



Top Catholic Scholars Slam Common Core

As the uproar grows against the [Obama administration-pushed Common Core nationalized education standards](#), a coalition of more than 130 prominent Catholic scholars and professors [outlined its firm opposition to the scheme](#) and is now asking U.S. bishops to reverse the advance of the controversial reforms among American Catholic schools. Already, more than half of U.S. dioceses have replaced Catholic teaching traditions by adopting the dubious national standards, they said. However, the fight is far from over, and many of the nation's top Catholic education experts are working hard to turn the tide and undo the damage being inflicted under Common Core.



Among other concerns highlighted in a letter to church leaders from 132 Catholic scholars, the educators warn that the scheme, which they said represents a “radical shift,” is really a “step backwards” in terms of education. Beyond the particulars of the widely criticized standards, however, the powerful document points out that there are even greater fears about Common Core as it relates to the church and its institutions: the philosophy and aims of the reforms, and how they will “undermine” Catholic education while “dramatically” diminishing children’s horizons.

“Because we believe that this moment in history again calls for the intercession of each bishop, we have been made bold to impose upon your time with our judgments of Common Core,” wrote the scholars, led by Notre Dame Law Professor Gerard Bradley and whose ranks include professors and leaders at many of America’s most prestigious Catholic universities. “In fact, we are convinced that Common Core is so deeply flawed that it should not be adopted by Catholic schools which have yet to approve it, and that those schools which have already endorsed it should seek an orderly withdrawal now.”

Of course, billionaire Bill Gates — an ardent supporter of such anti-Catholic causes as United Nations population-control efforts and abortion behemoth Planned Parenthood — has showered funds on Catholic educational organizations in a bid [to buy support for the controversial education agenda](#). However, with the nationwide backlash against Common Core growing stronger by the day, the money of Gates is increasingly turning into a liability rather than an asset when it comes to pushing the standards. One of the latest [scandals surrounds a Gates Foundation grant of more than \\$100,000](#) to the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) to promote Common Core in Catholic schools.

For the Catholic scholars, though, the standards themselves, and all that they entail, are even more concerning. “We believe that, notwithstanding the good intentions of those who made these decisions, Common Core was approved too hastily and with inadequate consideration of how it would change the character and curriculum of our nation’s Catholic schools,” the 132 professors and leaders, representing a wide range of disciplines, wrote to U.S. bishops in the letter that made [headlines nationwide](#). “We believe that implementing Common Core would be a grave disservice to Catholic



education in America.”

As the letter points out, each day brings more news reports about the national debate surrounding the standards. While Common Core was largely developed and adopted in the shadows — with virtually no public input — the scramble by officials to foist the standards on America in exchange for federal funds has now been overtaken by “sober second looks, and widespread regrets,” the scholars said. Indeed, more than a few states have put implementation of the scheme on pause pending further investigations, and multiple state governments are withdrawing from the federally funded Common Core testing regime — a crucial component of the agenda.

Educators and political leaders across America, meanwhile, are declaring their opposition to the scheme in droves. Parents and teachers are also making their outrage heard: packing public hearings to demand an end to Common Core and everything that accompanies it. “The national momentum behind Common Core has, quite simply, stopped,” the letter goes on. “A wave of reform which recently was thought to be inevitable now isn’t. Parents of K-12 children are leading today’s resistance to the Common Core. A great number of these parents are Catholics whose children attend Catholic schools.”

Of particular concern to much of the rapidly growing opposition movement is, of course, the standards themselves, which have been rejected even by members of the Common Core Validation Committee. The Catholic scholars cite Dr. Sandra Stotsky, the 21st-century chair in teacher quality at the University of Arkansas’s Department of Education Reform, who refused to sign off on the English standards, as well as Stanford Professor Emeritus James Milgram, who rejected the math standards owing to, among many other concerns, incorrect math.

“They were written hastily by people who didn’t care how poorly written they were so long as informational text was about 50 percent of the reading curriculum,” Dr. Stotsky, one of the nation’s top experts on the issue, [told](#) *The New American* about the new standards earlier this year. While she is not opposed to national standards *per se*, one of her biggest concerns was the glaring lack of literary study and the reduction in opportunities for children to develop critical-thinking skills.

Of course, Common Core supporters claim the standards will “raise academic standards,” the Catholic scholars noted. “But we find persuasive the critiques of educational experts ... who judge it to be a step backwards,” they added, citing experts such as Stotsky and Milgram. “We endorse their judgment that this ‘reform’ is really a radical shift in emphasis, goals, and expectations for K-12 education, with the result that Common Core-educated children will not be prepared to do authentic college work. Even supporters of Common Core admit that it is geared to prepare children only for community-college-level studies.”

