

Unfortunately, I cannot recommend this book for use in any Catholic catechetical program. As is always the case with a questionable book, problems are not found on every page. But when the problems are severe, the book becomes irrevocably damaged. Regrettably, the book carries both an *Imprimatur* and a *Nihil Obstat*, along with the following statement of approval from the USCCB: “*The Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, has found this catechetical text, copyright 2009, to be in conformity with the **Catechism of the Catholic Church.***” (This leads one to wonder who, if anyone, on the Bishops’ Ad Hoc Committee actually read this book.)

BOOK DOES NOT INCLUDE ACCURATE CATHOLIC TEACHING ON SANCTIFYING GRACE

Catholic Essentials appears to be a “popular” book in Catholic high school classrooms and also parish religious education programs. While the book presents a number of problems for Catholic students, it also contains one major flaw that we believe disqualifies the book for Catholic study. On page 273, the students find the following sentence regarding sanctifying grace: “***Sanctifying grace is the habitual, permanent grace received in Baptism that enables us to live with God, act by his love, and inherit Heaven.***” (underlining added) The problem is, Catholic moral theology does **not** teach that sanctifying grace is “*permanent.*” (The idea that “grace” cannot be lost is a popular concept in many of the between 30,000 and 50,000 different Protestant sects. It can easily lead to the false, “once saved, always saved,” theology frequently taught in Protestant churches.)

Using the word “permanent” appears to be an attempt by the author to combine two sentences that appear in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (#2000): “*Sanctifying grace is an habitual gift, a stable and supernatural disposition that perfects the soul itself to enable it to live with God, to act by his love. Habitual grace, the permanent disposition to live and act in keeping with God’s call, is distinguished from actual graces which refer to God’s interventions, whether at the beginning of conversion or in the course of the work of sanctification.*”

Note that the word “**permanent**” in the *Catholic Essentials* definition was taken from the second sentence of paragraph #2000, regarding “Habitual grace.” The author simply added the word “permanent” to his definition of sanctifying grace, which of course, is wrong. Sanctifying grace is **not** a permanent grace. It is lost through mortal sin and is restored in the Sacrament of Confession. In addition, one would expect that a Catholic theology text should also explain that a Catholic must be “in the state of sanctifying grace” at the time of death to attain salvation.

The Index of *Catholic Essentials* shows only **one** page entry for “Sanctifying grace” - page 273 - which means that there is no other explanation of sanctifying grace in this 330 page book. This is unfortunate. Being in the “state of grace” is fundamental to a proper understanding of Catholic moral theology. One can only wonder why the author **did not** explain this properly, **or print the more complete reading of sanctifying grace** found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (#1861), which states: “*Mortal sin...results in the loss of charity and the privation of sanctifying grace, that is, of the state of grace. If it is not redeemed by repentance and God’s forgiveness, it causes exclusion from Christ’s kingdom and the eternal death of hell...*” (underlining added)

In my opinion, this author’s decision to provide only a false and misleading teaching of sanctifying grace should make any Catholic educator, or parent, want to seriously evaluate the entire contents of this book.

OTHER PROBLEMS WITH *CATHOLIC ESSENTIALS* TEXTBOOK

1) SERIOUS SEXUAL SINS ARE NEVER LABELED “MORTAL” SINS.

On page 254-5, the author states: “**In the Letter to the Galatians, St. Paul names fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like as works of the flesh that contrast with the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:19-21). These kinds of acts are personal sins and can also be described by their degree of seriousness. Mortal sin is the most serious**

kind of personal sin...[It] effectively destroys our relationship with God and kills our ability to love. It's easy to see how adultery could kill the ability of a husband or a wife to love a spouse who has been unfaithful." Here the author is apparently identifying adultery as a mortal sin. On page 255, students are told, "Let's look at an example of an action that presents a grave or serious matter – the abuse of illegal drugs. When an action constitutes a grave or serious matter, it meets the first condition of a mortal sin." While the use of drugs may be a serious issue, so are the sexual sins that often affect more teens than the drug problem. After the discussion of illegal drugs, the author, on page 256, goes on to discuss "venial sin" with the following example, "...suppose we praise someone ("wow, you're cool") for stealing or for engaging in premarital sex." So, on page 254 the author is telling these teenagers that *fornication* is a "personal sin," and on page 256 he tells the children that *encouraging a friend in fornication* is a "venial sin" - when it would actually be a serious sin of scandal. (See CCC #2284) Why will he not simply tell them the truth - that fornication is a mortal sin?

