

## A 50-Year Breakthrough:

# History Textbooks for Catholic Schools

**D**id you know that the Renaissance astronomer Copernicus—the first person to formulate a comprehensive theory of the universe centered around the sun, not the earth—was a Polish university professor and a Catholic priest? Did you know that the Italian Baroque composer Vivaldi was also a Catholic priest?

Did you know that the first university in North America was the Roman Catholic University of Mexico, founded in 1551?

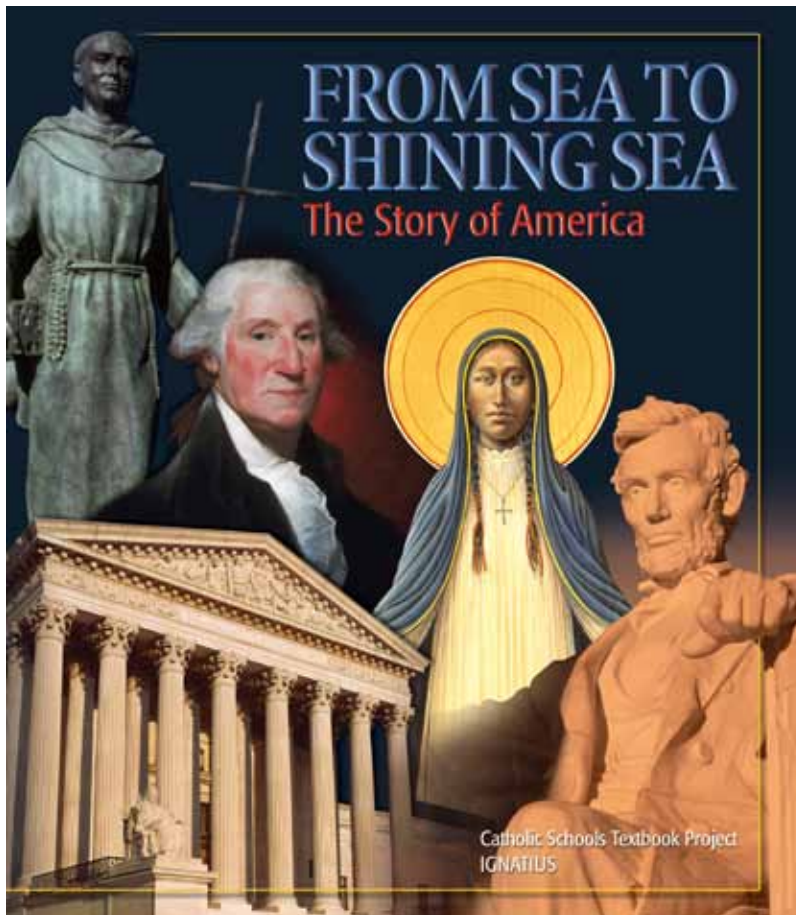
Did you know that the first hospital founded in the Americas was the Hospital San Nicolás de Bari in the Dominican Republic, and the two earliest hospitals in North America were the Immaculate Conception Hospital and Saint Lazarus Hospital? Or that the first hospital north of Mexico was the Hôtel-Dieu de Québec, founded in 1639 by three Augustinians from a Catholic-run hospital in France?

Students won't find these historical facts in a secular history textbook.

Nor will they learn about the saints of an era, or about the impact of the birth of Christ, or the enormous contribution of the Catholic Church, its teachings and its faithful throughout 2,000 years of history. Not unless their teacher does extra work to bring these elements into history and social studies lessons.

There simply hasn't been a choice in history textbooks for Catholic schools in the last 50 years. Either a Catholic school could use old, outdated history books that were published long before Karol Wojtyła was elected Pope, or it could use one of the secular textbooks offered by the four or five major secular textbook publish-

Textbook Volume 5 of the Catholic Schools Textbook Project History series.





The Catholic Schools Textbook Project History textbooks are used in schools in all 50 states and in English-speaking schools internationally.

ing houses. Most schools chose the latter, out of necessity.

### A Second Look

Isn't history all the same? After all, isn't history, history?

A true history explores all aspects of what happened at a given time. Yet today's unprecedented trend toward secularism has increasingly sanitized even history, removing anything contrary to its agenda.

In the U.S., for example, the meaning of "separation of church and state"—which the Founding Fathers understood as the separation of any one specific religion from civic rule—has been corrupted to imply a separation of God from state. Political correctness has hijacked common sense. Wishing others "Merry Christmas" might be offensive; the Ten Commandments can't be displayed on public grounds; the display of a cross is questioned at a military cemetery, or on a hilltop; and prayer at public schools or before athletic events is nearly taboo.

