the union still lies in its individual members. Unions must strive to become a true association of workers where the majority of leaders and staff come from the ranks of workers that they want to organize

The concept of human rights in CST is personalist rather than atomistic or individualist. It is grounded on a holistic understanding of the person as a historically situated subject who has the natural capacity to participate in social life. CST balances individual claims with social needs. It considers not only the potential harm to the individual when these rights are violated, but also the damage to the human community and solidarity. Though at times individuals have to sacrifice a certain amount of their personal good for the sake of the good of all, the individual good and the common good are mutually reinforcing in the final analysis. The right to collective bargaining should put into consideration not just the demands of the workers but the financial condition of the company and the welfare of the general public. Workers’ remunerations must take into account “the function and productiveness of each one, the conditions of the factory or workshop, and the common good” (Vatican Council II: 67). Workers’ demands must be just and reasonable. “Just efforts to secure the rights of workers who are united by the same profession should always take into account the limitations imposed by the general economic situation of the country. Union demands cannot be turned into a kind of *group or class ‘egoism.’*” While recognizing that a strike is a legitimate means of securing workers’ demands,⁶ it is an extreme means that must never be abused, “especially for ‘political’ purposes” (John Paul II 1981: 20). The right to strike does not mean exclusion of other means through which workers’ demands may be settled such as mediation, arbitration, or conciliation.

CST’s support of unionism is not an endorsement for class struggle. Unionism does not mean a struggle against others, but a struggle for the just good. Although in the process, it is impossible that they will not encounter clashes or oppositions, the goal of unions is to be a participative partner rather than an adversary. While unions are responsible primarily for their members, their ultimate goal is to resolve the conflict between labor and capital. Such conflict is not inherent in the process of production or in the economic structure. It is rooted in a materialistic economic philosophy that considers human work simply as a cost of production and valued solely for its economic purposes. Labor and capital are inseparable. “Each needs the other completely, neither capital can do without labor, nor labor without

⁶ “When, however, socio-economic disputes arise, efforts must be made to come to a peaceful settlement. Although recourse must always be had first to a sincere dialogue between the parties, a strike, nevertheless, can remain even in present-day circumstances a necessary, though ultimate, aid for the defense of the workers’ own rights and the fulfillment of their just desires. As soon as possible, however, ways should be sought to resume negotiation and the discussion of reconciliation” (Vatican Council II: 8; see also Paul VI 1971: 14).

capital” (Leo XIII: 28). Labor provides the intelligence and human power needed to transform raw materials into something usable or saleable, while capital provides the raw materials, instruments, machines, and equipment which make production possible. Thus, “it is totally false to ascribe to labor or to capital alone that which is obtained by joint effort of one and the other, and it is flagrantly unjust that either would deny the efficacy of the other and seize all the profits” (Pius XI: 57).

The Future of Labor Unions

Currently there are two emerging views within the labor movement in response to declining membership. One is to concentrate the resources of unions on political lobbying and electoral campaigns in order to amend labor laws. The other is to focus on recruitment of new members and establishing alliances with civil society.

Political Involvement

“Economic activity, especially the activity of a market economy, cannot be conducted in an institutional, juridical or political vacuum” (John Paul II 1991: 48). To pass from economics to politics is inevitable, for political activity “is the occasion of concrete exchanges between men, of rights recognized, of services rendered and of dignity affirmed in work . . . for in social and economic field, both national and international, the ultimate decision rests with political power” (Paul VI 1971: 46). The state plays a central role in structuring the economy and regulating union activities. As membership declines and payoff of union organizing is low, some unions concentrate on political involvement and increased donation for campaign spending to help pro-union candidates. They see this as the cure for declining membership. Many labor leaders believe that the future of unionism in the U.S. lies in more active political involvement.

“Union organizations have the duty to exercise influence in the political arena, making it duly sensitive to labor problems and helping it to work so that workers’ rights are respected” (PCJP 2004: 307). Through increased political and election related activities, unions can continue to have the clout and influence necessary to enact strong laws that give workers the right to form and join unions, to reform the NLRA in order to fulfill its goal which is to safeguard the right of the workers to collective bargaining, and to repeal right-to-work laws. Matheny (2009: 7) is of the opinion that the NLRA fails to “recognize the right to organize and to collective bargaining as basic human rights.” With regard to right-to-work laws, they allow non-members to benefit from union contract without giving their just share. They ruin workers solidarity by appealing to the selfish tendencies of the individual. “Accordingly, individual employees have an incentive to free-ride by letting others undertake the costs of organizing and union representation while still enjoying the benefits” (Dau-Schmidt: 100).⁷ These laws have the effect of draining the resources of the union in the long run.

