

St. Alberto Hurtado: A Saint for Garment Justice

Before entering the Jesuits, St. Alberto Hurtado discovered his vocation working in a poor neighborhood of Santiago, Chile. One of his great works was founding, in that neighborhood, the *Hogar de Cristo*, Chile's first homeless shelter. He began volunteering at a parish and school in the neighborhood while in high school. His law school thesis, *El trabajo a domicilio* (Work at home), applied Catholic Social Teaching to women who sewed button holes at home. He concluded that they were grossly underpaid, an injustice according to church teachings.



An inspiring writer, preacher, teacher, and retreat master, St. Alberto Hurtado led a life distinguished as a patron of youth and the poor and workers. His 1941 book, *¿Es Chile un país Católico?* (Is Chile a Catholic Country?), raised an uncommon question for a country that registered at 94% Catholic. His surprising conclusion was "no, not yet" as the church was distant from the poor and so much of Catholic Social Teaching remained unpracticed.

Inspired by Catholic Social Teaching, St. Alberto Hurtado founded the Chilean Trade Union Association, meant to train leaders and instill Christian values in the labor unions of his country. For them he wrote three books: *Social Humanism* (1947), *The Christian Social Order* (1947) and *Trade Unions* (1950). To disseminate the social teaching of the Church and help Christians reflect and act on the serious social problems faced by the country, he founded the periodical *Mensaje* ("Message") in 1951. He himself published numerous articles and books on labor issues in relation to Catholic practice.

St. Alberto Hurtado's earthly life concluded on August 18, 1952, dying of pancreatic cancer at the age of 51 years old. In 2005, he became Chile's second canonized saint.

See more at: <http://www.humanthreadcampaign.org/blog/st-alberto-hurtado-a-saint-for-garment-justice/>

What We Wear: Another Way to "Vote"

by Andrew Moss

For more than two decades, more and more Americans have become aware of the exploitation and violence associated with much of the globalized garment industry producing more than 95 percent of our clothes. A series of media exposures, including the 1996 revelation that TV host Kathy Lee Gifford had endorsed a clothing line produced by Honduran children in sweatshop conditions, spurred a growing consciousness of labor abuses in many countries.

These exposures highlighted the persistent use of child labor, the absence of living wages that could sustain a decent livelihood for millions of workers, and the prevalence of unsafe working conditions. The latter issue was thrust dramatically into public awareness by the collapse in April, 2013 of Rana Plaza, an eight-story commercial building in Dhaka, Bangladesh that housed a number of garment companies supplying brands like Children's Place, Benetton, Cato Fashions, and the parent company of Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger. The collapse of the building, which many workers had warned was unsafe, killed 1,139 workers and injured 2,500 more.

Although many of the major brands made public commitments to rectify such abuses, they continue to shed direct responsibility by contracting with local suppliers and subcontractors in different countries. They can easily move from country to country, supplier to supplier, to keep prices competitive while exerting (cont. on back)