

Who— Participants (Current)

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What

An interdisciplinary initiative to assess understanding of and commitment to Catholic social teaching principles. The goal is to integrate theory and practice relevant to multiple fields. Products may include publications in theology, higher education and social science, a national study of Catholic colleges and universities, and the like.

Why

We know less about learning CST than encouragements to teach it warrant: much research needs to be done to understand the processes of developing integrated, sustained means to apply CST principles. Such efforts build naturally on existing research & educational efforts

When

ND Team (Bill, Todd, Margie, and Jay) met in 2011 to develop basis for work

The national team meets March 23, 2012 at Loyola University of Chicago

How: Resources/Needs

Short-term: Seed funding for travel, pilot studies, research assistants, etc.

Long-term: Survey creation and refinement
Support for graduate/undergraduate research assistants
Data collection and analyses
Conference participation/travel, and hosting of conference
Development of book, journal, or like
Web resources to share instruments, materials, etc

Assessing Understanding of and Commitment to Catholic Social Teaching Principles: A Research Initiative

See: <http://blogs.nd.edu/cstresearch>

March 2012

Rationale

Catholic social teaching is, we hope, less of secret in recent years: it's referenced widely, and efforts to educate about CST principles have increased. In short, we say CST is important. And we may count courses offered, programs developed ...

Yet we know much less about *Catholic social learning* (see Bergman, 2011), and very little about how individuals may understand the principles and apply them in decision making and action.

A means to examine understanding of the principles and commitment to them would afford educators the opportunity to probe how the principles are engaged and how individuals learn and apply them. Many potential uses for such research tools would follow.

Means to Assess

While CST principles are very rich, even difficult to fathom at times (which prompts trepidation as we approach measurement), there are many potential means to examine how individuals may understand and apply them.

We could draw, as in previous work, from existing measures that have relevance to CST principles, such as:

Commitment to the Common Good

- Measures of Moral/Social Responsibility
- Openness to Diversity

Preferential Option for the Poor

- Empowerment View of Helping
- Belief in a Just World Scale
- Social Dominance Orientation

(See *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 2010, 17(1), p. 20-31)

Or develop **new measures** born out of understanding and experience of the principles →

Open-Ended /Qualitative Measures

- A. List principles by name, and ask what each means to people; look for consistent themes, trends . . .

We did this in a broader Center-wide research study, focusing on two “orienting” principles, the common good and option for the poor. Student responses were categorized reliably by raters. See slides or CST Research website.

- B. A more extensive approach would involve asking some or all of the following:

What do you know and believe about the principles of Catholic Social Teaching?
This may yield thoughts about the principles and if they are known ...

Name as many of the principles you can, in your own words.
This would be a measure of mastery; could be judged by experts ...

How and when do you try to apply the CST principles in your life and work?
This would be a measure of application and integration; could be done as a short answer or a longer journal type reflection.

Case Studies and Application

A related qualitative approach would involve developing a set of case studies or scenarios that provide social context/challenge. Participants could be interviewed or asked to write about and what should be done in the case (with no prior mention of the CST principles). Raters then could judge if participants applied principles in their responses.

A starting point for such work, one with implications for pedagogy, would be gather such case studies or moral scenarios upon which to build.

Quantitative/Survey Measures

It may prove valuable to create various objective measures to assess principles. Each would require:

- Multiple items to assess any one principle or component
- Confirmation of validity with experts and
- Testing of scale’s ability to predict agreement with the principle (stated without naming it) or with another measure or ...
- Pilot testing to refine and enhance reliability

A. Survey regarding commitment to the principles (scale creation)

Might include, say, 4 to 6 items to assess each of 5 to 7 principles

Sample items (taken in part from elements of the CSC one-page document):

- All people are a reflection of the image of God and thus all human life is sacred. (Human Dignity)
- We are called to be ministers to others beyond ourselves, to make decisions with the full community in mind. (Common Good)
- In community we realize the fulfillment of our dignity and rights in relationship with others. (Common Good)
- A moral test for society is how we treat the weakest among us. (Option for the Poor)
- Care for the earth is a duty of our Catholic faith. (Caring for Creation)
- All people have the right to life and to the basic necessities that provide quality to life: food, shelter, health care, education, and employment. (Rights and Responsibilities, or Common Good)

B. Survey questions could also assess **behavioral** intentions/actions:

- I seek to understand all those I come in contact with as created in the image of God
- I endeavor to make personal decisions on the basis of the common good vs. individual gain
- When voting in elections, the common good is an essential key criteria for me.

Some items could be **reversed coded**:

- I tend to vote on the basis of what will benefit me vs. the larger community
- Profit, not respect for workers, should be the priority in business endeavors

C. Survey questions could also assess **understanding** of principles and their relevance to social teaching, for example:

- The preferential option for the poor suggests that Catholics must live in poverty as Jesus did (agree or disagree)

- The CST principles are derived directly from Old Testament laws that have survived for centuries. (agree or disagree)

Defining Issues Test Model

The Defining Issues Test, developed by James Rest and colleagues, provides a comprehensive model of how principles can be assessed.

In such a tool, a social/moral challenge is presented followed by a range of responses, some of which represent principled responses while others are low level or distracting (sound good) responses. Participants are asked to rate the most important/relevant considerations in taking action with respect to the challenge presented. The more often a CST principle is employed/chosen, the higher the score.

Such a tool could be quite useful, though would require significant time for development, testing, and refinement.

PRINCIPLES OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT

- 1 The Common Good**
We are called to be ministers of hope for others to serve the greater good. In community we realize the fulfillment of our dignity and rights in relationship with others.
- 2 The Life and Dignity of the Human Person**
All people are a reflection of the image of God and thus all human life is sacred. We are all called to pursue peace and help overcome poverty, racism, and other conditions that demean human life.
- 3 Rights and Responsibilities**
People have basic rights and responsibilities that derive from their dignity as creatures made in God's image. Catholic teaching emphasizes that people have a right to life and to the basic necessities that provide quality to life: food, shelter, health care, education, and employment. We are called to respect the rights of others and to seek the common good.
- 4 Dignity of Work and Rights of Workers**
Work is an expression of our dignity and an expression of our involvement in God's creation. Our work should empower us to create a better future; it should never demean or detract from our inherent human dignity.
- 5 Option for the Poor and Vulnerable**
While the common good embraces all, those who are in greatest need deserve preferential concern. A moral test for society is how we treat the weakest among us.
- 6 Caring for God's Creation**
Care for the earth is a duty of our Catholic faith. We are all called to be careful stewards of God's creation and to ensure a safe and hospitable environment for vulnerable human beings now and in the future.
- 7 Living Solidarity**
We are all responsible for all. As members of the common human family, we should strive to foster community and to live in solidarity with all our neighbors.