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Archbishop Daniel Buechlein

Oral Report to the General Assembly of Bishops

“The Committee's experience of working closely with the publishers on the improvement of catechetical texts has been a very positive one. ... In fact, several publishers have expressed their gratitude to the Committee for its assistance.”

-Archbishop Daniel Buechlein, Chairman, Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the *Catechism*

Introduction

The following is an update provided to the general assembly of bishops on June 19, 1997, by Archbishop Daniel Buechlein, then the chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the *Catechism*. Following the Conference's reorganization in 2007, the Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the *Catechism* became the Subcommittee on the Catechism, under the direction of the Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis. The Subcommittee continues its work with publishers today—through the Institute on the Catechism—ensuring fidelity to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, promoting an evangelization catechesis.

Oral Report, Full Text

Thank you, Bishop Pilla.

Brother bishops, observers and guests.

First I would like to mention the names of the members of the Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the *Catechism*: Cardinal Law, Archbishops Levada and George, Bishops Wuerl, Hughes and Banks. I would also like to thank the staff of the Office for the *Catechism*: Father John Pollard and Father Tom DeVries.

Recall that the original inspiration for the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was the perceived need for a common language in service to the unity of the faith and in the global context of cultural diversity and religious illiteracy. The publication of the *Catechism* has brought about a new moment in the Church, a moment in which our Conference has recognized an opportunity for a genuine renewal of our catechetical mission. I am here to give an account of the work our particular Committee has done thus far to contribute to that catechetical renewal.

This oral report is supported by Supplementary Document "B" with the yellow cover which was distributed earlier. It is divided into six sections. I will refer to it during this report.

Section One, [pages 1-5], logs the communication from the Ad Hoc Committee to the Body of Bishops, the Administrative Committee and the Executive Committee. It simply provides a thumbnail sketch of the milestones of the Committee's work.

Section Two, [pages 6-8], summarizes the process the Committee has adopted to conduct the two types of reviews for which it is responsible, namely the review of individual works seeking to use the copyright for the *Catechism* and the review of catechetical series seeking conformity with the *Catechism*.

Section Three, [page 9], responds to a question concerning the confidentiality of both the respective chairs and the members of the review teams. There are two fundamental reasons for confidentiality: First, the Ad Hoc Committee itself and, as a whole, accepts the responsibility for the review of the texts. Secondly, there is the need to be free of possible lobbying by the author, editor or publisher of the catechetical series being reviewed. Our staff works closely with the publishers in dialogue over the recommended or required changes in the texts.

Section Four, [pages 10-13], provides a progress report on the objectives assigned to the Committee. I want to highlight only three points in this section.

1. On page 10 you will note that the Committee has completed the review of eighteen works which sought to use the copyright for the *Catechism*. Sixteen have been found to be consistent with the *Catechism* and have been given permission to use the copyright. The remaining two are being revised to reflect the *Catechism* more faithfully. The Committee is presently reviewing four additional works for copyright permission.
2. Thus far, five catechetical series which sought to be found in conformity with the *Catechism* have been reviewed. The Committee has five additional series in process of review. On page 11-12 are printed the titles, publishers and dates of publication of the catechetical series found to be in conformity with the *Catechism* thus far. As the list continues to grow, the names of additional series will be communicated to you on a quarterly basis.

3. Because of the significant increase in the number of catechetical series seeking the review for conformity and in anticipation of many more series over the next several years, the Committee has sought the help of additional bishops to serve as chairs of review teams. The names of the bishops who agreed to assist us are listed on page 12. As a point of information, I would like to let you know that it takes the Committee, the bishop-chair, the expert reviewers and the staff approximately 400 hours to complete the review of a single catechetical series.

The Committee's experience of working closely with the publishers on the improvement of catechetical texts has been a very positive one. While at first the publishers were apprehensive, they have generally found that the review process results in catechetical texts which are more complete and more reflective of the content of the faith as expressed in the *Catechism*. In fact, several publishers have expressed their gratitude to the Committee for its assistance.

