

# Catechism Update

Winter 2003

## Archbishop Hughes Makes Report to the General Assembly

On November 10, 2003, Archbishop Alfred Hughes, the chair of the Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism, made an oral report to the bishops of the United States gathered in their fall General Assembly. The report had two parts. The first part was a report on the National Adult Catechism project. The second part focused on concerns members of the Committee have about some high school texts currently in use in the United States. The substance of his reports follows here.

Most Rev. Alfred Hughes  
*Chairman*  
Most Rev. Robert Banks  
Most Rev. Daniel DiNardo  
Most Rev. George Lucas  
Most Rev. Donald Wuerl  
Most Rev. Leonard Blair

### *National Adult Catechism*

As many of you may remember, we had originally hoped to present that text to you at this General Assembly for your approval. However, we consider this too important an effort to rush it. Many of you have made good recommendations that we want to take very seriously. So, instead, we want to make a brief progress report to you and indicate future steps.

At the outset, I would like to thank those bishops who are serving on the Editorial Oversight Board for this significant project: Bishop Donald Wuerl, who serves as chair, Archbishop William Levada, Archbishop Daniel Buechlein, Bishop William Lori, Bishop Richard Malone and Bishop Gabino Zavala. They continue to work on this project in an exemplary manner. Bishop Wuerl had intended to make this portion of the report but he had to return to Pittsburgh to celebrate the funeral of Father Ronald Lawler who has worked so closely with Bishop Wuerl in his catechetical ministry.

Consultants:  
Most Rev. Daniel Buechlein, OSB  
Rev. John Pollard



You may recall that in June of 2000, the Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism proposed that the bishops undertake the development of a national adult catechism. This proposal was enthusiastically endorsed and the Catechism Committee was given oversight of the project. During the summer of 2000, Archbishop Buechlein, who was then the chair of the Catechism Committee, established the Editorial Oversight Board to supervise and guide the development of a draft text.

The first task of the Editorial Oversight Board set for itself was the creation of a draft outline as well as the identification of the structure of the text and of an approach to how the text would be developed. In January of 2001, a consultation took place on the proposed structure and outline for the *National Adult Catechism*. Response was significantly positive. Based on the results of the consultation, the outline was finalized and the writing of a draft began in June of 2001.

Upon completion of the first draft, tentatively named the *National Adult Catechism* for identification purposes, the text was sent in May of 2002 to all U.S. bishops for a six-month consultation/review. Bishops were asked to comment on the text's approach and structure as well as its content.

A large number of the responses showed overwhelming support for both the structure and the approach of the text. Respondents to the consultation praised the desire to make the catechism both an invitation to explore the faith and a source of information about the faith.

The structure that received overwhelming support consists of a story reflective of the experience of the faith in our country, as exposition of the faith which essentially follows the outline of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and finally a reflection on elements in our current culture that challenge the faith. Many of the specific comments on the content served to help reshape parts of the text. For example, the doctrinal summaries that now appear in the text came about as a result of suggestions received from the consultation of the first written draft.

Revision of the *National Adult Catechism* based on the consultation responses took place through the winter and spring of 2003. The past summer, a new draft was sent to all U.S. bishops in preparation for the possibility of presenting the text for a vote of approval at this General Assembly. However, the large number of individual suggestions submitted by the bishops over the summer proved impossible to process in time enough to be able to prepare a final draft and get it to you for your review in anticipation of this meeting. Therefore, the decision was made to postpone the presentation of the *National Adult Catechism* until November of next year. This is necessary since the June meeting is not a business meeting.

We have decided to put the extra time to good use. Once the changes suggested in the most recent consultation have been implemented, the draft will be submitted to a thorough review by members of the Editorial Oversight Board, the draft writer, catechetical staff and a theological editor who has been asked to review the text not only to tighten theological language and see to its consistent use throughout but also to identify terms which should be

clearly explained or defined in the text. The team will work to review the entire text for consistency and accuracy.

The new timeline calls for completion of all editorial tasks by March of 2004. The draft will then be reviewed again by the Bishops who serve on the Editorial Oversight Board and then by the bishops on the Catechism Committee. Once these two groups have signed off on the third, and, hopefully, final draft, the text will once again be sent to all of you next spring, allowing sufficient time for review prior to next November's meeting.

The members of the Catechism Committee are extremely grateful to Bishop Wuerl and to all the bishops who have contributed over the years to this project, not only those serving on the Editorial Board, but also all those who have taken the time to read the draft and offer comments and suggestions. We value that because we truly want this *National Adult Catechism* to be something we can all make our own and encourage people to use.

