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**Review: *Catholic Higher Education and Catholic Social Thought*,
Bernard G. Prusak and Jennifer Reed-Bouley, eds.**

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Bernard G. Prusak and Jennifer Reed-Bouley, eds. *Catholic Higher Education and Catholic Social Thought*. Paulist Press, 2023. 304 pp. \$34.95 paperback; \$27.96 ebook.

“Finding an appropriate distance from the dominant culture without becoming across the board countercultural is *the* challenge that (Catholic higher education) leadership must navigate” (244). So writes James Heft, S.M., neatly summarizing the theme of this excellent edited volume in his thought-provoking chapter. By exploring the overlap between traditional Catholic social teaching and the values of the modern academy, this collection of ten reflective essays seeks to light the way for Catholic universities as they live their mission in the twenty-first century.

Modern academia can be said to have a distinctive set of values. Even on secular campuses, faculty and students alike call openly for their institutions to embrace environmental sustainability, living wages for all workers, socially responsible investing, racial justice, and inclusionary policies that promote diversity and equity. What is sometimes underappreciated is how nicely those values align with Catholic social teaching. Whether the *cause célèbre* on campus is workers’ rights (*Rerum Novarum*) or climate change (*Laudato Si’*), well—there’s an encyclical for that. And while Catholic colleges and universities have not always lived up to the lofty ideals expressed by various popes and bishops, their mission—to engage and live Church teaching—puts them in a unique position to bring a grounded morality to academic values that, too often, secular institutions embrace only through the rudderless lens of political partisanship.

For centuries, Catholic higher education has been caught between an avowedly secular academic establishment that views organized religion with skepticism and a Church that seeks to inject morality into science and learning. This collection of essays serves as a valuable reminder of how much common ground exists between those two

sides of the debate, once we remove our artificial partisan visors. If anything, by embracing moral issues like environmentalism and social justice, the secular academy is moving closer to Catholic social teaching—which puts Catholic colleges and universities in a unique, if unfamiliar, position to take a leadership role in a system that traditionally viewed them as outside the mainstream.

The editors, Bernard G. Prusak and Jennifer Reed-Bouley, have brought together an impressive “who’s who” of thought leaders in Catholic education to contribute to this discussion. In addition to luminaries in the field like James Heft, who founded the Institute of Advanced Catholic Studies at the University of Southern California, the roster of contributors includes notable names like Provost Michelle Gonzalez Maldonado of the University of Scranton and Vice President Catherine Punsalan-Manlimos of Seattle University, to name a few. Cardinal Michael Czerny, S.J. adds weight to the discussion by writing the forward.

The contributors all “speak university”—which is to say, they know the language and terminology that dominates academic conferences and accreditation reports. All are versed in the challenges of running a modern institution of higher education, balancing the realities of student demand, faculty unions, and myriad other considerations. They are also familiar with and dedicated to the principles of Catholic social teaching, and they reflect honestly about the challenges of balancing Catholic ideals with the need to pay the electric bill.

Almost no stone is left unturned in this discussion, and the sum of these multiple perspectives gives any reader a thorough

understanding of the issues. Chapters focus on the importance of the liberal arts in educating students who seek practical career options (Anna Bonta Moreland and Mark Shiffman); racism in Catholic education (Tia Noelle Pratt and Maureen O'Connell), the role of Hispanic/Latinx students on campus (Michelle Gonzalez Maldonado); environmental sustainability (Vincent Miller); faculty and staff unionization (Joseph A. McCartin); the role of women in Catholic education (Jennifer Reed-Bouley and Catherine Punsalan-Manlimos); responsible endowment management (Matt Mazewski), and globalism (Paul Kollman, C.S.C.).

Laura Nichols of Santa Clara University contributes a particularly important chapter, pointing out the vital role Catholic colleges have historically played in elevating underprivileged immigrants and first-generation college students to the middle class. Through an analysis of student data, she demonstrates that some colleges have stayed true to that founding mission by serving underprivileged students, only to find themselves in dire financial straits today; meanwhile, wealthier Catholic institutions have often acquired financial stability at the cost of distancing themselves from that original mission and embracing a wealthier clientele. Nichols's chapter, presented first, serves as the book's centerpiece and many of the subsequent authors refer to it. It is a reminder that living and pursuing Catholic social teaching can be challenging, particularly in a competitive student marketplace that often drives universities to prioritize the race for prestige over accessibility.

There are few weak points in this comprehensive discussion. Some authors speak in generalities, and some, disappointingly, withhold identifiable information when presenting case studies that would have given valuable context to their arguments. Inevitably, there will be some readers who disagree with the conclusions presented here, but for those on different sides of the political spectrum who are willing to open their minds to the dialectic between Catholic social thought and modern academic values, and who are willing to look beyond the often-false paradox between the two created by centuries of academic prejudice, there is great value to be found here.

This book is very much a product of its time, with references to the COVID-19 pandemic, enrollment fluctuations, and other administrative issues that would have seemed unimaginable just a few years ago. It is a comprehensive approach to the modern world of Catholic university management, with each chapter followed by insightful, reflective questions obviously written with trustees, board members, and upper-level administrators in mind. As university leaders position their institutions for success in the twenty-first century, they would do well to reflect on these thoughtful and timely essays on Catholic social teaching and its role on campus. 