The judgments of Stotsky, Milgram, and “many others,” the letter continued, are supported by a “host of particulars”: when algebra is taught, whether advanced mathematics coursework should be taught in high school, the “misalignment” of reading and writing standards, and much more. However, the purpose of the scholars’ efforts is not to debate particulars, they said — at least not at this point.

“We write to you instead because of what the particular deficiencies of Common Core reveal about the philosophy and the basic aims of the reform,” they said. “We write to you because we think that this philosophy and these aims will undermine Catholic education, and dramatically diminish our children’s horizons.”

Instead of Common Core making America’s children “college and career ready,” the prominent experts told bishops that they judge the education agenda to be “a recipe for standardized workforce



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on November 12, 2013

preparation.” The standards scheme “shortchanges” the central goals of “all sound education,” and “surely those of Catholic education: to grow in the virtues necessary to know, love, and serve the Lord, to mature into a responsible, flourishing adult, and to contribute as a citizen to the process of responsible democratic self-government.”

In another stinging rebuke of the national effort, which is being [bankrolled by Bill Gates and massive taxpayer-funded bribes from the Obama administration](#), the 132 scholars said it adopts a “bottom-line, pragmatic approach” to education. At the center of the Common Core philosophy, they argued — echoing widespread criticism coming from secular sources as well — is the notion that it is a “waste of resources” to “over-educate” people. Perhaps the most obvious manifestation of the problem is in Common Core’s overwhelming emphasis on “informational texts” — Obama executive orders, EPA regulations, and the like — over classic, narrative fiction.

“This is a dramatic change,” the letter to bishops continues, adding that Common Core backers do not even disguise their intentions. “It is contrary to tradition and academic studies on reading and human formation.” Citing Stotsky and other experts again, the Catholic scholars go on to slam many of the ideas underpinning the radical shift in English and education more broadly. “Common Core reduces reading to a servile activity,” they explained, contrasting that with the exploration of the creativity of man and all of the lessons gleaned from the works of great writers who helped shape civilization over the centuries.

In addition to the myriad controversies surrounding the English and math standards, there are also related standards in the fields of science and history. Even though no Catholic diocese or even state government is under any obligation to adopt the science and history reforms despite having agreed to the other elements of the scheme, the scholars believe that the same “financial inducements, political pressure, and misguided reforming zeal” that led to acceptance of the controversial English and math standards “will conspire to make acceptance of the history and science standards equally speedy — and unreflective and unfortunate.”

The Catholic experts believe that, as in English and math, the [new national standards in science and history](#) will very likely “lower expectations for students.” Even more importantly, though, “is the likelihood that they will promote the prevailing philosophical orthodoxies in those disciplines.” In science, for example, the new standards will almost certainly “inculcate students into a materialist metaphysics that is incompatible with the spiritual realities — soul, conceptual thought, values, free choice, God — which Catholic faith presupposes.” They also fear that the history standards will be used to promote moral relativism with an anti-religious bias that is now common in college history departments.

Other Catholic leaders have also spoken out forcefully. The Cardinal Newman Society, which has been one of the organizations at the forefront of Catholic opposition, recently polled leading Catholic school principals on the issue. The survey [found](#) that only 13 percent thought Common Core would improve their schools, and about half thought it would hurt them. Cardinal Newman Society President Patrick Reilly recently noted that the standardization scheme is “something that we don’t want, and it’s something that we don’t need.”

“Our Common Core is the Catholic Faith,” Reilly [said](#) in a recent interview on EWTN’s *The World Over* with Raymond Arroyo. “The reason we set standards, the reason we have certain curricular decisions in how we teach is all based on our Faith; it’s all about formation of students, it’s not fundamentally about getting them into entry-level positions.... If they can coerce Catholic schools to accept the Common



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Core, it's done. Our nation will have one plan. It's an experimental plan, it's not tested, it's not proven that this will even work. And it wipes all opportunities for future innovation in states and in Catholic schools because we will all be doing the same thing."

As *The New American* magazine [reported](#) in August, Christian schools are already under intense pressure to go along with Common Core, and without strong resistance, the reforms will have a dramatic impact on religious education — even if the standards themselves are not technically adopted. Homeschooling families, too, are already feeling the effects of Common Core, and that is set to intensify without serious efforts to stop it.

The best solution, according to advocates of local control, educational freedom, and proper schooling, is to simply end the national standards entirely by having state governments and private schools reject them altogether. However, even with the tsunami of public outrage growing louder, officials have made clear that they do not intend to back down easily. The only way to stop it, then, appears to be for the public to get educated and involved until Common Core becomes history.

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