

A JOURNEY ACROSS AMERICA: THE NORTHEAST STATES

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AUTHOR

Michael Storck studied philosophy and classics at Christendom College, in Front Royal, Virginia, and earned a Ph.D. in philosophy at the Catholic University of America. Although he currently lives in Ohio with his wife and seven children, he spent three years in New Hampshire teaching at a small Catholic college. As a boy, he lived for about a year in Saltillo, Pennsylvania, a town inhabited by fewer than four-hundred people, located not far from an operating steam railroad called the East Broad Top.

PREFACE

As an educator I have often noted a serious problem in Catholic education—Catholic educators lack textbooks. Secular textbooks are attractive and rich in illustrations and maps but unsuitable for Catholic schools. These books often carry an anti-Catholic bias by presenting Catholic contributions in an unfavorable light, or by downplaying them. The alternatives to secular texts are old Catholic texts, but these also prove inadequate. Since no distinctively Catholic textbooks have been published since the 1960s, teachers are forced to use old copies of these texts or rely on photocopies. Even the original editions of such Catholic texts lack the graphic quality of the new secular texts, and thus they fail to attract students accustomed to the allures of a media culture. More importantly, old Catholic history texts do not address the intellectual and cultural needs of today’s Catholic students. I am not alone in my assessment of this situation. Many other leading educators have also noted a defect common to both secular and Catholic texts: they are written in a style that fails to capture the drama of history.

History, as its name indicates, is, first and foremost, a story—a story as riveting as any fictional tale and as full of tragedy and comedy, of despair and hope, as any novel or epic. Its characters are real human beings like each one of us; some are heroes, others are villains; some are exceptional, but most are average people trying to work through the unique circumstances of their time and place. Since history has the character of a story, it must be told as a story, especially to young readers. History texts should draw us into the hopes and fears, the struggles and victories of men and women of past times. They should help us meet historical characters as real people of flesh and blood.

Catholic Textbook Project is committed to producing textbooks pleasing to the eye, accurate, interesting to read, and imbued with Catholic tradition. Our history textbooks relay to students the necessary “secular” historical knowledge, the “cultural literacy” so important to contemporary education,

and give as well due place to God's providence and the role of the Catholic Church in the unfolding of history.

Without exaggeration or whitewashing, this volume tells the story of the accomplishments and failures of nations, groups, and individuals, both Catholic and non-Catholic. This text remains true to the vision of history set forth in the Second Vatican Council's guiding document, *Lumen Gentium*, "The Light to the Nations." It also fills a void in the historical education of young people today, who know little or nothing of the contributions of past ages to our civilization and Church. This vacuum of historical knowledge is not our true heritage. Ours is a culture of life and of hope, of faith, vast and deep, and rich achievements for the common good. May this textbook be one step toward the full restoration of that culture.

—Michael J. Van Hecke, M.Ed.
President
The Catholic Textbook Project

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FROM THE FOUNDING GENERAL EDITOR, CTP

History is a treasure chest of riches. In its stories are the most exciting, the saddest, and the happiest moments of human life. All the great souls and heroes of the world are to be met in the pages of a good history book.

A Christian interpretation of History is the story of God’s love for mankind. As a long and complex story, it can tell of tragedies as well as comedies, of famines as well as feasts, of exiles and homecomings, defeats and victories. There is among the many stories of history some story to entertain or to edify everyone. But over all, the story of history is the tale of God’s acts in time and space, the story of rebellious mankind, and the Mercy of God for human folly. History is a story, a story of hope.

However, events in our own time tend to leave most people in fear of the future, despite the watchword of our culture, which remains: “Progress! Be always Optimistic!” Current secular ideologies have given “history” a god-like power that makes sometimes wild proclamations: “Someday, History will look back and say . . .”; or “History will show the wisdom of . . .”; or “History will prove he was right . . .”; or “History will leave this ‘whatever’ behind in the dust of the ages.” This ideological sense of the name “History” is more than a little idolatrous in its foolish optimism. Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI wrote in several places about “optimism” as but a shallow mockery of Hope.

The evidence of the stories that come down to us from the ancient world and the medieval era do not promise all good endings. Humanity makes costly mistakes. Great men and women pay for those mistakes with their lives. Great empires collapse. Utopias are neither realistic, nor realized.

The Hope that the Christian Faith offers is more than an optimistically happy ending. The end of history will be the return of Our Lord in Glory and the end of time. Providence does not mean every time a happy ending—only a blessed one. It is God’s abiding care and love, in History and in individual lives. It is the vision of the perfection in Christ to which all people are called, not just what society and cultures—however great—have been.

May you, the readers of this book, young and old, find in its tales the traces of that Providence that keeps all of us safe in his Everlasting Arms.

—Rollin A. Lasseter, Ph.D.

Founding General Editor, CTP

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