



# THE BEACON

NEWSLETTER OF THE LUMEN CHRISTI INSTITUTE FOR CATHOLIC THOUGHT

WINTER 2025



## **PETER HARRISON** Reflects on Religion and Science as the Lumen Christi Institute's Fall Scholar-in-Residence

This past fall, the Lumen Christi Institute organized an academic collaboration with one of the world's leading experts in the intersection of science, philosophy, and religion. From September 1 to November 1, 2024, Dr. Peter Harrison, a distinguished scholar whose scholarship has shaped global discourse on the history of science and religion, joined the Institute as its Fall Scholar-in-Residence.

Currently a Professorial Research Fellow at the University of Notre Dame, Australia, and Emeritus Professor of History and Philosophy at the University of Queensland, Dr. Harrison brought decades of scholarly

expertise to the table. Before his role at Notre Dame, he held the prestigious Australian Laureate Fellowship, one of the highest honors in Australian academia.

Dr. Harrison's reputation in academia spans the globe. He served as the Idreos Professor of Science and Religion and Director of the Ian Ramsey Center at the University of Oxford, where he influenced some of the most prominent thinkers in the field. He has been a visiting fellow at top institutions such as Yale, Princeton, Otago, and the University of Chicago. His academic journey includes delivering the highly respected Gifford

*continued on page 8*

**2 LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR**

**3 HITTINGER BOOK REVIEW**

**4 INTERVIEW WITH REBEKAH SPEARMAN**

**5 CAREER PATHS OF SUMMER SEMINAR ALUMNI**

**6 FALL EVENTS RECAP**

**10 IN LUMINE NETWORK RECAP**

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Dear friends of the Lumen Christi Institute,

Professor Russell Hittinger, Senior Fellow and long-time collaborator of the Institute, once commented on what distinguished Lumen Christi from Newman centers and other Catholic campus ministries. Lumen Christi, as he put it, exists for scholarship. It is a place for professors, and students follow the professors.



All of our campus programs serve students, of course. Still, Professor Hittinger is right that Lumen Christi serves as an ideal gathering place for faculty because we are an intellectual ministry. When faculty members speak at a Lumen Christi program, they participate in a different kind of academic conversation. Because our programs are not for credit, participants share that they feel free to learn for the sake of learning.

Our conversations prioritize the integration of faith and reason. Students and faculty often do not share about their own faith commitments in a typical classroom. But Lumen Christi welcomes everyone to do so. It is a distinctive learning environment.

In this issue of the Beacon, I look forward to sharing with you the successes of our efforts in faculty formation. In the pages ahead, you can read about our seminars that form PhD students into future faculty. We also have a special interview with a Lumen Christi alumna, Dr. Rebekah Spearman. Rebekah is a University of Chicago PhD, now teaching at St. John's College.

Thank you for your prayers and your support of our programs. Thank you for enabling us to form not only the next generation of students but also the next generation of faculty.

Yours in Christ,

*Daniel Wasserman-Soler*

Danny Wasserman-Soler  
Executive Director

WE ARE DEEPLY GRATEFUL TO THE JOHN TEMPLETON FOUNDATION FOR THEIR transformative support through the 'In Lumine: Supporting the Catholic Intellectual Tradition on Campuses Nationwide' grant (#62372), which has been instrumental in advancing our work over the past three years. This generous grant has empowered us in countless ways, and and benefitted In Lumine Network institutes across the nation. We are truly thankful for their continued belief in our mission.

## REVIEW: F. Russell Hittinger, *On the Dignity of Society*

*On the Dignity of Society: Catholic Social Teaching and Natural Law*  
by F. Russell Hittinger.  
Catholic University of America Press, 2024.  
Edited by Scott J. Roniger.

REVIEW BY K. T. BRIZEK

In recent decades, the faithful have often found themselves really or potentially divided: are you a 'conservative' Catholic or a 'liberal' Catholic? Do you care primarily about the Church's teaching on marriage or are you more enlivened by the preferential option for the poor? These novel political categories are superimposed onto Catholic belief and practice such that we often feel more like we are registering to vote in a presidential primary than bearing in our bodies the resurrection of Christ crucified. A third group has an uneasy sense that 'conservative' and 'liberal' don't have much to do with Catholicism, but cannot quite put their finger on how.