And anyone who has recently attended an antiquities exhibit at any metropolitan museum may have noticed an elimination of "B.C." (Before Christ) and "A.D." (Anno Domini) in exhibit placards explaining dates and timelines.

The same secular agenda is echoed in textbooks. Consider just a few errors,

presented as true historical fact, in secular textbooks currently in use:

In the honors-level history textbook titled *The Western Heritage Since 1300*, AP Edition (Prentice Hall, 2010), a nod is given to Catholicism during the 1300s as follows: "The Christian clergy also practiced high magic.... In the late thirteenth century, the church declared its magic to be the only true magic."

Prentice Hall is a brand of Pearson's, one of the largest PreK-20 educational publishers in the world. To describe the Catholic liturgy and sacraments—outward signs, instituted by Jesus Christ for our sanctification—as "high magic" is unconscionable.

In the textbook *Ancient Civilizations* (Harcourt Brace, 2000), page 360, students learn that:

"As Christianity grew, it became more organized. Each group chose a single leader called a bishop. Some people believe Peter served as an early bishop. Over time, the role of the bishop of Rome grew into the position of pope, the leader of all bishops."

This directly contradicts Christ's promise to St. Peter (Matthew 16:18), Church history and Church teaching. Likewise, it contradicts the earliest accounts of Christian activity, which record Peter's immediate primacy and the evident organization of the early Church.

The textbook *World History: Connections to Today* (Prentice, 1999), page 399, informs students that "...Harvard, the first North American university, was founded in 1636." Yet the first North American university was actually the Roman Catholic University of Mexico, founded in 1551.

### History and Faith

The Church has played a significant role in human history.

Consider the historical impact of the conversion of the Emperor Constantine in the 4th century; the civilizing and educational influence of the Benedictine monasteries during the feudal system; the early entrepreneurship of the Cistercians in the 12th century; the heroism of St. Joan of

Arc in France; and the prayer of the Rosary throughout Christendom during the dramatic Battle of Lepanto that defeated the main fleet of the Ottoman Empire, against all odds, off the coast of western Greece; of Spain's missionaries in Mexico and the western United States; of St. Stanislaw in Poland and Sts. Thomas Beckett and Thomas More in England.

Consider the founding and operation of hospitals, schools and universities by various religious congregations throughout the world, including in the United States; the impact of Mother Seton in Philadelphia; of St. Don Bosco and St. Phillip Neri in Italy; of Sts. Francis and Dominic in the 13th century; of Ignatius of Loyola and his Society of Jesus; of St. Francis Xavier's missionary work in China and other parts of Asia; of the Oxford Movement and the conversion and sermons of St. John Cardinal Newman in England; of Philadelphia bishop St. John Neumann's creation of the parochial educational system, to name but a few examples.

Fr. Daniel Scheidt, pastor at Queen of Peace Catholic parish and school near South Bend, Indiana, notes: "In secular textbooks, how history unfolds and what's important is going to leave out some significant details, including the whole strand on the meaning of history. It is part of our Catholic faith that Christ is the Alpha and Omega; He is the beginning and the end. The whole point of history is that we can participate in the life of the saints in the Holy Jerusalem, and this participation begins now. Just because a secular textbook declines to engage this component doesn't mean it doesn't have its own meaning of history; for example, to present history as though the salvation of the human race is through technological progress, or to treat the scientific method as the savior of mankind.

"Sometimes secular textbooks can be very effusive about the innovations of the present moment and tell history as simply a movement from darkness to light," Fr. Scheidt adds. "Secular textbooks can be cynically dismissive of real heroism and

instances of real virtue."

"The principle governing all Catholic education, from the apostolic age down to the present, is the notion that the faithful should be engaged in transforming culture in light of the Gospel. Schools prepare students to relate the Catholic faith to their particular culture and to live that faith in practice," stated Archbishop J. Michael Miller, C.S.B., in a keynote address as Secretary for the Vatican's Congregation for Catholic Schools, "The Holy See's Teaching on Catholic Schools," delivered at The Catholic University of America on September 14, 2005. "Faith and culture are intimately related, and students should be led, in ways suitable to their level of intellectual development, to grasp the importance of this relationship.

