

With Michael Van Hecke,

PRESIDENT OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS TEXTBOOK PROJECT



What exactly is the Catholic Schools Textbook Project?

Simply, it is a collective effort to produce quality textbooks for Catholic schools. Many people do not realize this, but, for all major subjects, only secular textbooks are being used in almost every Catholic school, nationwide. Our first phase of the Project is to produce history or social studies books written in an engaging, journalistic style and professionally designed. They will bring history to life with accuracy, vitality and thought-provoking energy. That's one of our goals—to bring history alive, in the heart as well as the mind. And because the story of human civilization can't accurately be told without including the essential contribution of Catholics and the Faith, these textbooks will give the Church the position it deserves in history, without exaggerating either favorable or unfavorable realities.

How did the Project originate?

Early in my teaching career, I was assigned to teach a history class. My choice of books was between a beautiful secular book with poorly written, boring and incomplete history and a photocopy of an old Catholic textbook which was visually uninspiring, but more balanced in style and content of material. My question: why can't these two be combined? As I subsequently found out, there used to be whole lines of texts separately produced for the Catholic school system similar to the

secular "models," but which included the Catholic contributions to history, or literature, or science, as the subject allowed.

After becoming a headmaster twelve years ago and having to find books for my own schools, I was driven to create something to fill the vacuum. I began to find other interested educators who were interested in helping me carry out this project. Rollin Lassiter became my first partner in this effort. We began with one of the most urgent needs—a new history textbook for Catholic schools. Thus the Catholic Schools Textbook Project was born as an independent non-profit educational apostolate serving the Catholic school children in America. We hope parochial schools, religious operated schools (Dominican, Franciscan, Jesu-

it, etc.) and homeschools will be delighted with this new tool for Catholic education. We plan on eventually producing texts for all subjects and grades so Catholic schools have a real choice!

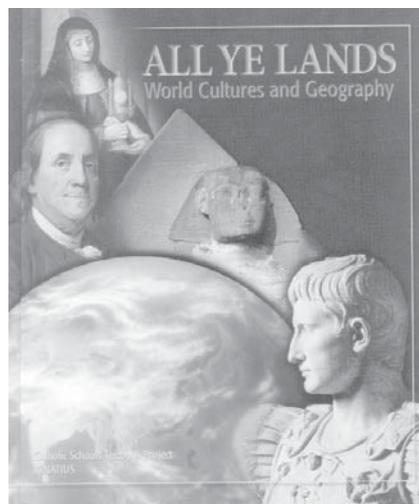
Why are these textbooks so urgently needed at this time?

Forty years ago there were twenty major publishers of history and social studies textbooks for American schools, including several Catholic publishers. Today there are only five, and not one of them is Catholic. In that time, the content has steadily diminished in quality and quantity. It has become centered on images as the text and language have been "dumbed down." At the same time, the national system of textbook review, which is dominated by a few big states like Texas and California, has politicized the books that are produced, to the point where history is now written more for committees of professional reviewers and activist organizations than for children.

As a result of all this, contemporary social studies books have become more bland and empty with each revision. The influence of activists and the secular education establishment has resulted in textbooks in which the facts of Christian history are also blurred and softened—when they're not ignored or distorted completely!

What is the goal of the Catholic Schools Textbook Project?

We hope to produce textbooks for



All Ye Lands is the first of a series of Catholic textbooks to be released in the next few years.

Catholic schools, in most subjects, that more than just meet state academic requirements – books that are written to engage and inspire students, teaching that Our Lord is essential to all history, that the Creator is seen universally in science, that the great human questions found in classic literature are essential to our own human maturity and liberty. With this goal accomplished, our future Catholic citizens will have the opportunity to possess what the last few generations have sadly missed—a balanced education which includes the vast contributions of the Church to our world and the basic orientation of truth that the acknowledgement of Christ and the Incarnation provide for any intellectual discipline honestly pursuing truth.

When do you hope to accomplish this momentous task?

This will take several years, given the number of volumes required for so many grades and subjects. Our current project, history, is being produced in two phases. The first phase focused on producing five texts for middle school and high school. Two books are available already with the others being released in the next two years. The second phase is to complete production of volumes for the lower elementary grades. These efforts are coupled with developing companion resources such as teachers’ manuals, maps, charts and other helpful tools.

What would be unique about the materials developed?

The Catholic Textbook Project is more than simply reprinting older textbooks from days gone by. Our books will offer:

- A narrative that tells the importance of the Christian faith and European-American history
- Colorful illustrations, beautiful artwork, and attractive maps and charts

- Faithful adherence to *Lumen Gentium’s* vision of history: “the work of God through the ages”
- Discussion of world cultures, parallel to European history, in a proper use of multiculturalism, with pride of place given to Catholic culture
- Emphasis on significant dates that define the timelines
- Many brief biographies of historically important men and women, highlighting the saints of the time
- Selections from many important documents in American and European history.

There will also be a website that gives teachers and students access to a variety of supporting information and links to related resources—maps, pictures, songs, and primary source documents.

What has the response been to the first volume of the series already in print and to the overall vision of the Project?

Fantastic! We’ve gotten enthusiastic support from many bishops, religious, lay leaders and Catholic educators. Many gave valuable input and suggestions at the planning and editing stages and are eager to promote the project. As pastors and educators, they know the urgent need out there for books like these and they are willing to help us in any way they can to develop the Project.

Also, we have a great team of very committed and qualified group of writers, Catholic men and woman who share a common love for the Faith and who have many years of experience as writers, editors, teachers and educators. We’ve been blessed with a number of sponsors and contributors who have generously made this vision a reality by providing crucial funding and other support.

Who will be publishing the series?

We are very fortunate to have the backing of Ignatius Press, one of the most successful of the new Catholic publishing enterprises established since Vatican II. Ignatius publishes many new and contemporary voices in the Church and society and has the marketing capability and know-how to get the word out about this wonderful series. Because he’s committed to Catholic education, the founder, Fr. Joseph Fessio, S.J., has been a tremendous support in getting this enterprise off the ground and the people at Ignatius have been most accommodating.

How might priests, religious and other committed Catholics assist you in this endeavor?

Obviously the most important ways are to pray for the Project and to assist is to do what you can to get these books into the hands of Catholic school children. Be it parish schools, independent Catholic schools or homeschools, spread the word and encourage them to use them in their programs. How else? Help us produce more books more quickly help by supporting Catholic education through donations. Being a ministry and a non-profit corporation, any contribution is most welcome and greatly assists us in generating materials more quickly. You can also make known this important project to other philanthropists or foundations that care about bettering Catholic education.

Where can people get more information or keep updated about the Project?

They can write to: Catholic Schools Textbook Project, P.O. Box 4638, Ventura, CA 93004. Or they can call us toll free at 866-458-3332. Probably the best way to keep updated on our progress is to check our website (www.catholictextbookproject.org) periodically to see what’s new. 