In a discussion of the Ten Commandments, the author warns that, "To deliberately miss Sunday Mass is mortally sinful" (p. 263), but in regard to sexual sins the author only encourages a life of chastity. On page 265 the students are told, "Chastity involves self-mastery over one's sexuality and rejects lust (inordinate enjoyment of sexual pleasure), masturbation (deliberate self-stimulation of genital organs to derive sexual pleasure), fornication (sex between unmarried persons), pornography (displaying sexual acts for a third party to see), prostitution (selling of sexual acts), rape (forcing another to have sex), and homosexual acts (sexual activity between persons of the same gender)." Again, telling teenagers to simply "reject" these sexual sins is not telling them the truth. Why not tell them that these are mortal sins that must be confessed before they can receive Holy Communion? Also, not only is contraception *not* in this list, it is also not listed in the "Index" of the book. Our young people have a right to the important, life-changing truths found in *Humanae Vitae*.

In a discussion of the Ninth Commandment on page 266, the author reminds students that, "the Sixth Commandment addresses sexual acts that are forbidden." Unfortunately, saying these acts are "forbidden" and must be "rejected" does not tell the students that they are mortal sins. Why are the students not told that committing a mortal sin results in the loss of sanctifying grace, which is the life of the soul? Instead of dancing around these terms, why does the author not tell the students the truth, that without sanctifying grace, the sinner is not in a "state of grace," and therefore, is not eligible for Heaven until he or she receives absolution in the Sacrament of Confession? The bottom line is that an admonition without consequences is a useless endeavor. (Ask any parent.)

It should be noted, here, that this very confusing section on mortal and venial sin could result in a student believing that there are actually three classes of personal sin: mortal, grave and venial, which is wrong. There are only two: mortal and venial. Author, Fr. James Socias, in his 2003 high school, "Didache Series" textbook, *Our Moral Life in Christ*, explains that "Certain authors have recently introduced a threefold division of sin: mortal, grave and venial...[but] The Magisterium of the Church has condemned this triple distinction, saying it has no foundation in Scripture, which specifies only two classes of sin. Consequently, mortal and 'grave' sins are identical." (p. 134) Interestingly, the "Introduction" to *Our Moral Life in Christ* was written by "Most Rev. Jerome E. ListECKi, Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago."

2) IS THE AUTHOR SUGGESTING THAT THE TEN COMMANDMENTS ARE OUTDATED, AS "OLD LAW?"

After a discussion of the Ten Commandments, the students are told on page 268 that there is a "New Law of Freedom. It gives us freedom from the ritualistic practices of the Old Law...The New Law is the work of Jesus Christ and is represented in the Sermon on the Mount, especially, as mentioned, the Beatitudes." The students are told on page 267, "Christians believe that the Old Law, including the Ten Commandments, is holy, good, and spiritual. It is meant to be followed. However, the Old Law does not offer the grace and the strength of the Holy Spirit...the special function of the Old Law is to reveal and condemn what is sinful." The students are then told, on page 268, "The New Law is a law of love. Love is the fulfillment of the Old Law. The New Law does not offer any new precepts for us to follow...The New Law is called the law of love because it operates out of the love infused in us by the Holy Spirit. It does not operate out of fear. The New Law helps us translate the love we receive into loving others...Rather than acting from rote, our choices to love can be made spontaneously and out of friendship with Christ." It is easy to believe that some, and maybe many, students will be left with the feeling that the Ten Commandments are outdated and not really important. This, of course, is a tragedy. Faithful Catholics may recall that many of those who have embraced the "spirit" of Vatican II for the past 40 years, have repeatedly replaced "fear" of God with "love" of God, a misplaced theology that has, obviously, been a complete failure.