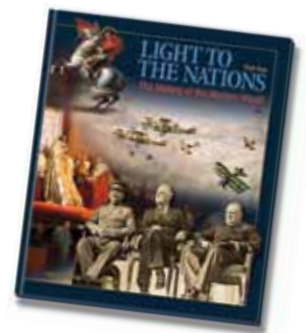
"Catholicism should permeate not just the class period of catechism or religious education, or the school's pastoral activities, but the entire curriculum," Archbishop Miller continued.

"One of the roles we have in Catholic education, in leadership," echoes Mark Salisbury, superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Diocese of Marquette in Michigan, "is to find the touch points between culture and faith.... Where do our values intersect or touch culture? Obviously, history is a natural touching point of culture and faith."

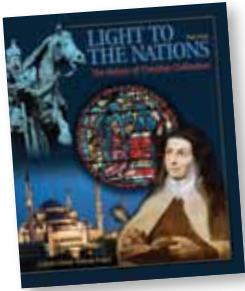
### A Welcome Solution

Born of the frustration shared by many principals at not finding updated history textbooks for Catholic schools, and not able to convince any existing Catholic publisher to fire the presses and create such a series as had been done before, seasoned headmaster Michael Van Hecke found a solution.

Van Hecke gathered a group of Catholic educators, bishops and historians, including Dr. Rollin Lasseter of the University of Dallas, and launched the Catholic Schools Textbook Project. This nonprofit 501(c)(3) publishing company created a masterfully presented series of history/social studies textbooks for Catholic schools.



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Textbooks for the middle grades—ranging from grades 5 through 10, depending on various state requirements—are complete. Final production of these textbooks for high school and primary schools is not far off.

In sum, the Catholic Schools Textbook Project is producing the first history textbooks for Catholic schools in nearly 50 years.

### Engaging Students

“Our textbooks have two profound differences from the products of the big four publishers,” says Van Hecke. “First, unlike the choppy and glitzy presentation of most other textbooks which try to imitate the MTV style of rapid-fire presentation, our narrative style engages the students immediately. It draws them into the text, which reads like the great histories which tell the story.”

“Being drawn into the story, the children then become enculturated into the heroism, greatness and tragedies that the human story has met, and that they, too, will meet in their own right. Armed with knowledge, even vicarious experience of the great questions, battles and victories of history, in light of Christ as the central figure of creation, the students are armed well and prepared for greater things than Wikipedia and iPhones.

“Secondly,” Van Hecke continues, “we are not compelled to emasculate history as per the political wrangling of various special interest groups, left and right, in textbook adoption hearings by the few big states, especially Texas and California. Not being emasculated by secular concerns, nor pietistic and preachy like many of the Protestant textbooks available, we are free to teach history with balance, joy and truth.”

### In the Classroom

Already used in schools in all 50 states and internationally in Peru, Canada, Spain, France, Ireland, England, the Philippines, Australia and Indonesia, the Catholic Schools Textbook Project has been featured on CNN and elsewhere.

“I like these history textbooks because they integrate the role of the Church throughout history, rather than ignore the Church or inaccurately criticize the Church,” says Monsignor Sabato Pilato, superintendent of Secondary Schools for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

The Los Angeles archdiocese recently approved these textbooks for use in its 220 schools, with adoption encouraged through a generous grant from the Dan Murphy Foundation. “These textbooks are critical for Catholic students because they present a balanced view of history,” adds Msgr. Pilato, “and because the school itself should help to prepare students to be well-educated, critical thinkers.”

According to J. Frazer Field, founder and executive officer of the Catholic Educator’s Resource Center, “The Catholic Schools Textbook Project is surely one of the most exciting and important initiatives for Catholic education to come along in many years. Too long have our Catholic schools been forced, by default, to use public school textbooks, which over the years have come to express a more and more narrowly secular vision of history and culture.”

“I love the textbook,” says Erin McCann, who teaches grades 5 and 6 at Spiritus Sanctus Academy in Ann Arbor, Michigan. “When I asked the students their thoughts on the text, they responded positively as well. They like that they are learning about how their faith played a role in how our country came to be. They are able to make some connections to what is discussed in the text with what is taught in religion and studied with the lives of the saints. For example, most of my students know the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe, but the way it is told in the text explains it from a different perspective—the historical perspective—which the students found really interesting.”

“I have marveled at the difference in the students’ enthusiasm for history since bringing in the Catholic Schools Textbook Project textbook,” says Vanessa Brink, a 4th/5th grade teacher at Gallup Catholic



School, the first diocesan school in the Diocese of Gallup, New Mexico. “The enthusiasm that both the students and I have for history is, in large part, due to these books!

