

GERARD V. BRADLEY, PROFESSOR OF LAW

C/O UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME, THE LAW SCHOOL
3156 ECK HALL OF LAW, PO BOX 780
NOTRE DAME, IN 46556

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This letter was sent individually to each Catholic bishop in the United States. 132 Catholic professors signed the letter.

Your Excellency:

We are Catholic scholars who have taught for years in America's colleges and universities. Most of us have done so for decades. A few of us have completed our time in the classroom; we are professors "emeriti." We have all tried throughout our careers to put our intellectual gifts at the service of Christ and His Church. Most of us are parents, too, who have seen to our children's education, much of it in Catholic schools. We are all personally and professionally devoted to Catholic education in America.

For these reasons we take this extraordinary step of addressing each of America's Catholic bishops about the "Common Core" national reform of K-12 schooling. Over one hundred dioceses and archdioceses have decided since 2010 to implement the Common Core. 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. We believe that implementing Common Core would be a grave disservice to Catholic education in America.

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.

Why – upon what evidence and reasoning – do we take such a decisive stand against a reform that so many Catholic educators have endorsed, or at least have acquiesced in?

In this brief letter we can only summarize our evidence and sketch our reasoning. We stand ready, however, to develop these brief points as you wish. We also invite you to view the video recording of a comprehensive conference critically examining Common Core, held at the University of Notre Dame on September 9, 2013. (For a copy of the video, please contact Professor Gerard Bradley at the address above.)

News reports each day show that a lively national debate about Common Core is upon us. The early rush to adopt Common Core has been displaced by sober second looks, and widespread regrets. Several states have decided to "pause" implementation. Others have opted out of the testing consortia associated with Common Core. Prominent

educators and political leaders have declared their opposition. The national momentum behind Common Core has, quite simply, stopped. 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.

Much of today's vigorous debate focuses upon particular standards in English and math. Supporters say that Common Core will "raise academic standards." But we find persuasive the critiques of educational experts (such as James Milgram, professor emeritus of mathematics at Stanford University, and Sandra Stotsky, professor emerita of education at the University of Arkansas) who have studied Common Core, and who judge it to be a step *backwards*. 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.

No doubt many of America's Catholic children will study in community colleges. Some will not attend college at all. This is not by itself lamentable; it all depends upon the personal vocations of those children, and what they need to learn and do in order to carry out the unique set of good works entrusted to them by Jesus. But none of that means that our Catholic grade schools and high schools should give up on maximizing the intellectual potential of *every* student. And *every* student deserves to be prepared for a life of the imagination, of the spirit, and of a deep appreciation for beauty, goodness, truth, and faith.

The judgments of Stotsky and Milgram (among many others) are supported by a host of particulars. These particulars include when algebra is to be taught, whether advanced mathematics coursework should be taught in high school, the misalignment of writing and reading standards, and whether cursive writing is to be taught.

We do not write to you, however, to start an argument about particulars. At least, that is a discussion for another occasion and venue. 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. We write to you because we think that this philosophy and these aims will undermine Catholic education, and dramatically diminish our children's horizons.

Promoters of Common Core say that it is designed to make America's children "college and career ready." *We instead judge Common Core to be a recipe for standardized workforce preparation.* Common Core 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.

Common Core adopts a bottom-line, pragmatic approach to education. The heart of its philosophy is, as far as we can see, that it is a waste of resources to "over-educate"

people. The basic goal of K-12 schools is to provide everyone with a modest skill set; after that, people can specialize in college – if they end up there. Truck-drivers do not need to know *Huck Finn*. Physicians have no use for the humanities. Only those destined to major in literature need to worry about *Ulysses*.

Perhaps a truck-driver needs no acquaintance with *Paradise Lost* to do his or her day's work. But everyone is better off knowing Shakespeare and Euclidean geometry, and everyone is capable of it. Everyone bears the responsibility of growing in wisdom and grace and in deliberating with fellow-citizens about how we should all live together. A sound education helps each of us to do so.

The sad facts about Common Core are most visible in its reduction in the study of classic, narrative fiction in favor of “informational texts.” This is a dramatic change. It is contrary to tradition and academic studies on reading and human formation. Proponents of Common Core do not disguise their intention to transform “literacy” into a “critical” skill set, at the expense of sustained and heartfelt encounters with great works of literature.

Professor Stotsky was the chief architect of the universally-praised Massachusetts English language arts standards, which contributed greatly to that state's educational success. She describes Common Core as an incubator of “empty skill sets . . . [that] weaken the basis of literary and cultural knowledge needed for authentic college coursework.” Rather than explore the creativity of man, the great lessons of life, tragedy, love, good and evil, the rich textures of history that underlie great works of fiction, and the tales of self-sacrifice and mercy in the works of the great writers that have shaped our cultural literacy over the centuries, Common Core reduces reading to a servile activity.

