

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, and overwhelm the good, the book becomes irrevocably damaged. In this case, because the Catholic faith is diminished in many subtle ways, it is “death by a thousand cuts.” Unfortunately, the book carries both an *Imprimatur* and a *Nihil Obstat*, along with the following statement of approval from the USCCB: “*The Subcommittee on the Catechism, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, has found this catechetical text, copyright 2013, to be in conformity with the Catechism of the Catholic Church.*”

It must be immediately pointed out that the author of this book, **Brian Singer-Towns**, is also the general editor of *The Catholic Youth Bible* (St. Mary’s Press, 2000), which has been declared unfit for Catholic youth by Helen Hull Hitchcock, editor and publisher of *Adoremus Bulletin*. In the Feb., 2006, edition of *Adoremus Bulletin*, Hitchcock explains that, “the fundamental problem is that *The Catholic Youth Bible* uses the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). But, the purpose in producing the NRSV was to incorporate so-called ‘inclusive’ language...” Hitchcock points out that, “In 1994, the Holy See decreed that the NRSV is not to be used in Catholic liturgy.” She then asks, “If the NRSV is not suitable for Catholic worship, is it reasonable to give to kids?” It must be noted that, in his introduction to *The Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth*, author Brian Singer-Towns suggests that *The Catholic Youth Bible*, **“together with this handbook are in a sense a matched set...”** Many readers may remember that, although the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was translated into English in 1992, it was not available for purchase until 1994 because it took two years to remove the inclusive language that was found in the 1992 translation from the French.

#### PRESENTATION OF PRAYER IS DISTORTED

Movie fans may recall Rex Harrison in “My Fair Lady,” complaining, “Why can’t a woman be more like a man?” Well, the underlying theme of this book could well be, “Why can’t a Catholic be more like a Protestant?” The book borders on the common heresy, “Don’t we all worship the same God?” On page 147 students find, **“Jews and Muslims, together with us, even worship the same God...”** And, on page 145 readers are told, **“But most teens today are tolerant and accepting of different religious traditions and beliefs.”** Is this Catholic Catechesis? On page 50, students are encouraged to, **“build unity with other Christians. We do this by praying together...and honestly searching for God’s truth together.”**

Is the author inviting Catholic teens to attend Protestant services with their friends? Catholics are not permitted to take part in Protestant services, only to be observers in special cases. Why are students not told that, “God’s truth” is found only in the one, true Church instituted by Christ to save souls – the Catholic Church? In addition, an underlying theme throughout the book is that students should make up their own prayers, which is common throughout the Protestant world, and, that these made-up prayers are more worthy than the memorized prayers of our childhood, which, the author claims, the students have outgrown.

On page 363 students are told: **“You probably first learned to talk to God using someone else’s words. These memorized prayers helped you express a child’s faith. As you have matured, you have likely used your own words in prayer to express who you are, what you think, how you feel, and what you need.”** And on page 385, **“You have probably heard the expression ‘lip service’ and ‘talk is cheap,’ which indicate that people don’t always mean what they say. Sometimes the deception is intentional. Perhaps, as can be the case in memorized vocal prayer, they have said the same words over and over to the point where the words have lost their meaning.”**

Where does that leave the rosary, the Mass, the Creed, the Our Father, the act of contrition, devotional prayer, etc.? The author’s “instruction,” in effect, distances youth from the common prayer and liturgical practices of the Church and alienates them from other Catholics and the Church’s venerable traditional practices. The author’s unfortunate Protestantizing tendency promotes a freewheeling religious style in youth that leads to a questioning of Catholic practices, and a questioning of the need to obey the Church and Church authority.

On page 414, students are told that, **“...anyone can create a prayer. There are no special formulas or requirements,”** and on page 420 the students are encouraged to rewrite the Lord’s Prayer with, **“How would you put the Lord’s Prayer into your own words?”** The Our Father is the prayer Christ dictated in Matthew, 6:9, and the students are asked to rewrite it?! And on page 227, students are encouraged to, **“Write your own Act of Contrition...”**

Interestingly, on page 374, the author suggests five prayer forms: “**blessing (and adoration), petition, intercession, thanksgiving and praise...**” Why does he not mention **Contrition**, which is central to the Catholic faith?

Traditional Catholic teaching uses the acronym *ACTS* for the Four Reasons We Pray: Adoration, Contrition, Thanksgiving and Supplication (petition), an easy teaching tool that can be useful for students of any age. And, on page 132, in a discussion of the “Gifts of the Holy Spirit,” the seventh gift is listed as, “**Wonder and awe,**” even though in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the seventh gift is, “Fear of the Lord.” Catholic students should be reminded that, according to the *Bible*, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” (Psalm 111:10)

The author offers a suggestion for prayer on page 388: “**Begin by dismissing thoughts about prayer as mere psychological activity or the rattling of memorized words. These are not part of healthy human relationships and are also not true prayer...For example, do you ever sit in your room listening to music, caught up in the rhythm and how the verses express your own thoughts and feelings?...If you do any of these things, you are already praying.**” Students should not be encouraged to isolate themselves in their bedrooms listening to music. This is hardly Catholic prayer.