Russell Hittinger's magisterial volume, *On the Dignity of Society*, offers the interpretive key which makes sense of this muddle. What came to be known as 'Catholic social teaching' is often traced to the publication of *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, when Leo XIII spoke out against the excesses of industrial capitalism and the new plight of the poor in the age after the enclosure of the commons and the rise of wage labor. But the story, Hittinger explains, actually dates back to 1789, when the revolution of the Third Estate overthrew the French monarchy and with it the societal institutions linked to the Church.

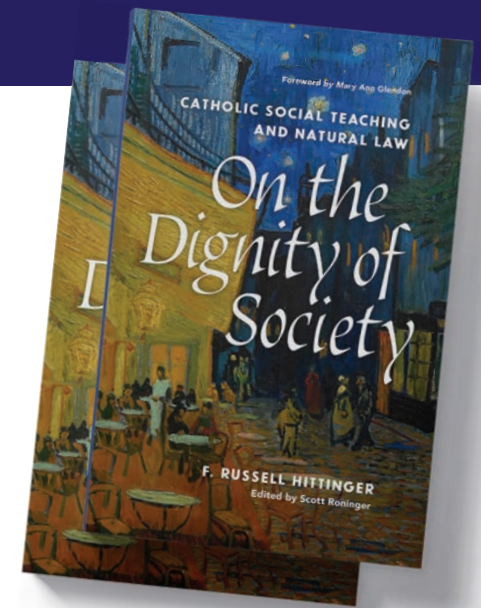
The body of teaching we know as Catholic social thought thus began with the rise of modern nation-states. The tradition beginning with Leo and continuing through Pope Francis engages with the modern and what 'modern' means specifically from the standpoint of human societies. Namely, the politically modern is distinguished by representative forms of government, but perhaps even more importantly by a privatization of religion (in many places) and the subordinating of all other forms of human sociality to the power of the state. When Jacques Maritain and Dietrich von Hildebrand originated the concept of the total state in the 1930s, they stood in a

centuries-long Church tradition of wariness toward the growing power of the nation-state and its trajectory towards totalitarianism.<sup>1</sup>

Catholic social thought is a body of writings, which pontiffs and their theologians have developed to address not only a new political context of disestablishment and banishment from the halls of political power, but also new concerns over the state's tendency to arrogate control of all forms of human sociality to itself. In Hittinger's view, the state ostensibly gives freedom to its members by delimiting the public from the private, while in fact it more tightly controls the Church, human relationships, and community than medieval courts ever could. Against this tendency, the Church asserted again and again that society is natural to human beings and the three necessary societies—family, polity, and church—have natural or supernatural forms, purposes, and prerogatives which the state may in no way alter or subvert.

A tour de force, standing at the pinnacle of a long and fruitful career, *On the Dignity of Society* includes Hittinger's original interpretations of natural law, his inimitable insights into the makings of papal encyclicals and matchless cross-section of his expertise in philosophy, theology, Church history, and law. With pieces from across the three stages of his academic career, Hittinger's latest publication finally makes available to the wider public the important line of thought he has been developing and teaching to Lumen Christi students for over a decade, in his semiannual summer seminar on 'Catholic Social Thought: A Critical Investigation.' His co-teacher for the seminar, Prof. Scott Roniger, is the editor of the volume.

<sup>1</sup> Chappel, James. "THE CATHOLIC ORIGINS OF TOTALITARIANISM THEORY IN INTERWAR EUROPE." *Modern Intellectual History* 8, no. 3 (November 2011): 561–90.



# ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Rebekah Spearman (PhD '22), Tutor, St. John's College, Annapolis



**LCI: Where did you do your PhD and where are you now?**

RS: I did my PhD in Classics at the University of Chicago; I'm now in a tenure-track position at St. John's College in Annapolis.

**LCI: How were you involved with LCI during your studies?**

RS: I sat in on a few of LCI's non-credit classes and attended many guest lectures and lunches. I think the most impactful experience I had at Lumen Christi was when I was asked to take over the New Testament Greek reading group after Fr. Paul Mankowski passed away. It was an incredible privilege to guide my peers in reading Luke's Gospel in Greek, and I learned so much from my co-leader, Fr. Pete Bernardi, as well as other participants of the reading group who had backgrounds in Biblical Hebrew and early Christianity. It was a wonderful, interdisciplinary experience that enriched my understanding of the Bible.