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Maybe the author of this book should re-read the Gospel of Matthew (5:19): *“Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do so will be called least in the Kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the Kingdom of heaven.”*

3) FAITH AND TRUST IN THE BIBLE IS UNDERMINED.

In a section titled **“Overview of the Bible,”** the author raises questions about the validity of those who wrote the parts of the Bible. On page 39, readers are told, **“Also, interestingly, very few biblical books were written by a single author...In fact, it was a commonly accepted practice to put the name of a famous member of the community or a famous ancestor of faith on the book, rather than the actual author or authors.”** Where is the author’s source for this statement, and why is he subjecting these children to the biblical discussions that take place among theologians and academics doing research in this area? It is reasonable to believe that the author’s statements will only serve to reduce the students’ faith and trust in the Bible, and that is unfortunate.

4) CHRIST NEVER RESPONDED “WITH A CLEAR ANSWER” WHEN ASKED WHY WE HAVE TO SUFFER.

In a section titled, **“Sacraments of Healing,”** on page 222, the children are told, **“Jesus Christ is the ‘physician of our souls and bodies’ (CCC #1420). He was once asked why people have to suffer. He never responded with a clear answer.”** Even though this may be technically true, or not true, a knowledgeable author would have taken the opportunity to explain the Catholic Church’s **“theology of suffering,”** which is not found in Protestant theology and has contributed to the conversion to the Catholic faith of many Protestants. A brief summary of this Catholic teaching on suffering was given recently by **Bill Donohue** in the March, 2015, edition of the *Catalyst*. He explains on page 9, *“Catholics learn how to ‘offer it up.’ When going through a tough patch, we are able to unite our sufferings with Christ. This is the essence of redemptive suffering. For instance, the number of saints who endured great suffering are legion, but in the end they all knew the beauty and joy of being with the Lord. Sadly, the idea of redemptive suffering is wholly unknown to agnostics and atheists. In times of trial, they are left to themselves, having nowhere to turn.”*

5) STUDENTS ARE ENCOURAGED TO BE “ORGAN DONORS” WITHOUT AN ADEQUATE QUALIFIER.

On page 101, students are told that, **“When Alexander Anthony of Indianapolis, Indiana, reached his thirteenth birthday, he registered for his first state identification card. He told his family he wished to have the sticker placed on the back of the card to further identify him as a willing organ donor.”** Then on page 103, the author goes on to quote from an encyclical, *“The Gospel of Life,”* by Pope John Paul II, who said that the **“donation of organs”** must be done **“...in an ethically acceptable manner...,”** which does not adequately explain the organ donation problems to the average teenager. Because the “sticker” on the card may include a heart donation, most pro-life groups caution pro-life people not to mark these cards in that way. Individual donor decisions can easily be made at the time by the family. Although there are many organ donations that can leave the donor in good health, a “heart” can only be taken from a living person, and of course, will cause the death of the donor. Instead of explaining this, the students are basically left to believe that marking the card is a good, Catholic idea, when it is not.

6) BOOK SAYS ISLAM “WAS VERY INFLUENCIAL IN THE CREATION OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION.”

In a section on page 313, titled, **“The Church’s Relationship with Muslims,”** the author begins with, **“The Second Vatican Council also mentioned the Church’s high regard for Muslims and spoke of similarities in faith.”** On page 314, he identifies Islam as, **“one of the fastest-growing religions in the world,”** and claims that **“During the middle ages, Islam was very influential in the creation of Western civilization, especially in the areas of science, philosophy and medicine. Effective dialogue between Catholics and Muslims begins at the starting point of common beliefs...and the sharing of positive and peaceful human values...Family life is central to both Catholics and Muslims.”** Really?