On page 387, students are encouraged to practice “**Centering Prayer,**” a mind-emptying technique that is found in the practices of Hindus, Zen Buddhists and New Agers, actually a form of Transcendental Meditation. As Catholics, we are not to adopt the questionable forms and practices of non-Christian religions. (See “A closer look at centering prayer,” by Margaret Feaster, *Homiletic & Pastoral Review*, Oct., 2004, p. 26)

The book also presents problems regarding our posture for prayer. A caption under a picture on p. 378 states, “**Notice the raised arms of the woman in prayer, a posture people often use when praising God. What posture do you use in your prayer?**” In addition to the fact that this is not a common posture for Catholic prayer, the “raised arms” posture further blurs the distinction between priest and the laity. Why is there no mention of the conventional Catholic posture for prayer, with hands together and thumbs crossed? According to Joseph F. Wagner, writing in 1926, Pope Nicholas V explained that “this joining of the hands is an expression of humble submission to the will of God and...[a] most eloquent gesture of supplication.” ([Attitudes During Liturgical Prayer](#)) And, on page 385, the author suggests, “**sitting yoga style**” at prayer, obviously not a usual Catholic practice.

In a discussion of the First Commandment on page 289, the author warns against “superstition,” stating, “**Some people even use religious symbols or rituals in superstitious ways, actually believing they can influence God. Although expressing your desires to God through prayer is good, believing God will fix the outcome of a game because you made the Sign of the Cross is wrong.**” This is very unfortunate. The young athlete, making the public Sign of the Cross, is not necessarily asking God to “fix” the game; he is probably asking God to help him to do the best he can, a traditional Catholic practice. In addition, his action is also a public statement of Catholic evangelization to the culture, a courageous act on his part.

On page 186 the students are asked to “**Develop Your Own Blessing: Anyone can develop a blessing. All you have to do is think of someone who needs God’s help or is celebrating a special occasion.**” This kind of suggestion blurs the line between the priesthood and the laity. Certainly, Catholics are always encouraged to offer prayers for those in need, but the author does not clarify the difference between the **priestly blessing** given only by an ordained priest, and a “blessing” of prayer offered by a lay person. This becomes a problem when Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion attempt to give “blessings” to communicants, which Eucharist Ministers are not allowed to do.

#### *PERSONAL INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE ENCOURAGED*

In addition to making up their own prayers, readers are encouraged to study scripture, using the Protestant model of self-interpretation. Certainly reading Sacred Scripture is a good idea for educated Catholics, well-grounded in their faith, but is it wise to propose this to teenagers, most of whom have not been well catechized in what the Catholic Church believes and teaches? It could cause young, uninformed, Catholics to begin searching for Scripture study groups, and, realistically, many of these groups are conducted by Protestants. It is true that more Catholic “Bible study” groups are forming, but too many poorly educated Catholics have lost their faith in Protestant Bible study groups. As made clear in **Vatican II**, “...the task of authentically interpreting the Word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church...” (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, n. 10). Needless to say, “self-interpretation” of the *Bible* has not worked well for Protestants. The arguments that result from “self-interpretation” have produced, over the past 500 years, between 30,000 and 50,000

different Protestant Churches or sects. This, of course, contradicts the *Bible*, which speaks of “the Church,” singular, i.e., the Catholic Church. The *Bible* clearly states that, “the Church” is “the pillar and bulwark of truth.” (1 Tm 3:15)

On page 25 the author suggests using the acronym PRIMA to study Scripture: **Pray, Read, Imagine, Meditate**, and then “**Apply what you have read to your life. God may be calling you to make a change in your life...**” On page 34, students are told to “**Make a Plan for Reading the Bible.**” And on page 371, students are given “**A Simple Way to Pray...There is a simple way to begin to pray regularly that will help you use Scripture and quiet time. Find a passage in Scripture...Calm yourself and ask God to help you. Read the passage and then sit quietly...Now go back a second time and read the passage again. Take note this time of a word or phrase that might jump out at you...Read your passage a third time, and this time ask God what it is he wants you to understand about your word or phrase. Then write down your word or phrase and carry it with you for a day or a week, to remind you of what you have experienced...This prayer experience can also be done with your friends. It will help you to see how God is working differently in your lives. It will also help you support one another.**” To do this regularly, without a priest or educated Catholic guide, may mean that these friends are supporting each other in their common ignorance, a dangerous practice.

And on 399, Under the “Rule of St. Benedict” and *lectio divina*, the students are told, “**You will probably want to read the [Scripture] passage at least three times, each time listening carefully for a word or phrase that seems to stand out to you...Some advise that you listen for a word or phrase that speaks to you today...Try to understand: ‘What is God saying to me in this passage.’ Why does this particular word or phrase stand out?**” What is to protect these children from reading what they want to read into a particular passage?

The book also contains an inadequate understanding of Grace. The index only shows two page references for the term “Sanctifying Grace.” On page 183, students are told, in a “side bar” inset, that, “**Grace is the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become his ‘coheirs’ with Christ, destined for eternal life. The Sacraments in particular are channels of grace through the power of the Holy Spirit. Here are some of the different types of grace we can receive: Sanctifying grace is God’s free and generous gift, sometimes called the ‘state of grace.’ This is a permanent disposition, a change in us that orients us toward God and helps us to live in keeping with God’s call. Through Baptism we receive sanctifying grace and a share in the divine life. Actual grace is God’s intervention and support for us in the everyday moments of our lives. Actual graces are important for our continuing growth in holiness. Sacramental graces are gifts specific to each of the seven Sacraments. Charisms are special graces that are associated with one’s state in life and are intended to build up the Body of Christ...**” The remaining information on that page discusses symbols and rituals.

