

Evaluating a Religion Textbook – What is Essential?

A. A complete presentation of the Faith

1) **The Word of God**

To speak of Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture as the source of teaching the Faith is to draw attention to the fact that catechesis must be penetrated by the thought, the spirit and the outlook of the Bible and, above all the Gospels, through assiduous contact with the texts themselves. (See *On Catechesis in Our Time*, Saint John Paul II, n. 27)

The Bible is foundational to Catholic teaching and must permeate religious education. Does the textbook focus on Christ as the center of our Faith, in chapter after chapter? Are pertinent passages of Scripture provided so that students may 1) study the verses that give the foundation of the teaching; 2) pray with the Word of God and encounter Jesus; 3) hear the opening prayer from the Bible; 4) memorize verses?

Comment on coverage

2) *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*

The four dimensions of Catholic Life include what we believe as found in the **Creed**, how we are united with Jesus and are strengthened by Him as celebrated in the **Sacraments**, how we live our lives by following the Way of Christ in the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes, which is entitled **Life in Christ**, and the way that we develop a relationship with Christ through **Christian Prayer**. Are the four pillars of the *Catechism* evident in each chapter, simplified for the age-level, so that students see Who God is and what He has done for us (Creed & Sacraments) and how we are to respond (Life in Christ & Prayer)?

- The **Creed** states what we believe and know to be true about God.

We grow in our understanding of who God is and the “Good News” about His love and His plan for us through the study of the Creed. How does the textbook assist students in knowing better the major teachings of the Creed? How well are the teachings presented? Are students challenged to respond to Christ and the truth of his teachings through their assent & obedience?

Comment on coverage

- The **Sacraments** unite us with Christ in a relationship of love. We call this sanctifying grace.

The Sacraments are the means by which we are united with the Person of Christ in a relationship of love. We call this means of union sanctifying grace and we receive sanctifying grace in the Sacraments. The source and summit of the Sacraments is the Holy Eucharist because we receive Jesus’ Body and Blood – Jesus Himself. How well are the Sacraments explained? Do the textbook instill a desire to receive the Sacraments? Does each chapter make a connection with Sunday Mass?

Comment on coverage

- **Life in Christ**, which defines the Church's moral doctrines in how we are to live, describes the right orientation of human action in relation to God and others. God gave us the Commandments and the Beatitudes to keep us from harm. How are learners challenged to live as disciples of Christ, following God's laws of love? How well does the textbook explain that our *response* to God in the way that we live is aided by God's grace? How are students called to serve others through the spiritual and corporal works of mercy? Are the lives of various saints included so that students can see and imitate those who were faithful to Christ?

Comment on coverage

- **Christian Prayer** deepens our relationship with the Persons of the Blessed Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The textbook is to foster for the learners a deeper relationship with Jesus through prayer. How is prayer integral to the daily lesson? Does the textbook series provide an ongoing process to teach students how to pray and to grow in a commitment to daily prayer? Is quiet time in prayer encouraged in the textbook? God will reveal to learners' hearts the deeper meaning of the teachings in quiet prayer.

Comment on coverage

Unity of the Faith

The Faith is a living unity, reflecting God's oneness. We teach the unity of the Catholic Faith by showing the connection between what we believe (**Creed**), how we are united with Jesus and strengthened by Him (**Sacraments**), how we live as a follower of Christ (**Life in Christ**), and how we deepen our friendship and commitment with Jesus in daily prayer (**Christian Prayer**). Does the teacher's manual help to make these connections so that the students see how the Faith relates to their lives? Does the teacher's manual reference corresponding paragraph numbers in the *Catechism*?

Comment on coverage

B. An Orderly and Systematic Presentation of the Faith (not jumping around)

1) Four Personal Realities – the teachings of the Catholic Faith reveal persons.

- **God - a unity of three Persons**, and His gracious plan to save us.
- **The Person of Jesus Christ**, true God and true man.
- **The Person of the Holy Spirit**: The Paschal Mystery, including the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus, which is the work of our Redemption by Christ, is handed on in the Church through the work of the Holy Spirit.
- **The human person**: we recognize our dignity in that we are created by God and He desires a relationship with us. Though hampered by sin, we are blessed and strengthened by His grace.

How does the textbook help relate every topic to one or more of these key persons?

Comment on coverage

2) Hierarchy of Truths - Upon what does this Truth depend?

“The truths of the faith are based upon one another, and some have a higher priority because the others depend upon them. In other words, first and foremost, we teach and lead students to encounter Jesus, the Son of God and our Savior. In the Apostles’ Creed, the hierarchy of truths of the faith are evident. The articles of creation, Mary, and the final judgment depend upon the main articles of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Does the textbook keep the students focused on the essentials: our relationship with Christ and how to be His disciple?

Comment on coverage

C. Organization and Presentation

1. Emphasis on God’s Grace: A central focus needs to be God’s initiative to give us His grace and our need for grace. We can only be faithful in living the Christian life by cooperating with and being strengthened by God’s grace. Is this explained and obvious to students in the textbook?
2. ‘Reasonableness’ of the Faith: Are teachings explained adequately and do they make sense?
3. Attractiveness of the Faith: The strength and beauty of the teachings of the Faith need to be evident and also seen through saints’ lives, sacred art and sacred music. Sacred art teaches truths about God. Is there Sacred Art included? Does the sacred art teach the content in a visual way? Are the various photos that dot the page relevant to the lesson or are they merely there for a splash effect?
4. Is *The Story of the Bible* clearly explained: We were created to be united with God in a relationship of love through grace. Grace is a participation in God’s life. We were separated from God in the loss of grace through the Original Sin. Through His Passion, Death, and Resurrection, Christ made it possible for us to reunited with the Father. Jesus instituted the seven Sacraments whereby we are reunited with the Persons of the Trinity in a relationship of love. This we call sanctifying grace.
5. The call to conversion and to repentance: Do the teachings foster greater *understanding* of who Christ is and His love for us, leading us to *change* in order to follow Him more closely? Is there a constant invitation throughout the textbook for students to become disciples of Jesus Christ?

Comment on coverage

D. Sensitive to learner’s needs

1. Is the language of the Faith used and explained? Without learning this vocabulary, the Faith is lost.
2. What is the quality of explanation of the teaching? More than a sentence or two is needed for students to grasp the meaning and substantial content helps with understanding the importance of this teaching. Is there a richness of method that draws students to encounter Jesus Christ and to know His love?
3. What is the age appropriateness and suitability of tasks? Is there a proper focus with the activities?
4. Are learning styles taken into account (visual, auditory, kinesthetic)
5. Does the textbook reinforce the Cognitive - knowing God, the Affective - loving God, including feelings, emotions, experiences and the Psycho-motor - serving God.

Comment on coverage

E. Overall impression of the textbook