**LCI: Did LCI programming have any impact on your studies, research or teaching?**

RS: I think chatting with and hearing from Zena Hitz at LCI was what first made me consider applying to St. John's College, which is where I now teach, so I am grateful for that. In general, the subject matter of LCI programming was pretty far afield from my research, but because of the aforementioned reading group on the Greek New Testament, I noticed some resonances in the use of particular words in the New Testament and Pindar and I hope to write more on that topic at some point. And, as I was reading Luke's Gospel with my students here at St. John's this past year, I found that things that came up in that reading group have informed my engagement with the text now.

**LCI: What is the primary reason you would recommend graduate students to get involved with LCI?**

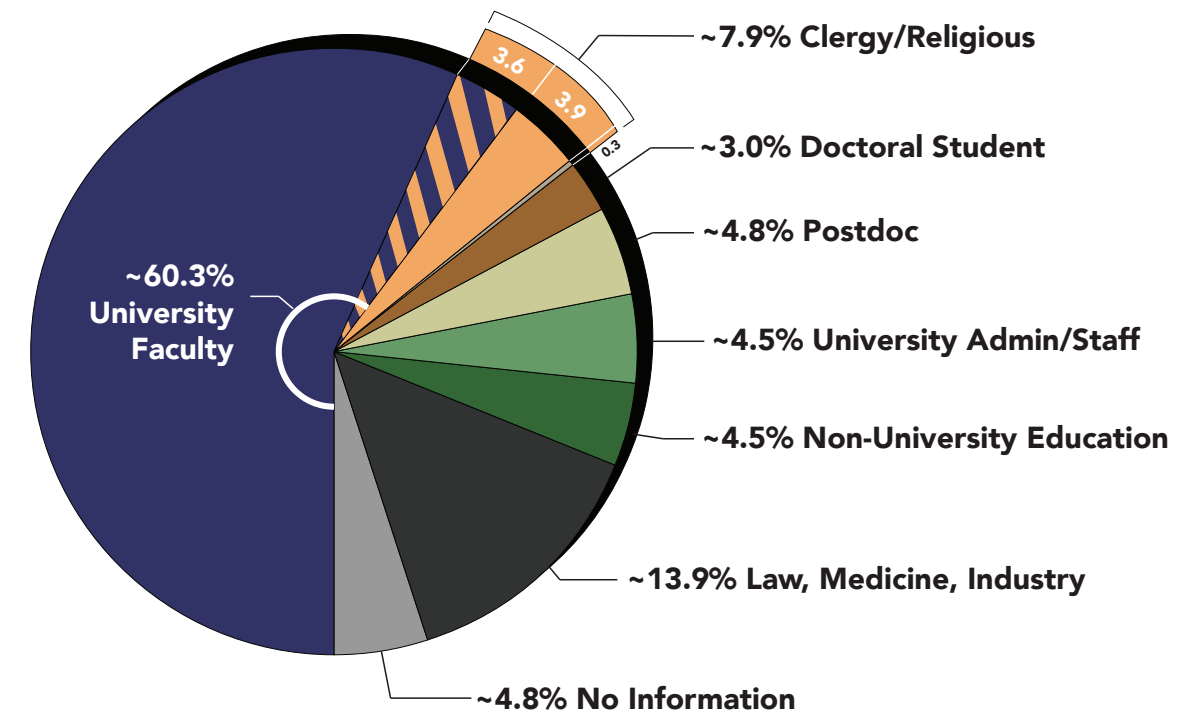
RS: I think the primary reason to participate in LCI programming is the opportunity to meet thoughtful people with different areas of expertise than yourself who also share your faith. I met one of my dearest friends from graduate school through LCI.

Rebekah Spearman's research focuses on archaic and early classical Greek poetry, especially the work of Pindar (c. 518-438 BC). You can learn more about her work at [rebekahspearman.com](http://rebekahspearman.com).