Telling our young people that Islam was very influential in the creation of Western civilization flies in the face of history, and greatly misleads these students in the current political climate. First, our high school students should be reading *How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization*, by Thomas E. Woods, Jr., Ph.D. (Regnery, 2005). In addition, in an article titled **“Ideological Foundations of Islamic Extremism,”** published in the March, 2015, issue of the *Mindszenty Report*, the author refers to an admission made by *“the most influential advocate in modern times of*

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jihad, or Islamic holy war, and the chief developer of doctrines that legitimize violent Muslim resistance,” Syed Qutb Shaheed., who joined the **Muslim Brotherhood** in Egypt in the early 1950s, where he was imprisoned and then executed in 1966. On page 5 of his 1964 book, **Milestones**, Qutb admitted that the Muslims were **not** influential in the creation of Western civilization when he wrote, “...*Europe’s genius created its marvelous works in science, culture, law and material production, due to which mankind has progressed to great heights of creativity and material comfort. It is not easy to find fault with the inventors of such marvelous things, especially since what we call the ‘world of Islam’ is completely devoid of all this beauty.*” According to the **Mindszenty Report**, Qutb also called for the “*goal of an Islamic world order...a global jihad to fulfill Allah’s promise of a holy reign on earth...[that] will follow sharia law...[and] will annihilate all those political and material powers which stand between people and Islam.*” The **Mindszenty Report** author concludes, on page 4, with, “*There can be no compromise in this struggle against Islamic extremists...If jihadists take pride in videotaping beheadings of innocent people and the burning of a captured Jordanian pilot, does anyone believe that these barbarians would not use chemical or nuclear weapons to destroy Western civilization if they could?*”

In regard to the **Catholic Essentials’** author suggesting that Catholics and Muslims share a concern for “family life,” he apparently has not read **Now They Call Me Infidel**, published in 2006 by author, Nonie Darwish. Darwish was raised in an Egyptian Muslim family, and on pages 73-4, she explains that, “*At all levels of Islamic society, the sharia laws turn the relationship between husband and wife from that of partners to one of slave and master...slapping women on the face and pushing them to the ground are common scenes in many Arabic TV shows and movies.*” And on page 76 she reveals that, “...*sharia closes all doors for women who seek to live an independent lifestyle.*” (On a personal note, we have a Muslim family living across the street, but I have never met the mother because she is not allowed to talk to anyone unless she has a male with her.) Needless to say, sharia law does not represent Catholic family life. Why does this author not tell our students the truth about Islam?

SOLUTION IS ACCURATE, FAITHFUL CATECHETICAL TEXTBOOKS.

Finally, why, in a Catholic textbook of over 300 pages, is there no picture of a priest saying Mass? Unfortunately, this book is typical of the many deficient catechetical texts that have been published for the past 50 years by a variety of publishing companies, including Ave Maria Press. According to noted church historian, **Dr. James Hitchcock**, the **Third Plenary Council of Baltimore** (Baltimore III) in 1884, “*mandated that all parishes sponsor*” a school, and also authorized the **Baltimore Catechism**, “*which was used in Catholic schools for the next eighty years*” until Vatican II. (**History of the Catholic Church**, 2012, Ignatius Press, page 445) During those years, generations of strong, church-going Catholics learned their faith and passed it on to their children.

The use of a uniform catechetical text for those 80 years is probably the reason **Bill Donahue**, in his 2012 book, **Why Catholicism Matters**, was able to say on page 275 that, “*greater family stability was achieved in the fifties than at probably any other time in history, with high marriage rates, low unwed birthrates, and low death rates not yet offset by sky-high divorce rates,*” obviously the fruits of a Catholic/Christian culture. In our society today, we have a great need to re-create uniform, authentic, Catholic standards for catechetical textbooks, or the Church will continue to lose our un-catechized young people who leave a church they don’t understand and can’t defend.

The good news is that there are a number of faithful, Catholic textbooks in print, and currently being used in various dioceses, some on-line Catholic curricula, and in many Catholic home-school programs. A few popular books are, the **Faith and Life** grade school series from Catholics United for the Faith and Ignatius Press, the **Catholicism Series** for high school (**Catholicism and Reason, Catholicism and Life**, etc., by Msgr. Hayes, Fr. Hayes and James Drumme), from C.R. Publications, the **Didache Series** from Midwest Theological Forum, and the **Baltimore Catechism**. One can only ask why the bishops, and/or our parish pastors, are not mandating these faithful books for our schools?