On page 358, students are told that, “**Grace is God’s love given to us, all of us. It is free and underserved – never earned. This gift is ours for the taking...we also experience grace through forgiveness. Through our Baptism and through the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, the Holy Spirit gives us sanctifying grace to heal our wounded soul and make us whole – and make us holy – again...Without any effort on our part, we receive God’s gift of grace...Although we don’t earn grace by being good, grace helps us to be good.**”

In a book that, in many ways, blurs the line between Catholicism and Protestantism, this description of grace seems shallow, at best. The students should be told that committing a mortal sin removes sanctifying grace from the soul, and the sacrament of Penance returns the soul to a “state of sanctifying grace” -- necessary for eternal salvation. What does the author mean when he calls the “state of grace” a “permanent disposition?” Also, does not the Church teach that by our good actions we gain actual grace, to enlighten our mind and strengthen our will, to do good and avoid evil? But the author claims that grace is “never” earned. And, he claims that the sacraments are “channels of grace,” but he does not fully explain that sacraments specifically provide “sanctifying” grace.” The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that, “*The whole power of the sacrament of Penance consists in restoring (emphasis added) us to God’s grace...Reconciliation with God is thus the purpose and effect of this sacrament.*” (#1468) This section on grace could be very confusing to the students.

#### BASIC WHITEWASH OF MARTIN LUTHER

To further confuse young people seeking the Truth, the entire issue of Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation is not accurately explained. It is a whitewash of Luther and the Reformation. The author explains on page 148:

**“Martin Luther, the best known of the reformers, was a German monk, priest, and Scripture scholar. With hopes of bringing change rather than division, he wrote a critique of the Church’s practice of selling indulgences (something that reduces a person’s time in Purgatory). Eventually, however, he was excommunicated by the Catholic Church, and after attempts to resolve the conflict failed, the Lutheran Church was born.”** Also, on page 23 students are told, **“Catholic Bibles have seven more books in the Old Testament than do most Protestant Bibles. This goes back to a disagreement over whether to use the original Greek or the Hebrew version of the Old Testament. The Greek version has been accepted by the Church since the time of the Apostles and contains the Books of Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Sirach, and Baruch...Many Protestant churches later decided to use the Hebrew version of the Old Testament, which does not contain these [seven] books.”** In truth, Protestants draw their heretical teachings, which were unknown in the first 15 centuries of the Church’s life, from an incomplete *Bible*. In addition, on page 27, the book features one of Martin Luther’s rallying cries, **“Sola Scriptura,”** (meaning the Scripture **alone** is the source of God’s Revelation). The fact that “sola scriptura” has been a primary source of disagreement with Protestantism for 500 years, was summarily dismissed with, **“However, through patient dialogue, the different Christian churches are more tolerant and appreciative of one another than they have been in centuries.”**

Why are students not taught the truth about Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation? Martin Luther was a Catholic priest who in 1517 nailed his “Ninety-five Theses” to the door of the castle-church of Wittenberg to protest the authority of the Catholic Church, thereby leading the Protestant Reformation. For young people to adequately defend their Catholic faith, they need to understand the differences between the Catholic Church and the Protestant churches. For example, Protestants, believing in “Scripture alone,” reject Catholic belief in the Magisterium (teaching authority of the Catholic Church), and also Tradition (The Traditions that were handed down by word of mouth from the Apostles). Therefore, Protestants sit on a very unstable “stool,” which has only one leg, that being “Scripture.” They claim to believe **only** what is in the *Bible*. In contrast, the Catholic Church is very stable, on a three-legged stool, supported by **Tradition**, the **Magisterium**, and **Scripture**.

Interestingly, the author does not mention Martin Luther’s other rallying cry, “sola fide,” meaning that we are saved by “faith alone.” Although Luther claimed that these two teachings (“sola fide” and “sola scriptura”) appear in the *Bible*, it is simply not true. Martin Luther brazenly added the word “alone” to comply with his personal beliefs (*Martin Luther*, by Peter F. Wiener, pp. 30 & 39). In addition, to say that many Protestant churches “later decided” to use the Hebrew canon, minus the seven books is misleading. Luther used that abbreviated canon **because** he did not want those seven books, which, again, did not agree with his personal convictions. Sadly, being saved by “faith alone” leads to another belief held by many Protestants, which is “once saved, always saved.” There is a temptation by many Protestants to extend this to discount behavior, and believe that salvation (or justification) is not related to actions or moral behavior, which is obviously not Catholic theology. The truth is that the only place the *Bible* states the words “by faith alone” is in James 2:24, where James says, “You must perceive that a person is justified by his works and not by faith alone...faith without works is dead as a body without breath.” Actually Luther also wanted to remove the book of James from the *Bible*, but his close associates talked him out of it. Ironically, Luther’s “by faith alone” has led to no faith on the part of those abandoning Protestantism for agnosticism or atheism. Any credit given to Protestant principles can endanger the faith of Catholic youth, as we see too many lapsing into Pentecostalism and other sects.

It would also be beneficial to tell students that many Protestants, and over 1000 Protestant ministers, have come into the Catholic Church in recent years, led by a search for Truth. According to a *Catholic World News* website posting on March 11, 2014, “One of Sweden’s most prominent Protestant leaders has shocked his followers by announcing his conversion to Catholicism.” And, as reported in the January, 2014, issue of *Miles Christi*, “The Church of England...the officially recognized Christian Church in England...is a painful detachment of the Catholic Church, from which it was separated in 1534, during the reign of Henry VIII.” According to Lord Carey, a former Archbishop of Canterbury, the Church of England is only “one generation away from extinction...the Church of England is dying, it is losing faithful, closing its churches, abandoning the public square, and in the space of a decade it will see itself reduced to insignificance. The newspaper *Daily Mail* recently titled an article ‘2030: The year Britain will cease to be a Christian nation.’” This is the sad result of creating a contemporary theology, to accommodate the culture.