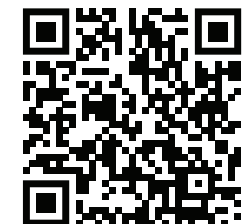
## CURRENT CAREER SNAPSHOT: PhD Summer Seminar Alumni, 2011-2019

In an effort to better understand the impact and effectiveness of its mission, the Lumen Christi Institute conducted a comprehensive study on the career paths of alumni from its PhD summer seminars held between 2011 and 2019. Tracking a total of 330 alumni, the results highlight how our alumni go on to become the next generation of leaders, making significant contributions to the academy, the Church, and the broader culture. Notably, 60.3% (199 alumni) have gone on to teach as faculty at universities, underscoring the Institute's commitment to forming and inspiring

the next generation of academic leaders. Additionally, 7.9% of alumni have pursued religious life or become clergy, with 14 individuals embracing this vocation after attending the seminar. Of these, 3.6% (12 alumni) are both religious/clergy and also have faculty positions at universities. The study also tracked alumni who entered various professional fields, university administration, postdoctoral research, and other vocations. The Lumen Christi Institute celebrates the diverse paths of its alumni and invites all former participants to reconnect and share their stories.



**ACCESS DETAILED RESULTS** from an additional study we conducted on all participants from 2011-2019, including those from undergraduate, master's, and faculty summer seminars, by scanning the QR code.



We want to hear from our alumni.  
Get in touch with us: [postdoc@lumenchristi.org](mailto:postdoc@lumenchristi.org)



OCT 10: Downtown Lecture on “An Inquiry into the Value of Work: A Discussion of Matt Crawford’s *Shop Class as Soulcraft*” with Matthew Crawford (Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture)



OCT 3: Graduate Student Reception



NOV 21: Talk and Q&A with Betsy Bohlen (Archdiocese of Chicago) and Booth Business School students



OCT 2024: In partnership with the Archdiocese of Detroit, Detroit Mercy Law, and the Michigan Catholic Conference, the Catholic Criminal Justice Reform Network hosted a dialogue entitled “Doing Justice and Loving Mercy.”

## FALL QUARTER Seminars, Forums, and Events



SEP 20: Peter Harrison Colloquium in Swift Hall on his book. Brad Gregory (University of Notre Dame) and Willemien Otten (University of Chicago Divinity School) offered remarks on Peter Harrison’s book *Some New World: Myths of Supernatural Belief in a Secular Age*. Scholars, faculty and graduate students from the University of Chicago, Loyola University Chicago, University of Notre Dame, and University of St. Mary of the Lake attended.



OCT 11: Symposium on “The Boldness of Belief and Timidity of Technology: A Symposium on Gratitude, Creation, and the Technological Mindset” with Matthew Crawford (Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture)



NOV 8: A master class on “What Is a Society? On the Coherence of Catholic Social Thought from Pope Leo XIII to Pope Francis” with Russell Hittinger (The Catholic University of America) and Scott Roniger (Loyola Marymount University)



OCT 16: West Suburban Catholic Culture Series event on “Literary Traditions and the Pursuit of Truth: A Culture of Humility” with Emily Austin (University of Chicago)



NOV 7: Mary Hirschfeld (University of Notre Dame) responds to Russell Hittinger’s book, *On the Dignity of Society: Catholic Social Teaching and Natural Law*. In addition to Hittinger himself, the panel also featured Scott Roniger (Loyola Marymount University) and R.H. Helmholtz (University of Chicago emeritus)



## PETER HARRISON continued

Lectures at the University of Edinburgh in 2011 and the Bampton Lectures at the University of Oxford in 2019.

The fall residency at the Lumen Christi Institute provided a unique opportunity for scholars, students, and the public to engage with Dr. Harrison’s insights on the history of science and religion. Dr. Harrison’s time at the Institute had a lasting impact on the academic community of the University of Chicago’s campus and beyond. As a part of his work as a visiting scholar at Lumen Christi, Peter Harrison also spoke at other In Lumine Network Institutes, giving lectures and workshops and participating in symposia at Harvard, Duke, and USC.

Dr. Harrison taught Lumen Christi’s non-credit course, *Science and Religion: Historical and Philosophical Perspectives*, which considered the long history of science-religion relationships and explored the ways in which religious factors played a positive role in the emergence of modern science and established a permanent place for scientific activity at the heart of modern Western culture. One of the students shared, “I’ve been attending these courses for a few years and this is as excellent a course as any I’ve had the privilege of attending.” Another commented that the course provided a “compelling thesis, argued systematically and eloquently [with] a myriad of practical takeaways.”