### **Concerns About Some High School Texts**

The second topic on which I want to report to you concerns the state of high school catechetical materials in use in our country. More than two years ago, Archbishop Buechlein, at that time the chair of the Catechism Committee, stood here before you to report on the study which the Catechism Committee had done concerning the feasibility of the bishops' undertaking the development of our own national catechetical series. At that time, Archbishop Buechlein reported that we had come to the conclusion that there was no need for such a series on the elementary age level. He said that publishers of catechetical materials for elementary school age children had been working with us effectively in creating good materials which authentically reflect the teaching of the Church as found in the Catechism. Happily, I can report that this situation continues.

You might remember that in the same report, Archbishop Buechlein said that the situation on the high school level was different. At that point, June of 2001, relatively few texts had been submitted to the Catechism Committee for conformity review and so it was hard to judge. Archbishop Buechlein said that, for this reason, the Committee had decided to reserve judgment about the need for a national series on the high school level in the hope that publishers of high school age materials might begin working more with us in the development of texts.

First, please let me make it clear that my purpose in speaking to you today is not yet to recommend that we develop a national high school series. We are still reserving judgment on that point. The June 2001 report, which, to be honest, we hoped would encourage high school publishers to submit more materials, did do exactly that. In the last two and one half years, the Catechism Committee has conducted more than twenty-five reviews of individual high school catechetical texts. Our experience in conducting these *reviews has made clear to us two*

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important points. The first is that the high school catechetical publishers continue to work with us to create high school religion texts which are in conformity to the Catechism. The second is that the working relationship between the Committee and some high school publishers has not yet born as much fruit as we had hoped.

If you were to have the most recent Catechism Update in front of you, you would quickly recognize that there are few high school texts in the conformity listing. At this point, we have not been able to grant a declaration of conformity to any one complete high school series from any of the major publishers whose texts are most frequently used in this country. Over the past two and one half years, close to two-thirds of the conformity reviews we have conducted on high school catechetical materials have ended with the judgment that the materials were not only inadequate for conformity, but also could not be amended and therefore needed to be re-written. What causes us great concern is that many of the materials found to be inadequate are still in wide use throughout the country.

You may ask: what are some examples of deficiencies we have found?

Some of the texts found to be inadequate are relativistic in their approach to the Church and to faith. Students, for instance, are easily led to believe that one religion or church is as good as another and that the Catholic Church is just one church among many equals. There is often a blurring between the Catholic Church and other Christian ecclesial communities. Our young people are not learning what it means to say that the sole Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church or the true ecumenical teaching of our Church.

In many of the texts, we have found that there is an effort to state clearly the doctrine and Church teaching. Unfortunately, this doctrine and Church teaching is sometimes introduced with a formula such as “Catholics believe this or that . . .” This tentative language gives the impression that the teaching is just one legitimate opinion among others rather than a matter of truth. Unfortunately, we find numerous instances of this problem. Our young people are not learning that what we know and believe is based on objective truth revealed to us by God.

The sacramental theology which our young people are being taught is also often seriously flawed. In some texts they are taught that the sacraments were instituted over an extended period of time with the implication that they can still be changed. Often, the sacraments are presented as a way to celebrate special moments in life and not as a privileged moment of encounter with Christ. The distinctive role of the priest may be sidelined or even ignored. Our young people are sometimes being taught that it is the community who baptizes or who confects the Eucharist. They may be told the various ways in which Jesus is present during liturgy without a clear statement that he is present in the Eucharist in a unique and special way. They may be taught that the sacramental power to forgive sins and anoint the sick was once shared by all the faithful. In some texts, the teaching about the Church’s prohibition on the question of the ordination of women is ambiguous or even misleading. In some lessons on the Sacrament of Marriage, they are being exposed to language which makes reference to partners rather than man and woman or husband and wife.

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Since the Catechism Committee first identified common deficiencies in presentations on morality, there have been evident strides. Topics such as grace, sin, conscience and the formation of conscience now appear in almost every text dealing with moral issues. However, there are still some troubling concerns. For instance, there seems to be a reluctance to name premarital or extra marital intercourse as sin. The students may be encouraged to avoid premarital intercourse in order to escape consequences such as pregnancy or disease, not because such actions are sinful. Similarly, practices of virtue and goodness may be encouraged in order to make the world and one's life better. The relationship between the moral life in this world and in the life to come is often not treated. Moreover, moral teaching, like faith teaching, may be presented using tentative language, implying that morality is a matter of opinion and personal choice.