Professor Anthony Esolen, now at Providence College, has taught literature and poetry to college students for two decades. He provided testimony to a South Carolina legislative committee on the Common Core, lamenting its “cavalier contempt for great works of human art and thought, in literary form.” He further declared: “We are not programming machines. We are teaching children. We are not producing functionaries, factory-like. We are to be forming the minds and hearts of men and women.”

Thus far Common Core standards have been published for mathematics and English language arts. Related science standards have been recently released by Achieve, Inc. History standards have also been prepared by another organization. No diocese (for that matter, no state) is bound to implement these standards just by dint of having signed onto Common Core's English and math standards. We nonetheless believe that the same financial inducements, political pressure, and misguided reforming zeal that rushed those standards towards acceptance will conspire to make acceptance of the history and science standards equally speedy – and unreflective and unfortunate.

These new standards will very likely lower expectations for students, just as the Common Core math and English standards have done. More important, however, is the likelihood that they will promote the prevailing philosophical orthodoxies in those

disciplines. In science, the new standards are likely to take for granted, and inculcate students into a materialist metaphysics that is incompatible with, the spiritual realities –soul, conceptual thought, values, free choice, God– which Catholic faith presupposes. We fear, too, that the history standards will promote the easy moral relativism, tinged with a pervasive anti-religious bias, that is commonplace in collegiate history departments today.

Common Core is innocent of America’s Catholic schools’ rich tradition of helping to form children’s hearts and minds. In that tradition, education brings children to the Word of God. It provides students with a sound foundation of knowledge and sharpens their faculties of reason. It nurtures the child’s natural openness to truth and beauty, his moral goodness, and his longing for the infinite and happiness. It equips students to understand the laws of nature and to recognize the face of God in their fellow man. Education in this tradition forms men and women capable of discerning and pursuing their path in life and who stand ready to defend truth, their church, their families, and their country.

The history of Catholic education is rich in tradition and excellence. It embraces the academic inheritance of St. Anselm, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Blessed John Henry Newman. In contrast to such academic rigor, the Common Core standards lack an empirical evidentiary basis and have not been field-tested anywhere. Sadly, over one hundred Catholic dioceses have set aside our teaching tradition in favor of these secular standards.

America’s bishops have compiled a remarkable record of success directing Catholic education in America, perhaps most notably St. John Neumann and the *Plenary Councils of Baltimore*. Parents embrace that tradition and long for adherence to it – indeed, for its renaissance. That longing reflects itself in the growing Catholic homeschool and classical-education movements and, now, in the burgeoning desire among Catholic parents for their dioceses to reject the Common Core.

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.

Faithfully in Christ, we are:

Institutional Affiliations Are for Identification Purposes Only

Gerard Bradley
Professor of Law
University of Notre Dame

Robert P. George
McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence
Princeton University

Anthony M. Esolen
Professor of English
Providence College

Anne Hendershott
Professor of Sociology
Franciscan University of Steubenville

Kevin Doak
Professor
Georgetown University

Joseph A. Varacalli
S.U.N.Y. Distinguished Service Professor
Nassau Community College-S.U.N.Y.

Patrick McKinley Brennan
John F. Scarpa Chair in Catholic Legal
Studies
Villanova University School of Law

Robert Fastiggi, Ph.D.
Professor of Systematic Theology
Detroit, MI

Duncan Stroik
Professor of Architecture
University of Notre Dame

Thomas F. Farr
Director, Religious Freedom Project and
Visiting Associate Professor
Georgetown University

Matthew J. Franck, Ph.D.
Director, Simon Center on Religion and the
Constitution
Witherspoon Institute

Ronald J. Rychlak
Butler Snow Lecturer and Professor of Law
University of Mississippi, School of Law

V. Bradley Lewis
Associate Professor of Philosophy
The Catholic University of America

Patrick J. Deneen
David A. Potenziani Memorial Associate
Professor of Political Science
University of Notre Dame

E. Christian Brugger, D.Phil.
J. Francis Cardinal Stafford Professor of
Moral Theology
Saint John Vianney Theological Seminary,
Denver

Kenneth L. Grasso
Professor of Political Science
Texas State University

James Hitchcock
Professor of History
Saint Louis University

Maria Sophia Aguirre, Ph.D.
Director of Economics Programs and
Academic Chair
The Catholic University of America

Fr. Joseph Koterski SJ
President, Fellowship of Catholic Scholars
Fordham University