Another highlight of Dr. Harrison’s visit was a colloquium which the Institute held on September 20 in Swift Hall at the University of Chicago. The colloquium focused on his book *Some New World: Myths of Supernatural Belief in a Secular Age*. For the event, Lumen Christi brought together more than 40 scholars and graduate students from the University of Chicago, the University of



Oxford, DePaul University, Loyola University Chicago, Mundelein Seminary, the University of Toronto, the University of Notre Dame, and more.

Along with Dr. Harrison, Brad Gregory (University of Notre Dame) and Willemien Otten (University of Chicago Divinity School) offered remarks on the book’s in-depth questioning of the foundational categories used for thinking about science, religion, and their intersection. The question of the nature-grace distinction was explored as well as the historical development of views on this topic in the Catholic and various Protestant traditions. One attendee shared, “Brilliant – the text chosen was an exceptional complement to the ongoing work at the Science and Religion Initiative.” Another attendee said, “I appreciated it as an opportunity to network and meet with other academics in my field of study from the Midwest.”

In continuing its mission to foster meaningful intellectual exchange, the Lumen Christi Institute remains committed to connecting Chicago’s academic community with groundbreaking scholars. Dr. Peter Harrison’s visit exemplified the Institute’s dedication to deepening understanding across disciplines. As the Institute looks to the future, it is inspired by the insights shared and eager to host more transformative conversations in the years to come.

*\*This event was made possible through the support of ‘In Lumine: Supporting the Catholic Intellectual Tradition on Campuses Nationwide’ (Grant #62372) from the John Templeton Foundation.*



## Meet LCI’s Scholar-in-Residence this Winter, Rev. Dr. Adam Hincks, S.J.

The Lumen Christi Institute is excited to welcome Rev. Dr. Adam Hincks, S.J. as our scholar-in-residence for the winter quarter. In addition to being a Jesuit priest with the Canada province, Dr. Hincks is also a practicing cosmologist. He is an assistant professor and holder of the Sutton Family Chair in Science, Christianity and Cultures at the University of Toronto, with a joint appointment between the Department of Astronomy and Astrophysics and St. Michael’s College. He is also affiliated with the Vatican Observatory as an associate scholar.

During his time at the Lumen Christi Institute and University of Chicago, Fr. Hincks is teaching a non-credit course on the “Bible and the Big Bang,” which takes a deep dive into both the science of the early Universe and the Biblically-rooted doctrine of creation from nothing, and explores what, if any, is the relation between them.

Fr. Hincks is also offering a Magis Lecture at St. Ignatius College Prep on February 11th on the topic of “Faith, Belief, and Knowledge.” Based on St. Augustine’s teaching that “Believers are also thinkers: in believing, they think and in thinking, they believe,” Fr. Hincks will present knowledge and belief as interlocking rational activities and explore how they relate to religious faith. Learn more about the Magis Lecture by using the QR code.





## IN LUMINE NETWORK Gathering from Across the Nation

On October 17-18, the Lumen Christi Institute convened the third annual meeting of the In Lumine Network (ILN) at the University of Chicago. Funded by the John Templeton Foundation, the conference brought together representatives from the 13 member institutes of the ILN to compare best practices and learn from experts on the theme of “Virtue, Moral Formation, and the University.” A culmination of years of work, the conference highlighted the Lumen Christi Institute’s ongoing commitment to two key goals: first, improving its effectiveness at forming the next generation of leaders and second, supporting the professional development of its staff who bring Catholic programs to the secular university.

The conference was planned jointly with experts from Baylor University and featured academic research from a multi-year study including ecumenical Christian study centers as well as Catholic institutes like Lumen Christi. The study, also funded by the John Templeton Foundation, was led by Sarah Schnitker, associate professor of psychology at Baylor University, and Perry Glanzer, professor of educational foundations and resident scholar with the Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion. The study focused on how Christian institutes support the formation of virtue in university students.

The academic research itself was a longitudinal study collecting quantitative data and qualitative interviews. Additionally, Lumen Christi and other institutes took part in a community of practice, a structured forum to share strategies. Lumen Christi’s team participated in biweekly calls over a period of two years and attended two major conferences on the topic, including organizing the second meeting in collaboration with the ILN network meeting. The results of the study revealed that institutes like Lumen Christi make a demonstrable impact on the moral formation of students who

participate in their activities.

