

# Introduction

The claim is often made that CST — Catholic Social Teaching, Catholic Social Thought, or Catholic Social Tradition, as the reader may like — is the best-kept secret of the Church. How often this claim is made is itself an oft-repeated observation.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the claim is made so often that CST surely cannot be a secret any longer! The many books on CST, the biennial conferences on CST hosted by the University of Notre Dame’s Center for Social Concerns, Villanova University’s *Journal of Catholic Social Thought*, and the media attention to Pope Francis’s *Laudato Si’* all suggest that the secret is out — and that the claim that CST is a secret has run its course.

Yet what do students at the 200-plus Catholic colleges and universities in the United States know about CST? How many of those institutions teach all students enrolled there at least the basics of the history and principles of CST? And how much student learning is happening even at those institutions where such teaching is taking place? Moreover, what bearing does CST have on how Catholic colleges and universities should organize themselves and operate? In other words, what are the implications of CST for the institutions of higher education that teach it (or arguably should)?

The articles in this issue of the *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* speak to all those questions and more: CST and the composition and orientation of boards of trustees of Catholic colleges and universities (Prusak); CST and the mission statements and curricular offerings of Catholic colleges and universities, as well as whether they have scholarly centers dedicated to CST (Maas Weigert et al.); CST and investment and licensing policies (Purcell and Rose); CST and labor policies at Catholic colleges and universities (McCartin); CST and faculty development programs (Brigham and Soltis); student perceptions of CST (Nickerson and Dammer); and a rubric to assess student learning of CST (Hudson et al.). This issue as a whole is a product of the CST Learning and Research Initiative, a collaboration of faculty and administrators at eleven Catholic colleges and universities across the United States. Through national meetings over the last five years, we have facilitated campus focus groups

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Susan Crawford Sullivan and Ron Pagnucco, “Sharing the Vision of Social Justice,” in *A Vision of Justice: Engaging Catholic Social Teaching on the College Campus*, ed. Sullivan and Pagnucco (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 183-191, at 188.

and collected oral histories of student understanding of CST, developed a rubric for curricular and research purposes, and conducted conversations leading to the peer-reviewed articles that follow.<sup>2</sup>

Our project has, of course, a history. We draw on the earlier work of other scholars<sup>3</sup> and we understand ourselves as seeking to help realize the vision statement on “Catholic Higher Education and Catholic Social Teaching” published by the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU) in 2012. That vision statement calls on Catholic institutions of higher education to employ CST “as a lens through which to assess the education we offer,” “to promote research based on principles of CST,” and “to incorporate CST into all aspects of... institutional life,” including “employment, labor and contracting policies,” among others.<sup>4</sup>

In his work on university ethics, James Keenan, SJ, has called attention to the lack of horizontal accountability among the various offices or fiefdoms (his word) organizing our academic institutions: academic affairs, student life, finance, institutional advancement, enrollment management, and so forth. That accountability flows “unilaterally and singularly vertically,” as he writes, makes it difficult to sustain a sense that the institution really is a community animated by common interests other than the bottom line.<sup>5</sup> It also can stand in the way of change.

Here again our humble yet ambitious CST project seeks to help. One of the aims of the CST Learning and Research Initiative is precisely to give Catholic colleges and universities means to develop and coordinate CST-grounded programs and initiatives across “fiefdoms,” thereby encouraging both accountability and community. Put otherwise, our project is dedicated to the fostering of Catholic colleges and universities as common goods: a good that can be enjoyed in common with others who constitute it with us. We thank the *Journal of Catholic Higher Education*, and ACCU, for vetting and publishing our work.

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<sup>2</sup> For more information, see <http://sites.nd.edu/cstresearch>.

<sup>3</sup> To begin with, see the articles in *A Vision of Justice* and in Kathleen Maas Weigert and Alexia K. Kelley, ed., *Living the Catholic Social Tradition: Cases and Commentary* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, “Catholic Higher Education and Catholic Social Teaching: A Vision Statement,” (Washington, DC: ACCU, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> James F. Keenan, SJ, *University Ethics: How Colleges Can Build and Benefit from a Culture of Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 64.