#### *DEFICIENT UNDERSTANDING OF LITURGY*

This book is also confusing in its treatment of liturgy. On page 213 the book states that, **“...the Eucharist is the ‘heart (or source) and the summit’ (CCC 1407) of the life of the Church.”** But the more correct statement in the

*Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that, “The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life” (#1324), citing the life of the Christian, rather than the life of “the Church.” Then, on page 408 the author states that, “**The liturgy is the summit and source of spiritual life in the Church,**” and on page 407 we find, “**In the Mass we celebrate the Eucharistic Prayer as the center of Mass and the center of our lives as people of God.**” This is confusing and diminishes the importance of the Eucharist. In addition, there is no clear explanation that the priest at Mass is acting “in persona Christi,” a term not used in this book, meaning “in the person of Christ.” Why not explain to students that the priest, at the consecration, does not say “this is **your** body,” he says “this is **my** Body.” The priest is acting “as Christ.” Instead, the author refers to the priest as representing Christ. On page 222, the book states, “**Ordination gives [priests] the special character needed to represent Christ.**” On page 230, readers are told, “**Priests know they represent Christ...**” And on page 244, “[The priest] **must be a leader devoted to serving others in the Person of Christ (that is, as representing Christ).**” But there is no real explanation of what “in the Person of Christ” actually means. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, “*It is Christ himself, the eternal high priest of the New Covenant who, acting through the ministry of the priests, offers the Eucharistic sacrifice. And it is the same Christ, really present under the species of bread and wine, who is the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice.*” (#1410)

On page 172, the book states that, “**...liturgy means the participation of the People of God in the work of God. So our liturgies aren’t something we do but something God does and we participate in. ‘Wait,’ you say, ‘it isn’t God that’s saying the prayers and singing the songs and eating and drinking the bread and the wine; It’s us!’**” No, the “People of God” are not merely “eating and drinking” *the bread and wine*, they are eating and drinking the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ! The *celebrant* of the liturgy is defined as, “**the title of the person who leads, or presides at, a liturgical celebration. Only ordained ministers – bishops, priests, and deacons -- can preside at sacramental liturgies.**” Could this incorrectly imply that deacons can celebrate Mass?

Finally, it is very hard to understand why a Catholic, catechetical text, with over 500 pages and 100 pictures, would not contain **at least one** picture of a priest in liturgical vestments celebrating Mass, maybe holding up a Host at the consecration? There are a couple pictures of a priest or bishop, but not celebrating Mass. Also, students should be told that the Mass is the greatest prayer a Catholic can say, and they should be encouraged to attend daily Mass if they can!!

And on page 173 readers are told, “**We can...name some of the ways that Christ is present in the liturgy. He is present in the assembly, because we are the Body of Christ. He is present in the Word of God, Scripture...And in a special way, Christ is present during the Eucharist, because his Body and Blood are present in the bread and the wine...**” The author acknowledges that the bread and wine do, indeed, *become* the body and Blood of Christ, on page 180 with, “**...the Eucharist is still bread and wine becoming Christ’s Body and Blood,**” and, in the chapter on the Eucharist, the author further explains, on page 214, “**We actually receive Jesus Christ...when we receive the consecrated elements, which are the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.**” On pages 218-19, the book states that, “**Christ is also present in the priest or bishop who presides over the Eucharist. But he is particularly present in the bread and wine, which after the Consecration...become the Body and Blood of Jesus...Although the consecrated elements retain their physical forms of bread and wine, they have truly become Jesus’ Body and Blood...**” On page 222 students are told that, “**Ordination gives [priests] the special character needed to represent Christ, allowing them to consecrate the bread and wine so that they become the Body and Blood of the Lord.**” It is interesting that the proper term “*Real Presence*” of Christ in the Eucharist is not found in chapter 20 on “**The Eucharist**” or in chapter 16, “**Introduction to the Liturgy.**” The term Real Presence is also not found in the index, but it is found at the end of the book, in the chapter on “**Praying Together**” (chapter 37, out of 39 total chapters). On page 408, readers are told, “**...but the fullest of these is the Eucharist, where we...are nourished by his Real Presence...Christ continues to be present in the Eucharist: Body, Blood, soul, and divinity. It is because of this Real Presence...**” But, how many students will actually read to page 408, near the end of the book? The word transubstantiation is only mentioned once in the book, on page 218: “**The technical word for the transformation of the bread and wine into Jesus’ Body and Blood is *Transubstantiation*. This is perhaps one of the hardest things for us to understand. It is a belief that separates Catholics from many other Christians.**” Why does the author not simply say it separates Catholics from Protestants? Students must understand that Protestant ministers do not have the same power the Catholic priest has to consecrate bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ.

Unfortunately, the fact that the Mass is an unbloody Sacrifice is not made clear. On page 218, the book states that, “**In the Eucharist...Through the words and actions of the priest...The saving power of Jesus’ Passover – that is, his sacrifice on the cross – strengthens us and renews us. It isn’t that we are resacrificing Jesus; rather, we are**

**making his original sacrifice real and present during the sacramental ritual. As a sacrifice, the Eucharist...**

On page 220 students are told, **“The Eucharist Rite, or ritual, is the most complex of the sacramental rites. The Lord’s Supper, the Holy Sacrifice, the Holy and Divine Liturgy, Holy Communion, and the Mass (from the Latin word, *missa*, meaning ‘sending forth’) are all names for the Eucharistic Liturgy.”** Why can’t students be properly taught that it is the *Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*, the re-presentation of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross? Sadly, in discussing the Eucharist on page 215, the author states that, **“There are many stories about Jesus’ eating and drinking in the four Gospels. In fact, he and the disciples were accused of being gluttons and drunkards.”** Is that an appropriate comment to include in a book for teenagers?