⁷ Right-to-work legislation is based on a wrong premise that unions coerce workers to join against their will. Labor union is a voluntary organization that follows democratic principles. When it comes to matters pertaining to the organization, the rule of the majority overrides individual or minority decisions. Security clauses are part of the labor-management agreement that require all employees to pay union dues. “Workers who are treated unfairly cannot expect their fellow workers to take coordinated action in defense of their rights

However, a purely legalistic approach to the worker's issue has its pitfalls, especially if it centers on rights (in a contractarian or positivist sense) of the worker as a self-interested autonomous individual, rather than as a person who possesses an inherent value while being a part of the community. "[T]he bonds which hold us in common are not merely legal contracts or mutual self-interests, but commitments to real goods, shared with others to serve the world" (PCJP 2011: 58). Human rights in CST are not merely means to an end, but are ends in themselves that cannot be sacrificed for the sake of economic utility. The right to free association exists, even if injustices and evils in society cease to exist. Further, "focus on specific pieces of legislation and the logistics of campaign support tended to obscure political leaders' understanding of the underlying values and motivations involved in shaping labor's priorities" (Bussel: 210). Many labor activists see themselves as part of the human rights movement in the U.S. This approach leads to more public support since there is a growing awareness today on the public to pressure corporations to uphold human rights. But in using the rights discourse, labor leaders must affirm that human rights are not just legal entitlements subject to shifting political power. Human rights in CST are moral claims based on the dignity of the person that "*presuppose duties, if they are not to become mere license*" (Benedict XVI: 43). Rights which belong to every human being in an immediate way creates duties which bind other persons in society. "Legislation is necessary but it is not sufficient for setting up true relationships of justice and equity . . . [It] can give rise to an individualism in which each claims his own rights without wishing to be answerable for the common good" (Paul VI 1971: 23). For example, legal reform may lead to a limited definition of employment which excludes or discriminates against temporary or contingent work, denying millions of part-time workers the right to unionize or to obtain just benefits. There are those "who see workers' human rights as threats to the free enterprise system, others see the same rights as concealing a selfish egoism no different than the libertarian individualism central to the unregulated market philosophy" (Gross 2012: 4). Hence, efforts to use the law to prevent the decline of private sector unions could backfire through enactment of anti-labor policies such as right-to-work laws or increased election spending of corporations to support candidates with anti-labor agenda.

Hylton notes that unions' political activism negatively correlates with union density in the private sector, as the former may lead to transfer of personnel and resources from unionization campaign to political campaign. In the same manner, Yates points out that there appears to be "a negative correlation between rising spending by labor in presidential campaigns and union certification victories" (123). It is lamentable that while some unions complain about how expensive it is to organize new locals, a huge amount of union funds are spent for partisan politics, electoral campaigns, and support of political candidates, a number of whom would turn their backs from the labor sector once elected. "With a majority of union members confined to six states, very few members of Congress feel accountable to labor" (MacLean: 65). Partisan politics is divisive which may distract workers from their collective struggle. "In such a situation they easily lose contact with their specific

unless they belong to a disciplined, organized entity that can overcome collective action problems" (Levine: 546).

role, which is to secure the just rights of workers within the framework of the common good of the whole of society; instead they become an instrument used for other purposes” (PCJP 2004: 672). Perhaps, it is better for unions to concentrate their effort on organizing and winning contracts that will provide workers with improved working conditions. “Time will tell, of course, what a couple of hundred million dollars might have meant for organizing campaigns, support for worker centers, an all-out campaign for universal health care, new labor radio stations, and labor education programs inside and outside unions” (Yates: 123).

Many union leaders are apprehensive of the capacity of corporations to influence political institutions. While it is true that corporations and business groups spend millions of dollars financing election campaigns, unions have other means to engage in political action, aside from competing with corporations in dominating political spending during elections. “No matter how much unions spend, they will be outspent by companies and organizations” (Chaison: 149). The political power of the union lies in its members who are engaged with their union activities and with the community. Legal reform cannot be effected by workers if membership in organized labor continues to decline, for the influence of unions on policy making depends on their ability to mobilize their members toward collective action. Members should be encouraged to exercise their right to vote and support candidates based on their track record and socio-economic platform rather than party affiliation.⁸ The point is not to totally abandon the political front. It is a fact that public policies that address the needs of the working class (e.g. minimum wage and anti-discrimination laws) had been enacted by the U.S. congress through the efforts of national federations of unions. But political activities should not replace grassroots organizing, educational campaigns, recruitment of new members, and decentralized collective bargaining. Workers cannot simply wait for laws to be changed so that the withering of private unionism is arrested. “Only a tremendous increase in union membership, even under the present difficult conditions, can create the political clout needed to change the law of organizing” (Chaison: 163).