Other problems which commonly recur include a studied avoidance of revealed proper names or personal pronouns for the Persons in the Blessed Trinity. This leads to an inaccurate understanding of the divine nature of the Persons of the Trinity as well as their unity with each other and their proper relations. Some of the texts, in trying to avoid masculine titles or pronouns for the Persons of the Trinity, speak of the Father only as God and then speak of Jesus without noting his Sonship or divinity, creating an implication that Jesus is somehow different from God or even somehow less than God. The Christology in texts may be unbalanced with an overemphasis on the humanity of Jesus at the expense of his divinity. Sometimes the treatment of the Holy Spirit is either missing or flawed. We have seen numerous instances in which the third Person of the Trinity is referred to as "the Spirit of God" or "God's Spirit" which could suggest that the Holy Spirit is somehow less than God.

The interpretation of Sacred Scripture tends to rely almost exclusively on the historical critical method and does not generally draw on the rich patristic and spiritual interpretation in the Church. The implication is that the Scriptures are, to a large degree, merely human texts. The divine role is usually stated, but often then obscured in the way in which Scripture passages are treated. In some instances, miracles are explained away as ordinary phenomena, not of supernatural origin. We have even seen some of the miracles of Jesus explained as a result of lucky timing!

The approach to Church often overemphasizes the role of the community. The ideal Church is sometimes presented in such a way that the student would be led to believe that we should live without reference to the role of the hierarchy in the Church.

In general, the high school texts are strong in their emphasis on the social mission of the Church and the moral responsibility that Catholics have in this area. The social teaching, however, is not always grounded in the Divine initiative of the Holy Spirit or related to personal moral teaching or to eschatological realities.

This is merely a sampling of the kinds of problems that have aroused serious concerns for the bishops serving on the Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism. I want to emphasize that the Committee members are not saying that every high school religion book is problematic, but there are a number of doctrinally deficient texts that are still being widely used supposedly to educate and form our young people in the faith. The bishop members of the Committee, Bishop Donald Wuerl, Bishop Robert Banks, Bishop Daniel DiNardo, Bishop Leonard Blair and Bishop George Lucas, as well as Archbishop Buechlein who serves as a consultant, have asked me to speak in their name in acquainting you with these grave concerns about some high school texts commonly in use today. We urge you to require, whenever possible, that catechetical texts approved for use within your diocese carry a declaration of conformity to the Catechism. We have also asked the Committee on Catechesis to consider the development of national doctrinal guidelines for catechetical texts on the secondary level. As you heard in Archbishop Buechlein’s earlier report, that Committee has accepted that charge and is moving forward with the effort. In the meantime, we on the Catechism Committee will continue to work as best we can with high school publishers to develop catechetical materials that teach the faith accurately and completely.



## Suggestions for Reading Conformity Listing:

Verify copyright date—an edition in use may not be an edition found to be in conformity.

Verify title and edition—e.g., a School text may carry a conformity declaration while its Parish counterpart does not.

ST= student text      TM= teacher manual      CM= catechist manual  
BL=bilingual    S=School    P=Parish    S/P= single edition applicable to both  
S&P= two separate editions, both found to be in conformity

## Conformity Listing of Catechetical Texts and Series

As of December 1, 2003 the following texts and series have been found to be in conformity with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Apostolate for Family Consecration		
Consecration in Truth ©2001	STs, doctrinal content of TMs	1-8
The Apostolate's Family Catechism ©2003	ST,	1-12
Ave Maria Press		
Catholic Social Teaching: Learning and Living Justice ©2001	ST	high school
Encountering Jesus in the New Testament © 2003	ST	high school
Our Sacramental Life: Living and Worshiping in Christ © 2003	ST	high school
Send Out Your Spirit © 2003	ST, doctrinal content of TM	high school sac. prep.
The Church: Our Story ©1999	ST	high school
Your Life in Christ: Foundations of Catholic Morality ©2001	ST	high school
Benziger		
Benziger Family Life ©2001 (3rd printing or later)	STs	K-8
Christ Jesus, The Way!, S&P © 2003	STs, doctrinal content of CM and TMs	K-6
Come Follow Me, S/P ©1998	STs, doctrinal content of TMs	K-8
Share the Joy ©1997	STs, doctrinal content of TMs	K-6
Brightstar Publishing		
Light of the World ©1996(TM/1-3) ©1997(4-6)	student booklets, doctrinal content of TMs	ages 9-13
C.R. Publications		
Catholicism Series ©1996-1997	STs, doctrinal content of TMs	high school
Foundation for the Family		
The New Corinthians Curriculum ©1996	teacher curriculum guide, parent-to-child guide	K-8
Harcourt Religion Publishers		
Call to Faith, P ©2005	ST	1-6
Celebrating Our Faith: Confirmation ©2000	ST, doctrinal content of TM	sacramental prep.
Celebrating Our Faith: Reconciliation & Eucharist ©2000	English STs, BL STs, doctrinal content of TMs	sacramental prep.
Celebrating Our Faith: Reconciliation & Eucharist, Level II ©2002	English ST, BL ST, doctrinal content of TM	sacramental prep.
Growing in Love ©2001	STs (3-8), student lessons (K-2)	K-8
Journey Through the Old Testament ©2002	ST	high school
Walking By Faith, S/P ©1999	STs, doctrinal content of TMs	K-6
Ignatius Press		
Faith and Life © 1984-1987	STs, doctrinal content of TMs	1-8
Faith and Life © 2002 (grades 1-2), © 2003 (grades 3-8)	STs, doctrinal content of TMs	1-2, 3-8
Image of God © 1986-1993	STs, doctrinal content of TMs and resource books	K-8, Confirmation, Mass Books
Leaflet Missal Company		
Project Genesis ©1997	STs, doctrinal content of TMs	K-8
Legionaries of Christ		
The Treasure of My Catholic Faith © 2003	ST	1-6
Friends of Jesus © 2003	ST	7-9
Witnesses of Christ © 2003	ST	10-12
Loyola Press		
Christ Our Life, S/P ©1997(P TM©1999)	STs, doctrinal content of TMs	K-8
Christ Our Life, S/P ©1997/2002(P TM©1999)	STs, doctrinal content of TMs	K-8
Christ Our Life: Confirmed in the Spirit©1997(P TM©1999)	STs, doctrinal content of TMs	sacramental prep.
Finding God: Our Response to God's Gifts, P ©2005	STs, doctrinal content of CMs	1-6
Knowing Our Catholic Faith: Beliefs & Traditions ©2000	student worktexts	1-8