Section Five, [pages 14-16], describes a pattern of doctrinal deficiencies which the Committee has found rather common among the catechetical series we have reviewed. I want to emphasize that these deficiencies have been found in only those series which have been submitted to us and should not be generalized to all catechetical materials. While these series often treat certain doctrinal themes quite well, we have noted a relatively consistent trend of doctrinal incompleteness and imprecision:

- 1. There is insufficient attention to the Trinity and the Trinitarian structure of Catholic beliefs and teachings**

Catechetical texts fail at times to present the Trinity as the central mystery of the Christian faith. The language used in referring to the Persons of the Trinity contributes at times to a lack of clarity. This is most evident in the reluctance to use "Father" for the first person of the Trinity and, at times, to substitute "Parent God" for God the Father. Particularly, the relationship between Jesus and the Father is often weak. There are times where the word "God" is placed in a sentence where one would expect to find "Father" or "God the Father" since the reference is precisely to the relationship between the first and second persons of the Trinity.

- 2. There is an obscured presentation of the centrality of Christ in salvation history and an insufficient emphasis on the divinity of Christ**

Texts fall short, at times, in presenting Jesus as the culmination of the Old Testament and the fulfillment of God's plan for our salvation. The indispensable place of the Incarnation in the plan of salvation is not always sufficiently presented. Jesus the Savior is often overshadowed by Jesus the teacher, model, friend and brother. It is a question of imbalance.

Some texts do not present the mystery of the Incarnation in its fullness. Often there appears to be an imbalance in the instruction on the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ. At times, we detect a negative undertone in speaking of the divine nature of Christ, as if divinity is equated with being "distant and unreal."

- 3. Another trend is an indistinct treatment of the ecclesial context of Catholic beliefs and magisterial teachings**

Catechetical materials do not always clearly present the Church as established by Christ to continue both his presence and his mission in the world. The teaching function of the Church and its apostolic nature, as well as the role of the hierarchy and the concept of the leadership of bishops and priests in teaching the Word of God are often under-treated. The mark of unity in the Church is at times eclipsed by an emphasis on the Church's catholicity and diversity.

- 4. There is an inadequate sense of a distinctively Christian anthropology**

By and large the catechetical texts do not seem to integrate the fundamental notions that human persons are by nature religious, that the desire for God is written in the human heart and that the

human person is inherently spiritual and not reducible to the merely material. Neither are the texts generally clear that it is precisely in Christ that we have been created in the image and likeness of God. Nor do they emphasize that Christ has restored to us the divine image of God, an image disfigured by sin. Rather, too often the impression is left that the human person is the first principle and final end of his/her own existence.

5. There is a trend that gives insufficient emphasis on God 's initiative in the world with a corresponding overemphasis on human action

Texts do not adequately emphasize that human action is intended to follow upon God's action and initiative in the world. When the methodological starting point is predominately human experience, the texts leave the impression that our human initiative is the prerequisite for divine action. God's initiative at times appears subordinate to human experience and human action.

6. We have detected an insufficient recognition of the transforming effects of grace

The catechetical texts tend to present an inadequate understanding of grace. Rather often it is described as God's love, then not much more is said about it. That the preparation of the human person for the reception of grace is already a work of grace is not clearly presented. Grace is not generally treated as God's initiative which introduces humanity into the intimacy of Trinitarian life and makes us his adopted children and participants in his life. The texts are generally weak in treating the particular efficacy of the grace proper to the respective sacraments.

7. We have found a pattern of inadequate presentation of the sacraments

Catechetical texts often do not treat the sacraments within the Paschal Mystery, that is, the sacraments are not explicitly presented as the means by which we share in the new life of Christ through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Sacraments are often presented as important events in human life of which God becomes a part, rather than as effective signs of divine life in which humans participate. Consequently this leads to a deficient understanding of the divine action and the graced transformation that is at the heart of each of the sacraments. Particularly, the sacraments of the Eucharist and Holy Orders evidence deficiency because the texts usually do not present the character and role of the ordained minister in the life of the ecclesial community.

8. We have seen a pattern of deficiency in the teaching on original sin and sin in general

In general, the texts do not clearly teach that original sin is the loss of original holiness and justice, transmitted by our first parents, and that it wounds human nature in all people. Too often the texts do not address how the doctrine of original sin informs other doctrines, for example, grace, baptism, sin, and redemption.

9. We have found a meager exposition of Christian moral life

At times an over-emphasis on personal identity and self-respect gives the impression that these are the primary "sources" of morality. Too often the source of morality found in God's revealed law, as taught by the Church and grounded in natural law, are not adequately treated. Where texts could present the binding force of the Church's moral teaching in certain areas, often they do not. In addition, instruction on what is necessary for the formation of a correct conscience is either inadequately or even mistakenly presented.

10. Finally, we have found an inadequate presentation of eschatology

The eschatological aspect of Catholic doctrine is often underemphasized. The transcendent, trans-temporal and trans-historical nature of the Kingdom is not always present. The general judgment, the concept of hell and the eschatological dimensions of the Beatitudes as well as the moral and sacramental orders are not always adequately taught.

In summary, in each of these areas of concern the Committee has presented concrete suggestions to the publishers that have made the texts more complete and more faithful to the *Catechism* in their treatment of the content of the faith. The publishers have been very cooperative in accepting the recommended and required changes and incorporating them into their texts. For this we bishops should be grateful.

Section Six of your documentation, [pages 17-24], presents a preliminary summary of the Committee's progress in its charge to study the feasibility of a national catechism or catechetical series. The various components of the feasibility study are included. While we continue to gather information, we believe that it is premature for us to give any definitive counsel to you about the advisability of undertaking the development of a national catechism or catechetical series.

One aspect of the feasibility study, however, merits attention. A few months ago we established a task force of experts to explore the development of a scope and sequence chart based on the *Catechism* to show if and how the content of the *Catechism* might be spread throughout a catechetical program according to grade levels. To see how it looks, you may want to refer to the draft chart included in the documentation, but please keep in mind that this draft has not been reviewed or had the benefit of broader consultation. There is also a sample of tentative learning objectives included for your information.

Let me now turn to a few items which are not contained in the documentation.

The Holy See has announced that the *editio typica* of the *Catechism* will be released on June 29. It will include a new Index, and will be sent to all of the bishops throughout the world.

The Holy See will provide both a list of the changes to be found in the *editio typica* and a translation of the now amended texts in a number of languages. The different episcopal conferences around the world will be asked to print a small pamphlet containing these changes which can be inserted into existing editions of the *Catechism*. Our Conference will print an addendum which includes the changes found in the *editio typica* and will make it available to those who currently own a copy of the *Catechism*.

In addition the Holy See has agreed to raise the fair use of the *Catechism* from 500 to 1,000 words, with the usual provision that the user complies with all other requirements set forth. This will allow for a greater dissemination of the text of the *Catechism* in appropriate texts.

In conclusion, I want to remind you that the Ad Hoc Committee has received an unsolicited grant of \$500,000 from Our Sunday Visitor to be given in installments of \$100,000 over a five-year period. Since we anticipate that our work will take a few more years to complete and since the Office for the *Catechism* has only been funded through 1998, we will shortly formulate a proposal for consideration by the Committee on Priorities and Plans and the Committee on Budget and Finance to extend it, using the grant from Our Sunday Visitor as the basis for its continued funding. That proposal will be presented to the Administrative Committee in September and the General Assembly in November.

If there are any comments, observations or questions, I will try to respond to them at this time.

Thank you.

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Resources

Visit <https://www.usccb.org/committees/catechism> and <https://www.usccb.org/committees/catechism/conformity-review-list>.



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