Regrettably, this *Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth* exemplifies the following comments, concerning defective catechetical texts, by **Bishop Arthur Serratelli**, speaking as Bishop of Paterson, New Jersey (*AD 2000*, May, 2008):

*“With the enthusiasm that followed the Second Vatican Council, there was a well-intentioned effort to make the liturgy modern...Teaching about the Mass began to emphasize the community. The Mass was seen as a community meal. It was something everyone did together. Lost was the notion of sacrifice. Lost [was] the awesome mystery of the Eucharist as Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. The priest was no longer seen as specially consecrated. He was no different from the laity. With all of this [came] a profound loss of the sacred. No single factor can account for the decline in Mass attendance, Church marriages, baptisms and funerals in the last years. But most certainly, the loss of the sense of the sacred has had a major impact.” (p. 20)*

#### *EXPLANATION OF MORALITY AND SIN IS NOT ACCURATE*

The sections on Christian morality also present serious problems. On page 253, the author begins with a question, **“...How does God want me to live?”** Readers are then told, **“Fortunately we have Scripture and Tradition to help answer that question.”** Why does the author not mention the Magisterium, the teaching authority of the Church, which provides direct answers on basic questions of Christian morality through its many teaching documents. In addition, why does the author not mention the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which can certainly help students know how “to live?” According to the index, the *Catechism* is mentioned only on pages 8 and 9. On page 8, the students are told, **“Bishops, priests, youth ministers, teachers, and other adult Catholics use it as a reference book for authentic Catholic teaching. In its content and structure, this handbook reflects the *Catechism*.”** Notice that the author suggests that the *Catechism* was published only for theology experts, and “other adult Catholics,” apparently not students! But on the other hand, this text suggests that students are capable of theological, Scripture analysis! In addition, while the author indicates that **“...this handbook reflects the *Catechism*,”** in truth, it frequently distorts it.

A moral dilemma is presented on page 253: A student athlete explains, **“One of my teammates told me the brand of basketball shoes our team is required to wear is made at a factory run by people who underpay and mistreat the workers. I want to respond to this injustice. But I also want to play on the team, which means wearing the shoes. Am I morally wrong to buy the shoes and play?”** The student is told, **“It would seem that your only moral choice is to refuse to wear the shoes...Maybe the whole team will join you. This is how the world becomes a better place, starting with one person refusing to cooperate with sin.”** This “teammate” is hardly a reliable source of information! How do these students know what is meant by “underpay and mistreat?” This might be a foreign country where the pay scale is different, and this person might be lucky to have a job. The student must also consider his obligation to help his team be successful. This should not be presented as an iron-clad decision, lacking details.

Also, in the section on Christian morality, there is an examination of conscience on page 256, but instead of listing the 10 Commandments (traditional examination of conscience) the author lists 13 questions, apparently taken from a Rite of Penance. Why are the Beatitudes outlined and explained in this chapter, but not the Ten Commandments? In addition, there are serious problems with the discussion of mortal and venial sin on pages 261 and 262. After explaining that **“A mortal sin is a serious offense against God, one that destroys the virtue of charity within us...[and] involves serious immoral acts, - or what the Church calls ‘grave matter’...and these sins have the power to cause eternal death,”** the students are then given an example of a mortal sin: **“Making specific plans to try to move ahead in class rank by cheating on your exams...is a mortal sin...”** Why does the author not use a more accurate, and appropriate example, especially for teenagers, such as sexual sin or deliberately missing the Sunday Mass obligation? Instead, to compound the problem, the example given for a venial sin is: **“A venial sin may involve a seriously wrong act, such as failing to attend Mass on Sunday...which is lessened by some unintended circumstance, like forgetting to set your alarm.”** Of course, the student will remember that “missing Mass” was under the heading of Venial Sins. These examples show either great ignorance, or deliberate deception, on the part of

this author. Telling students that, “**The Church requires us to celebrate the Lord’s Day and other holy days of obligation by participating in the Mass**” (page 294), is a requirement without consequences. And we wonder why “more than 70% of American Catholics don’t attend church on Sunday?” (*The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic* by Matthew Kelly, p. 191) A responsible catechetical text would properly inform students that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* clearly states: “*The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants) or dispensed by their own pastor. Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin.*” (# 2181) (*Emphasis added*)

#### SEXUAL QUESTIONS POORLY EXPLAINED

The chapter on “**Respecting Sexuality**,” on page 319, begins with what some would call juvenile, or inappropriate, remarks: “**Do you remember when you first learned about sex? Were you a bit surprised about the way babies are made? When you were a child, it was probably hard to imagine that anybody would want a baby badly enough to do something that gross. Now that you are a bit older and wiser, it may be difficult to imagine that you ever felt that way about sex. You are a sexual being from the moment of conception until your last breath...**” This is the message children hear from Planned Parenthood, an organization that regularly tells children they are “sexual beings,” from birth to death. This emphasis on sex is not healthy. One would think that this author would provide the Catholic message, that **we are, more importantly, spiritual beings**, with a body and a soul, from conception to natural death.

Also, is it really necessary, or appropriate, to direct the students, on page 326, to read the “**Song of Songs**,” the “**strongest affirmation of sexuality**” in the *Bible*, and then ask, “**Does it surprise you that poetry like this is in the Bible?**” The truth is that many great theologians deny that “it is the strongest affirmation of sexuality” to be read literally, but is rather a poem of the wedding of God and man, of the mystical union of the soul with God. They actually warn of reading it in a vulgar and gross sense, in terms of ordinary marriage, and becoming entrapped by the sensual and carnal aspects of its images and words. As St. Bernard noted, one should not read this book unless he has reached a certain degree of purity and taming of the flesh. Thus the ignorance of the author’s comments.

Again, we have another refusal to call a sin “mortal.” In regard to the Church’s teaching on contraception, the book states on page 323 that, “**Surgical sterilization, chemical contraception, and barrier methods such as condoms or diaphragms are not considered natural means and are therefore morally wrong.**” Unfortunately, *Humanae Vitae* (Church’s 1968 Encyclical forbidding contraception) is not mentioned in this book. Using the term “morally wrong” does not send the same message as telling the students that these forms of contraception are *mortal sins* that must be confessed before one can receive Holy Communion. The same problem is found in the discussion of in vitro fertilization, adultery, cohabitation, fornication, masturbation, homosexual acts, and the use of pornography. None of these sins is ever correctly named as **mortal** sin.

#### TEACHING ON HOMOSEXUALITY VERY MISLEADING

The two paragraphs on homosexuality present a specific set of problems. This subtle acceptance, or even encouragement, of homosexuality repeats the “talking points” that can be found in promotional gay literature, which is reason enough to condemn this book. In the two paragraphs on page 328, misleading, and/or false, statements are found:

- 1) The book states: “**For reasons that are still unclear, some people experience a strong sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex...For those who realize they are sexually attracted to people of the same sex...**”

The implication here, that homosexuality is genetic, is absolutely false, and is not supported by research. Same-sex-attraction has always been understood as learned behavior. In fact, in 1970, Planned Parenthood encouraged “increased homosexuality” as a way to reduce U.S. population. (*Family Planning Perspectives*, Oct., 1970) The use of the word, “realize” implies that this is a genetic state that is “discovered”, which can have tragic consequences for a fifteen-year old boy.

- 2) The book states: “**...we have seen more social acceptance of people who have a homosexual orientation...homosexual acts are against natural law because they do not allow for the possibility of life.**”

Suggesting a greater “social acceptance” of those who have a “homosexual orientation,” could imply a subtle, cor-

responding, acceptance of homosexual activity, given that homosexual acts are only defined as “against natural law,” which most teenagers, and many Catholics, probably cannot explain. It would fall into the same ambiguous category as “morally wrong.” Why is this author so reluctant to call homosexual acts mortal sins?

- 3) The book states: **“An active prayer life and support from others within the faith community can help men and women with homosexual orientations to accept the gift of their sexuality...”**

Telling teenagers that “an active prayer life” can help them accept the “gift” of their sexuality is a subtle way of saying that homosexuality is a gift from God, a position taught by the gay community in general, and specifically by a priest of the Milwaukee archdiocese, who was eventually arrested for child abuse.

### *RESPECT LIFE ISSUE IS DISTORTED*

The section on Respecting Life is another disappointment. Under the title, **“Life Issues and the Fifth Commandment,”** the first topic discussed on page 308 is capital punishment, with a picture of an execution chamber, and the question, **“Why is the Church speaking out more strongly against capital punishment in our time?”** After claiming on page 309 that **“The issue of the death penalty presents a major challenge to society,”** and the suggestion that the organization Pax Christi, **“provides excellent literature to use in school projects,”** the discussion moves on to the problem of war. On pages 310-11, the author outlines seven criteria for a **just war: Just Cause, Comparative justice, Legitimate authority, Right intention, Probability of success, Proportionality, and Last resort.** He then states on pages 311-12, that, **“...many people question whether a just war is even possible in modern times...Even without a war, the arms race causes more harm than good. Even if we never use the weapons, the enormous sums of money spent creating weapons of mass destruction keep us from using those resources to provide basic human rights to the neediest people. Christians should do everything they can to end the arms race.”** After the students are told, **“This country has been involved in war in your lifetime,”** they are asked, **“According to the criteria for a just war, do you think these wars are morally right?”** Page 311 also includes a statement from the U.S. Bishops supporting those who choose **“conscientious objection.”**

A basic question is, why does the author devote four pages to a dogmatic discussion of capital punishment and war, before finally getting to the “controversial” abortion question on page 312? Not mentioned, of course, is the fact that the number of people executed each year in this country through “capital punishment” can generally be counted on a few fingers, but thousands of babies are being “executed” **each day** in this country’s abortion clinics. Which is the most immediate moral issue?

The questions of abortion and euthanasia, huge **“life issues”** in our society, are given barely three pages of discussion. While capital punishment is said to present a **“major challenge”** to our society, abortion is identified on pages 312-13 as one of the **“most controversial”** life issues in society today. Faithful Catholics would reverse those definitions. The author continues that abortion is controversial **“because not everyone agrees with the Church that from conception a child has the right to life...But even those who know abortion is wrong might consider it anyway when they face the situation personally...Girls and women who find themselves unexpectedly pregnant often panic...Some feel pressured by friends or family to abort their baby...[some] do not think they will be able to provide for their child...others seek abortions because the child will be an inconvenience or get in the way of their life plans...and years of child support can make abortion seem like a good financial alternative.”** Finally, in listing **“Five Ways to Promote Life,”** only one addresses the abortion issue. Also, on page 315 there is a promotion of Cardinal Bernardin’s **“Seamless Garment”** position, which many believe, diminishes the serious sin of abortion.

The “Respecting Life” chapter ends with comments on pages 314-17 regarding genetic engineering, cloning, suicide, scandal (**“Skipping Mass on Sunday sets a bad example for others...”**), abuse of food, alcohol, tobacco or drugs, obeying speed limits and traffic laws, proper exercise and healthy diet, and concluding on page 317 with, **“It may seem like the list of sins against the Fifth Commandment could go on and on.”** Obviously, this long list of less significant issues further dilutes the status of *abortion* as a critical life issue. Finally, the failure to discuss the linkage between the moral evil of contraception and the moral evil of abortion adds to the overall weak and confusing stance of the author regarding not only Pro-life issues, but also Social Justice matters, wherein he also lumps together intrinsic moral evils with lesser sins or indifferent acts.

In the Chapter titled “**Respecting Material Goods**” and a discussion of the seventh and tenth commandments, the author explains on page 331 that these commandments are not “**just personal rules,**” but “**...the Church teaches that they have farther-reaching consequences than that. They apply to corporations, institutions, and governments, as well. What if those who run these groups really practiced in corporate life what they preach in private life? What if they truly shared their wealth, did not steal, and cleaned up all their messes?**”

On page 333-34, students are told that the “**Earth’s Goods Are for All...We know that God created the world with enough resources to go around. God also intended that the world’s resources benefit all creation. Although it is okay to own private property, we have to be respectful so that we don’t claim so much that others have little or no access to the goods necessary to survive. Our reason tells us that sharing is a matter of fairness, or justice. Our faith goes a step further. Charity, or love of neighbor, requires that the goods of the earth be available for everyone to use in a reasonable way...Today, more than 925 million people throughout the world are hungry...the people in the richest countries of the world have the means to share the wealth more effectively. The United Nations Development Program estimates that the basic health and nutrition needs of the world’s poorest people could be met for an additional thirteen billion dollars a year...**”

After suggesting that students donate money or food to meal programs, the author explains that, “**The second response is to work for social action to correct the situations that cause hunger and poverty. Social action means working for changes in laws or public policies...Every day new information on the environment reminds us that we cannot continue to greedily use up the goods God has entrusted to us.**” On page 335 readers are told, “**It is up to us to see that the goods of the earth are distributed, in just and charitable ways, to every person in the world.**” The page includes a quotation from a 1991 pastoral letter from the U.S. Bishops stating that, “**The Catholic Church is deeply concerned about the environment,**” implying that the Church fully endorses these liberal, political statements. The author reinforces his position with, “**The Catholic Church has often spoken with the voice of moral authority about issues of economic and social justice, including hunger and pollution.**” On page 336, the students are asked, “**What can you do to help ensure that God’s gifts are fairly distributed among all people?**” Certainly there is a place for Christian charity, but it should be done by individuals, through the Church and local communities, not through government mandates that are often based on faulty, or political reasoning.

According to Dr. Jacqueline Kasun, author of *The War Against Population* (1999, Ignatius Press), “War and socialism are two great destroyers of the food supply in Africa, as they have been in other continents.” (p. 40) In other words, starvation in the world does not occur because we in the United States do not “share.” **The primary causes of hunger are war and socialism.** Why are the students not being told that our U.S. economic system of a free market business economy has given the world the greatest standard of living ever known to man, and that socialism has been an abject failure in every country where it has been tried? The author’s comments betray liberal/socialist tendencies that do not conform to actual Catholic social doctrine that should be faithfully incorporated in a catechetical work for youth. We should be strengthening the faith and practice of Catholic students, not training them in a decadent, American liberalism at odds with Catholic doctrine.

On page 264, in the section on “**Social Justice,**” students are told that, “**One person driving a gas-guzzling, polluting automobile will have a small impact, but a million people doing the same thing will change the world.**” This is simply another socialist argument to promote public transportation to address the fabricated problem of man-made global warming. On page 268 the author claims that, “**...although it is a good thing to provide electrical power, it would be wrong to do so if it meant exposing even a few people to unsafe radiation...Our membership in the family of God takes precedence over our allegiance to our country. This is a difficult challenge for those of us living in the United States, where about 5 per cent of the world’s population uses 25 per cent of the world’s energy resources.**” It is disingenuous for this author to imply that electrical energy exposes people to radiation, and that the United States might use up all available energy resources. The “radiation from electricity” claim has no research to support it, and the idea that we are running out of energy sources is also not supported by science. (*The Wall Street Journal*, “The Scarcity Fallacy,” 4-26,27-2014, p. C1) Also, according to Dr. Kasun, “In the case of fuels, large reserves of petroleum remain and are being discovered in many parts of the world. Extremely large deposits of coal remain in the United States and throughout the world, enough for a thousand years, possibly more than twice that...” (p. 49). In addition, the recently discovered “fracking” technology, taking place in the U.S., is projected

to provide enough natural gas and petroleum to soon allow this country to be energy independent, and to be the world's leading energy producer.

On page 269 students are told that, **“Policy makers at all levels of government should ensure that each person has access to the resources needed to lead a truly human life...the United Nations (UN) is an institution that recognized these basic human rights in 1948 with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights...the Church strongly supports this document...it is critically important that society have organizations like the UN to advocate for the common good of all.”** Does this author not know that after the formation of the United Nations in 1945, the first three Secretary-Generals were either Communist or Marxist? The United Nations is dedicated to abortion rights, population control, a one-world government, and other left-leaning issues that certainly are not supported by the Catholic Church. In addition, the UN has recently launched a global “campaign to promote tolerance and greater equality for lesbians, gays, transgender people and bisexuals.” (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, “U.N. office unveils gay rights campaign,” 7-28-13, p. 12A)

Also on page 269, the book cites *Rerum Novarum* (1891) by Pope Leo XIII, to imply that the Church **“...affirms the rights of workers to form unions and the need for just wages and safe working conditions,”** without acknowledging the difference between labor conditions in 1891 and labor conditions today, which include the public and private sectors. The author then cites *Pacem in Terris* (1963) by Pope John XXIII to **“call for disarmament and the creation of a world authority to protect the common good.”** He also quotes *Centesimus Annus*, (1991), by Pope John Paul II, **“A strong critique of capitalism is given.”** On pages 270-71, the students are told that **“...there is a great urgency to ensure that the earth's resources are fairly distributed to meet people's basic needs...As a starting point, solidarity means distributing the world's resources so each of us gets our fair share and no one is suffering because of physical need.”** The chapter concludes on page 273 with, **“What ideas do you have for structuring society so it would be easier for those who are poor to obtain what they need for a full life?”** And, **“On the other hand, we must also work to change the structures of society that keep people hungry or poor or hopeless...Some of the social issues are war, abortion, workers' rights, world hunger, and the environment. Think of how you can respond to each of these issues with works of service and works of justice.”** This sounds very much like, “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs,” proposed years ago by socialist, Karl Marx. It is interesting that, although the term, “social justice” is not found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* or the *Bible*, the index of this text contains eight references under the title, “social justice.”