Unions and Civil Society

“The Church’s traditional teaching makes a valid distinction between the respective roles and functions of trade unions and politics. This distinction allows unions to identify civil society as the proper setting for their necessary activity of defending and promoting labour” (Benedict XVI: 64). Civil society refers to non-government, non-partisan, non-profit cause-oriented associations that are voluntary, locally based, and are bound together by shared values. It “includes the wide variety of social relations – friendships, family neighborhood initiatives, NGO’s etc. – that are neither part of the formal economy nor part of the state” (Stormes: 9). John Paul II states, “Apart from the family, other intermediate communities exercise primary functions and give life to specific networks of solidarity. These develop as real communities of persons and strengthen the social fabric, preventing

⁸ “Unions do not, however, have the character of ‘political parties’ struggling for power, and they should not be forced to submit to the decisions of political parties nor be too closely linked to them. In such a situation they easily lose contact with their specific role, which is to secure the just rights of workers within the framework of the common good of the whole of society; instead they become an instrument used for other purposes” (PCJP 2004: 672).

society from becoming an anonymous and impersonal mass, as unfortunately often happens today” (1991: 49).

As part civil society, unions must exhibit the values of community and solidarity, rather than individualism or class egoism. They need to erase the negative image of a labor union as a mere special interest group or another bureaucratic layer of management that serves only the narrow concerns of its members, and strive to transform unions into being a moral crusader and an advocate of social justice and dignified work. “CST’s understanding of labor unions is a means for workers to make valuable contributions to the common good” (Matheny 2009: 30). This involves working for the welfare of the whole community rather than just workers, for outside their workplaces, workers and their families are also part of their communities.

Today, many are worried about corporate America where powerful and rich corporations dominate. Unions are perceived as a means to counterbalance corporate dominance, but this could be achieved by unions more effectively by aligning themselves with civil society, rather than by competing with corporations in campaign contributions. Unions are stronger and more effective when they work through coalitions and linkages with the academe, local churches, consumer and human rights groups, and other private organizations, including associations of business leaders as well as professional and vocational associations. By doing so, labor organizations can amplify their political and economic influence. Alliance with other civic groups was behind the success of the boycott campaign of the Immokalee farm workers in Florida against giant fast food companies (Yates: 176-81). This was the same tactics used by supporters of 15-hour minimum wage law in Seattle, by hotel workers in Las Vegas to win certification, and by West coast janitors in their “Justice for Janitors” campaign. By working with other community organizations, unions can use “economic, political, and community pressure to force the employer to recognize the union on the basis of some showing of majority support” (Yates 2009: 53). The principle of subsidiarity allows unions to “bypass the existing channels of national power and influence in which our demands and interests get redirected, diluted, and diminished, and build new structures of power and solidarity from below” (Stromquist: 14). Current laws make it difficult for workers to organize but legal impediments are not an insurmountable obstacle, for workers can form unions outside of NLRA restrictions by relying on ad-hoc representation elections supervised by cause oriented groups and respected community leaders, or using community pressure to press employers to accept the card-check process. “[U]nions in European countries were able to organize without support from the state institutions, a fact ignored by the American union movement” (Lipset and Katchanovski: 241).

Conclusion

The future of labor unions in the private sector depends on our policy makers, business leaders and on the unions themselves. Policy makers can draw insights from CST on the nature of political power, the morality of human rights, the principle of subsidiarity, and the dignity of work. Business leaders can heed the call from the Catholic Church to assume greater responsibilities towards improving the daily lives of ordinary workers and their families and promoting the common good. They can enable workers to enter into

participative management to ensure that human work is not treated as a mere commodity. The continuous transformation of the labor process challenges labor unions to expand and evolve, to discover new modes of organizing and new methods of actions, and to exert efforts towards moral renewal. As traditional unions in the private sector decline, unions need to invent flexible and creative organizational structures so that they will continue to be vibrant and relevant in the new global economy.

Unionism is not a panacea; it cannot solve all our socio-economic problems like financial crisis, corporate greed, or corruption in government. Collective bargaining cannot prohibit outsourcing, subcontracting, capital relocation, or unemployment. CST argues, however, that unionism is central in our search for the solution to the social question. Unions are a constructive factor of social order and an indispensable element in social life because of their positive contributions to improvements in the workplace and to the public good. Unions are good in themselves as an expression of the workers right to associate and instrumentally good as they invoke such values as solidarity, subsidiarity, participative management, common good, and economic equality. More importantly from the perspective of CST, unionism empowers workers to express themselves and regain their dignity as human persons, rather than being treated as subjects of instruments of production. “They serve the development of an authentic culture of work and help workers to share in a fully human way in the life of their place of employment” (John Paul II 1991: 15). While it has been proven that workers and society as a whole gain material benefits from effective unionization, focus on intangible benefits and moral principles offered by CST may give labor organizing a new impetus and inspiration.

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