Participating in the Baylor study led to improvements at Lumen Christi in organizational development and program evaluation. It also introduced the LCI team to philosophical and social scientific perspectives on the cultivation of virtue. Michael Le Chevallier, Senior Associate Director of the Lumen Christi Institute shared, “Our programming team has deep and varied expertise in the Catholic intellectual tradition. None of us, however, have PhDs in non-profit management. It was great to get an expert’s view on the life-cycles of programs and varied techniques for program evaluation, while also building community (and commiserating!) with other leaders from Christian study centers engaging in similar work on their own campuses. Additionally, we directly benefited from learning about how social scientists today talk about (and measure) virtues, allowing us to bring our own Catholic tradition into dialogue with contemporary scholarship.”

Participation in the study also provided other benefits to LCI programs. Sarah Schnitker, one of the Baylor principal investigators, joined the LCI teaching team for its 2024 Templeton funded summer seminar on Eudaimonia: Philosophical, Theological, and Psychological Perspectives. Another member of the research team, Karen Melton, made a presentation on program assessment to LCI’s monthly professional development sessions, ensuring that these insights could be shared with all ILN institute members. It also shaped the content of LCI’s campus program, leading to two non-credit courses, one on the study of virtue in the ancient and modern periods, and another on vice, taught by Candace Vogler (University of Chicago).

The conference included over 50 leaders from colleges and universities across the country, with representatives from Anselm House at the University of Minnesota, Chesterton House at Cornell University, and the Beatrice Institute at the University of Pittsburgh, among others. A highlight of the conference was a public panel discussion featuring John Boyer (University of Chicago), Sarah Schnitker (Baylor University), and Jonathan Brant (Wycliff Hall, Oxford University) on Virtue, Moral Formation, and the University.



### 2024 SUMMER SEMINAR RECAP

**What is Social Science?** Charles Taylor’s Catholic Vision of Human Behavior seminar at USC | June 2–8, 2024 | Jason Blakely (Pepperdine University), guest visit by Charles Taylor via Zoom.

**Economics and Catholic Social Thought: A Primer** | June 2-5, 2024 | University of Notre Dame | Mary Hirschfeld, Joseph Kaboski, and Kirk Doran (University of Notre Dame)

**Early Christian Biblical Exegesis** | June 9-14, 2024 | University of Toronto | Lewis Ayres (Durham University), Paul Blowers (Milligan University), Rev. Andrew Summerson, S.Th.D. (University of St. Michaels College)

**Catholic Social Thought in Business Education** | June 11-14, 2024 | University of St. Thomas | Jeffrey Burks (University of Notre Dame), Lloyd Sandelands (University of Michigan), Msgr. Martin Schlag (University of St. Thomas, MN), Andreas Widmer (Catholic University of America)

**St Thomas Aquinas on Free Choice** | June 16-23, 2024 | University of Chicago | Fr. Stephen Brock (University of Chicago)

**The Thought of John Henry Newman** | June 22-29, 2023 | University of Oxford | Fr. Stephen Fields, SJ (Georgetown University)

**Artificial Intelligence, Ethics & Catholic Thought** seminar at Duke University | June 23-29, 2024 | Paul Scherz (University of Virginia)

**Faith on the Frontiers: Origins, Cosmos, and Extraterrestrial Life** seminar at Cornell University | July 7-13, 2024 | Jonathan Lunine (Cornell University), Chris Baglow (University of Notre Dame), Karin Oberg (Harvard University)

**The Thought of Rene Girard: Understanding the Faith in a Secular Age** | July 13-20, 2024 | Stanford University | Grant Kaplan (St. Louis University), Trevor Merrill (Caltech)

**Eudaimonia: Philosophical, Theological, and Psychological Perspectives** | July 21-27, 2024 | University of Pennsylvania | Candace Vogler (University of Chicago), Martin Seligman (University of Pennsylvania), Kristján Kristjánsson (University of Birmingham), Darcia Narvaez (University of Notre Dame), David Cloutier (Catholic University of America), Sarah Schnitker (Baylor University)

**Catholic Social Thought: A Critical Investigation** | July 27-August 3, 2024 | University of California, Berkeley | Russell Hittinger (Catholic University of America), Scott Roniger (Loyola Marymount University)

LEARN more about the findings of the two-year study here:

