

catechism update

Winter 2002

New Catechism Committee Chair Appointed

At the November 2002 General Assembly of the bishops of the United States, Archbishop Daniel Buechlein was elected chair of the new Bishops' Committee on Catechesis. Because of the demand of this new responsibility, as well as the demands of other commitments both in his diocese and to the Conference, Archbishop Buechlein asked Bishop Gregory to relieve him as chair of the Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism, a position the Archbishop has held since the formation of the Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism in 1994. Bishop Gregory acceded to Archbishop Buechlein's request and accepted his resignation as chair of the Catechism Committee.

On the same day that he accepted Archbishop Buechlein's resignation, Bishop Gregory appointed Archbishop Alfred Hughes as the new chair of the Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism. Archbishop Hughes has served on the Catechism Committee since March of 1995. In naming Archbishop Hughes to a three year term as chair, Bishop Gregory noted that one of his reasons for appointing Archbishop Hughes to the position is that his knowledge of the Committee's work and his experience in serving on the Committee will provide continuity at a time of transition. At Archbishop Hughes' request, Archbishop Buechlein will continue to serve as a consultant to the Catechism Committee.

Most Rev. Alfred Hughes
Chairman
Most Rev. William Levada
Most Rev. Robert Banks
Most Rev. Donald Wuerl
Most Rev. Daniel DiNardo

Consultants:
Most Rev. Daniel Buechlein, OSB
Rev. John Pollard



National Adult Catechism: Summary of Consultation Responses

The consultation on the *National Adult Catechism* concluded on October 31. The members of the Editorial Oversight Board and the Catechism Committee are grateful to all who took time to read and evaluate the draft. A large percentage of responses praised the draft for its readability, structure, and potential usefulness. The positive comments and judgments far outweighed the negative. While most of the general evaluations were positive, many of the individual comments tended to be more critical, some in a constructive sense, others in a negative sense. Most of those who were highly critical of the draft based their judgment on the opinion that this draft was not what they thought a “catechism” should be. There were also a few who were opposed to the concept of a national adult catechism no matter what shape the text would take.

While the thousands of suggested amendments are still being processed and collated, it is possible to give a brief summary of evaluation responses based on the submitted Consultation Response Form. Presented here is an overview of responses to the statements on the Consultation Response Form.

N.B. A total of ninety-seven (97) responses have been received. Some respondents did not use the form. Others did not answer every question. Several respondents had not realized there was a back page to the general response form and so answered only the first six questions.

1. The text complements the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and applies its teaching to the American scene.

Strongly Agree	22	(23%)
Agree	40	(41%)
Disagree	16	(16%)
Strongly Disagree	5	(5%)
No form or no response	14	(14%)

The negative responses focused on the second half of the statement - how well the draft applies the *Catechism*'s teaching to the American scene. A couple of the respondents pointed out that it should be the United States scene, not American. Reasons for a negative rating include the following:

- the application of the teaching is too general or too weak
- the tone and approach of the text is negative, critical or judgmental about US culture
- the focus of the text seems to be too much in the Northeastern US
- the text is not engaging and the language is not creative or inviting
- the draft does not reflect the full richness of the *Catechism* in terms of the sources cited and used

2. The text encourages reference to and use of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Strongly Agree	30	(31%)
Agree	48	(49%)
Disagree	3	(3%)
Strongly Disagree	0	
No form or no response	16	(16%)

The negative rating was given by respondents who thought the draft did not sufficiently point back to the *Catechism* enough.

3. Paralleling the structure of the text to the four parts of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is a good approach.

Strongly Agree	25	(26%)
Agree	53	(55%)
Disagree	3	(3%)
Strongly Disagree	0	
No form or no response	16	(16%)

4. The structure of each chapter - an opening story followed by doctrinal teaching, cultural application, and prayer - is a good approach.

Strongly Agree	41	(42%)
Agree	38	(39%)
Disagree	3	(3%)
Strongly Disagree	2	(2%)
No form or no response	13	(13%)

The negative ratings were not about the structure of each chapter but that the application of the structure did not seem to be balanced throughout the draft. Some stories were more engaging than others. Some chapters contained better doctrinal presentations than others. Some chapters had better cultural application than others.

5. Including reflection questions and questions for discussions in each chapter is useful.

Strongly Agree	30	(31%)
Agree	44	(45%)
Disagree	10	(10%)

Strongly Disagree	0	
No form or no response	13	(13%)

Those who responded negatively generally agreed with the idea of reflection questions and discussion questions but felt that those in this draft were not particularly helpful. There have also been several suggestions for renaming these sections.

6. Having a brief glossary at the end of each chapter is helpful.

Strongly Agree	31	(32%)
Agree	44	(45%)
Disagree	8	(8%)
Strongly Disagree	1	(1%)
No form or no response	13	(13%)

Again, those who responded negatively were not opposed to the idea of glossary but rather had concerns about how it appeared in this draft. Many, including those giving a positive rating, suggested that there be a comprehensive glossary at the end of the book. Other criticisms tied to this question include:

- not enough terms were defined; understanding of traditional theological words is taken for granted
- terms need to be defined in a clearer and more consistent manner
- the definitions were too brief

7. The text is written in a style that engages the reader.

Strongly Agree	9	(9%)
Agree	45	(46%)
Disagree	21	(21%)
Strongly Disagree	4	(4%)
No form or no response	18	(18%)

This point generated the highest negative rating. Reasons for giving a negative rating included:

- the text is written on a seventh or eighth grade reading level
- the text is written in a style that is too academic, or too theological, or too abstract
- the tone of the text is too negative, or critical, or preachy
- the text is bland

8. The text presents the teaching of the Church in a clear and understandable manner.

Strongly Agree	11	(11%)
Agree	50	(51%)
Disagree	15	(15%)
Strongly Disagree	3	(3%)

No form or no response 18 (18%)

Reasons for negative ratings included:

- the treatment of doctrine is uneven throughout the draft
- the teachings are too general or broad
- the text is too academic or theological to be clear to the average Catholic, let alone to young adult Catholics
- the tone is too preachy

9. The text addresses issues facing people in the United States in our day.

Strongly Agree	11	(12%)
Agree	46	(47%)
Disagree	16	(16%)
Strongly Disagree	5	(5%)
No form or no response	19	(19%)

Reasons for negative ratings include:

- the focus of the material is too narrow
- a lot of issues are missing, and the text does not address enough real life issues (e.g., one parent families, domestic abuse)
- the text is not consistent in how it approaches issues
- some of the material in the draft will date too easily, e.g., references to September 11

10. The text is appropriate for adult readers.

Strongly Agree	17	(17%)
Agree	48	(49%)
Disagree	11	(11%)
Strongly Disagree	3	(3%)
No form or no response	18	(18%)

Reasons given for negative ratings include:

- the text is trite
- it is written in uneven reading levels
- the writing style is inconsistent
- the style is appropriate for some but not all

11. General Comments about the text:

Many, including those who had a positive view of the draft, commented that the text needs more inclusive language on the horizontal level.

As noted above, a number commented that the tone of the text is too judgmental and accusatory. Some noted that it focused too much on the negative elements of US culture.

Many commented that the text takes for granted that the reader will understand the “Church jargon” used throughout.

Many commented that they would like to see more on Scripture in the text, and more Scripture included in the text.

There were a lot of comments about the stories:

- they do not always fit the chapter well
- there were too many stories about men, especially priests, and not enough about women
- there are no stories about married people
- the stories from the Bible did not fit
- more stories about everyday small heroes and/or lay saints are needed.

Several advised against including items that would date the book quickly. Among examples cited are quotes from present- day US bishops and references to September 11.

There were several who commented that the text contains too much “pre-Vatican II” theology and language.

NOTA BENE

The Conformity Listing from *Catechism Update* is now available in PDF format on the Catechism Division page of the USCCB’s website. This format is identical to the one on the printed publication in order to allow for easier readability of the list. Acrobat Reader software is necessary in order to open and access the listing in this format.

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