“When we were using the Houghton Mifflin book,” continues Brink, “the students would fidget, daydream, doodle and pass notes. Now, when I tell them I am going to read from *From Sea to Shining Sea*, the students sit at attention, there is very little movement, they ask a ton of questions, write notes and piece together the lives of the historical figures, understanding them in context and being able to tell which historical figures lived as contemporaries. They also enjoy map work with the class, instead of seeing tiny maps that give them very little global understanding of where people are from and how they are or were connected to us in any way. It is really fascinating. Outside of class, many of the students have asked to borrow the book so they could read it at home. Some students have even told me they like this book better because it is easier—not less packed with information, but the flow makes the reading comprehension and interest easier to come by.”

“I’m particularly attracted to the story approach,” echoes Mark Salisbury, superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Diocese of Marquette, Michigan. “Most history textbooks are dry statements and really don’t engage the students’ imagination in those great heroic moments of

history.... If the materials you’re using in the classroom aren’t engaging in telling the story to the heart of the student, it will appear dry and unimportant. This series not only tells history from a Christian point of view and finds the touch points of history and culture, but it also tells it as a story.... The writers of these texts thought deeply about what will engage students, deeply





Headmaster Michael Van Hecke, M.Ed., is founder and president of the Catholic Schools Textbook Project

## QUICK REFERENCE

### VATICAN DOCUMENTS ON CATHOLIC EDUCATION:

#### **The Holy See's Teaching on Catholic Schools (2005)**

Talk-turned-booklet; a concise summary of the Holy See's teachings on Catholic schools since Vatican II, by Archbishop J. Michael Miller, C.S.B., during his tenure as Secretary for the Vatican's Congregation for Catholic Schools

#### **Gravissimum Educationis (Vatican II, 1965)**

Often referred to as "Vatican II's landmark decree on Christian Education"

#### **The Catholic School (1977)**

Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith (1982)

#### **The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School (1988)**

#### **The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium (1997)**

#### **Consecrated Persons and Their Mission in Schools: Reflections and Guidelines (2002)**

and meaningfully.... We've received very good feedback from those teachers who now use these textbooks as a supplement. It's my hope that we will have these textbooks in all of our students' hands, soon."

Cynthy Ward has been a teacher at Holy Cross School in Ventura, California, for more than 11 years. She jumped at a benefactor's offer to bring these textbooks into her 7th grade classroom.

"The students have a newfound pride in their Catholic heritage, and just last week a student commented that each chapter ends on an upbeat," notes Ward, who says the parents' reaction to the new textbooks is typically "It's about time!" She continues: "The students enjoy the classic, beautiful insets of paintings by the masters. Each chapter has provided a springboard for further discussion of our faith, which was lacking in the state-sanctioned textbook used previously. It seems that it's more difficult to move students out of the classroom each time we get into discussions of faith and history; they are hungry for these kinds of exchanges. I've noticed they are more engaged when they can directly relate to a history which includes contributions by Catholics who have gone before them. Also, the teacher's manual is well laid out, with chapter summary, goals, review questions, and sample quizzes and tests. I especially appreciate

the pronunciation guide and timeline."

"Time and again in these history books, the question implicitly comes up, 'Why did these people choose to act this way?'" adds Brink. "While the answer can often be along the lines, 'They chose to act this way because they were dissatisfied, they were angry, they were at peace, they were trying to care for these or those people...' the book always points us, either implicitly or explicitly, to the spirituality of the people and the God we find enthroned in, or dethroned from, their hearts. This is a wonderful complementarity, especially in our Catholic schools, to religious and spiritual formation, and actions of consequences—current and historical, personal and universal, immediate and eternal."

Ecclesiastical endorsements of the textbooks are abundant.

"The Catholic Schools Textbook Project series will undoubtedly be a reliable resource for strengthening the vitality of a curriculum which gives a rightful place to the specifically Catholic understanding of history and of the human person. With gratitude for your work in fostering the Catholic identity of our schools and wishing you blessings for every success..." wrote Archbishop Miller.

"This is an interesting and well-written account of the story of America which shows the Catholic Church as an integral part of that story. In presentation, it is well set out and visually attractive. It should engage the attention of students, giving them something of the historical perspective they need to assess the culture of this country," noted Francis Cardinal George, Archbishop of Chicago.

Even John Cardinal O'Connor, former Archbishop of New York, commented early in the project's textbook releases: "... I am deeply impressed by your present undertaking and hope that you will pursue it to completion."

"Catholic principals needed a robust, engaging, Catholic option for their classrooms," says Van Hecke. "Now they have one!" ■  
—Karen Walker