Finally, on page 148, the book presents a very misleading presentation of the religion of Islam: **“The other religion we have a special tie to is Islam, the faith of Muslims. Like Jews and Christians, Muslims also trace their origins back to Abraham and Sarah. Like us they acknowledge only one God, the Creator of us all. They believe that Jesus was a great prophet, but they do not believe that he is the Savior, the Son of God. They place their faith in their founder, Mohammed, whom they believe was the greatest prophet. Their holy book is the Koran. After the 9-11 terrorist attacks, many people became interested in what Muslims believe. What they found out is that most Muslims are a peaceful people, and that those terrible events were the work of extremists who use the Islamic faith to justify their evil acts.”** That is very misleading, and basically, not true.

According to Islam expert, Robert Spencer, The violence against “infidels” (non-Muslims), proposed in the latter part of the Koran, supersedes the peace-loving messages found in the previous sections. Realistically, there is no “moderate” voice in the Muslim community. Those who might be moderates are intimidated by the fanatical terrorists who dominate the culture. Muslims view their god, Allah, as a “master” over the people, who are his slaves. Allah is not a loving father. In addition, the Muslims treat women very poorly, as second-class citizens. For example, author Nonie Darwish points out, “...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...sharia closes all doors for women who seek to live an independent lifestyle.” (*Now They Call Me Infidel*, pp. 73-76) In some non-Muslim countries, there are groups of Muslims living together in neighborhoods that become very dangerous, and are avoided completely by non-Muslims, including the police.

In his discussion of the book, *Crucified Again*, by Raymond Ibrahim, Bruce S. Thornton points out that we “are living through one of the largest persecutions of a religious group in history. Estimates of the numbers of Christians under assault range from 100-200 million. According to one estimate, a Christian is martyred every five minutes. And most of this persecution is taking place at the hands of Muslims.” Ibrahim, according to Thornton, “lays out the justifying doctrines of Islam that have made such persecution possible during the fourteen centuries of Muslim encounters with non-Muslims. The foundations can be found in the Koran...There ‘infidels’ are defined as ‘they who say Allah is one

of three' or 'Allah is the Christ, [Jesus] son of Mary' – that is, explicitly Christian. As such, according to the Koran, they [the Christians] must be eliminated or subjugated.” Unfortunately, as Thornton explains, “...received wisdom in the West today denies this obvious truth...the corruption of history in the academy and in elementary school textbooks have replaced historical truth with various melodramas in which Western colonialists and imperialists have oppressed Muslims.” This, and other prejudices “have led American media outlets to ignore or distort Islamic-inspired violence.” Regrettably, the same appears to be true in this catechetical text.

## CONCLUSION

Although this book is filled with what many would call “God-talk,” it is, in too many instances, a complete distortion of what the Catholic Church believes and teaches. Unfortunately, it is just another in the long line of post-Vatican II catechetical texts, written by those who either don't believe, or understand, what the Catholic Church teaches, or choose to distort it. It could be compared to regularly feeding the family with sugar that contains a small percentage of arsenic! Arsenic can have a cumulative effect, resulting in a number of debilitating symptoms, in some cases leading to death. Similarly, regularly feeding children a catechesis that has subtle errors and omissions of the Truth will result in debilitating spiritual symptoms, in some cases leading to the death of the soul. Sadly, forty years of deficient catechetical texts have produced a profound loss of faith of two, going on three, generations of Catholics who don't practice the faith, or have joined a non-Catholic denomination.

The good news is that there are faithful Catholic textbooks available, such as the **Faith and Life** grade school series by 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 Drummey, from C.R. Publications), the **Didache Series** from Midwest Theological Forum, the *Baltimore Catechism*, and others. One can only ask why these good books are not mandated by our bishops? According to James Hitchcock, author of, *History of the Catholic Church* (Ignatius Press, 2012), “The *Third Plenary Council of Baltimore* (Baltimore III, 1884) mandated that all parishes sponsor [a parish school].” Baltimore III also authorized the *Baltimore Catechism*, “which was used in all Catholic schools for the next eighty years” (p.445), until the 1960s, and generations of strong, educated, Church-going Catholics learned their faith and passed it on to their children.

Catechisms do make a difference. Unless we change course, we may be in the same situation as the Catholic Church in the Netherlands, where the Church is facing collapse, with the closure of some 700 churches, and an ongoing exodus of the faithful (18,000 Catholics leave the Church each year). Some may recall that in 1966, “the Dutch Catholic bishops conference published the notorious *Dutch Catechism*, which was heavily censored by the Vatican. This Catechism became a huge international best-seller, translated into dozens of languages, causing great confusion among the faithful, and a significant decline in the Catholic faith.” (*Miles Christi*, March, 2014 Newsletter #161).

We must follow the instructions found in Scripture, e.g., in the message from Moses (Book of Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9) when he warns, “**Now, Israel, hear the statutes and decrees which I am teaching you to observe...take care and be earnestly on your guard not to forget the things which your own eyes have seen, nor let them slip from your memory as long as you live, but teach them to your children and to your children's children.**”