Midwest Theological Forum		
Introduction to Catholicism © 2003	ST	high school
Our Moral Life In Christ © 2003	ST	high school
Our Sunday Visitor		
Catholic Vision of Love © 1996, revised edition	STs, doctrinal content of TMs	5-8
Pauline Books & Media		
Be Sealed ©1998	ST, doctrinal content of TM	sacramental prep.
Jesus Brings Us Life ©1996	ST, doctrinal content of TMs	sacramental prep.
Priory Press		
Dominican Series © 2000	STs, doctrinal content of TMs	high school
RCL ♦ Resources for Christian Living		
Eucharist © 2003	ST, doctrinal content of TM	sacramental prep.
Eucharistía © 2003	ST, doctrinal content of TM	sacramental prep.
Faith First ©2000, 2001 (TM, 3rd printing)	STs, doctrinal content of TMs	K-6
Faith First Junior High ©2001	STs, doctrinal content of TMs	junior high
Nuestra Identidad Católica ©1998	student workbooks	1-8
Our Catholic Identity ©1998	student workbooks	1-8
Reconciliation © 2003	ST, doctrinal content of TM	sacramental prep.
Reconciliación © 2003	ST, doctrinal content of TM	sacramental prep.
Understanding the Catechism ©1999	4 STs	high school
Sadlier (William H. Sadlier, Inc.)		
Acercandote a La Fe/Coming to Faith ©1999	BL STs,doctrinal content of 1-6 TMs	K-6
Coming to Faith/Keystone Edition, S ©1998 & P ©1999	STs, doctrinal content of TMs	K-6
Faith and Witness Program, S & P ©1998-1999	STs, doctrinal content of TMs	junior high
One Faith, One Lord © 2003	English ST, BL ST, doctrinal content of English and BL TMs	junior high
Sacrament Program: First Reconciliation & Eucharist©2000	English STs, BL STs, doctrinal content of TMs and director's guide	sacramental prep.
Sadlier We Believe , S & P © 2004	STs, doctrinal content of TMs	K-6
The Spirit Sets Us Free: Confirmation Prep for Youth©2000	English ST, BL ST, doctrinal content of English and BL TMs	sacramental prep.
St. Maron's Publications		
Faith of the Mountain ©2000	STs, doctrinal content of TMs	1-8
St. Mary's Press		
Living Justice and Peace © 2002	ST	high school
The Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth ©2003	ST	high school
Written on Our Hearts (Old Testament) ©2002	ST	high school
Silver Burdett Ginn		
Blest Are We, P © 2002, S © 2004	STs, doctrinal content of CM and TMs	1-6
Blest Are We Junior High, P © 2003, S © 2005	STs, doctrinal content of CM and TMs	7-8
The Gift of Eucharist ©2000	ST, doctrinal content of TM	sacramental prep.
The Gift of Reconciliation ©2000	ST, doctrinal content of TM	sacramental prep.
This Is Our Faith, S ©1998	STs, doctrinal content of TMs	K-8
Vietnamese Catechetical Committee		
The Spirit Sets Us Free: Confirmation Prep for Youth ©2001	BL Vietnamese/English ST	sacramental prep.

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