Francis J. Beckwith
Professor of Philosophy and Church-State
Studies
Baylor University

Thomas V. Svogun
Professor of Philosophy and Administration
of Justice and Chairman of the Department
of Philosophy
Salve Regina University

Scott W Hahn
Professor of Theology
Franciscan University of Steubenville

Eduardo J. Echeverria, Ph.D., S.T.L.
Professor of Philosophy and Systematic
Theology
Sacred Heart Major Seminary

Ryan J. Barilleaux, Ph.D.
Paul Rejai Professor of Political Science
Miami University (Ohio)

Brian Simboli, Ph.D.
Science Librarian
Lehigh University

John A. Gueguen
Emeritus Professor, Political Philosophy
Illinois State University

G. Alexander Ross
Institute for the Psychological Sciences

Suzanne Carpenter, Ph.D., R.N.
Associate Professor of Nursing
Retired

Patrick Lee
McAlear Professor of Bioethics
Franciscan University of Steubenville

Peter J. Colosi, PhD
Associate Professor of Moral Theology
St. Charles Borromeo Seminary

Dr. Robert Hunt
Professor of Political Science
Kean University

Matthew Cuddeback, PhD
Assistant Professor of Philosophy
Providence College

Dr. Joseph H. Hagan
President Emeritus
Assumption College

John A. Cuddeback, PhD
Professor of Philosophy
Christendom College

Dr. Michael J. Healy
Professor and Chair of Philosophy
Franciscan University of Steubenville

Thomas Hibbs
Dean of the Honors College
Baylor University

Susan Orr Traffas
Co-Director, Honors Program
Benedictine College

Michael J. Behe
Professor of Biological Sciences
Lehigh University

Thomas R. Rourke
Professor of Politics
Clarion University

Robert H Holden
Professor, Dept. of History
Old Dominion University

Philip J. Harold
Associate Dean, School of Education and
Social Sciences
Robert Morris University

David T. Murphy, Ph.D.
Dept. of Modern & Classical Languages
Saint Louis University

W. H. Marshner
Professor of Theology
Christendom College

David W. Fagerberg
Associate Professor, Theology
University of Notre Dame

Melissa Moschella
Assistant Professor of Philosophy
Catholic University of America

Daniel J. Costello, Jr.
Bettex Professor of Electrical Engineering,
Emeritus
University of Notre Dame

Brian Scarnecchia,
Associate Professor of Law
Ave Maria School of Law

Thomas Behr
Assistant Professor of Comparative Cultural
Studies
University of Houston

Bernard Dobranski
Dean Emeritus and Professor of Law
Ave Maria School of Law

Daniel Philpott
Professor, Political Science and Peace
Studies
University of Notre Dame

Anne Barbeau Gardiner
Professor emerita, Dept of English
John Jay College, CUNY

C.C. Pecknold
Assistant Professor of Theology
The Catholic University of America

Anthony Low
Professor Emeritus of English
New York University

Heather Voccola
Adjunct Professor of Church History
Holy Apostles College and Seminary

Raymond F. Hain, PhD
Assistant Professor of Philosophy
Providence College

Catherine Abbott
Professor of Mathematics
Keuka College

Thérèse Bonin
Associate Professor of Philosophy
Duquesne University

Dr. Francis P. Kessler
Prof. Political Science
Benedictine College

Christopher Wolfe
Co-Director, Thomas International Center
Emeritus Professor, Marquette University

Carson Holloway
Associate Professor of Political Science
University of Nebraska at Omaha

Stephen M. Krason, J.D., Ph.D.
President
Society of Catholic Social Scientists

Laura Hirschfeld Hollis
Associate Professional Specialist and
Concurrent Associate Professor of Law
University of Notre Dame

Wilson D. Miscamble, C.S.C.,
Professor of History
University of Notre Dame

Stephen M. Barr
Professor of Physics
University of Delaware

D.C. Schindler
Associate Professor of Metaphysics and
Anthropology
The John Paul II Institute for Studies on
Marriage and Family

Jeanne Heffernan Schindler
Senior Research Fellow
Center for Cultural and Pastoral Concerns

David L. Schindler
Gagnon Professor of Fundamental Theology
Pontifical John Paul II Institute, Catholic
University of America

Rev. Edward Krause, C.C.C.
Professor of Social Sciences, Emeritus
Gannon University

Christopher O. Tollefsen
Professor of Philosophy
University of South Carolina

Paige E. Hochschild
Assistant Professor of Theology
Mount St. Mary's University

Robert C. Jeffrey
Professor of Government
Wofford College

Rev. Anthony E. Giampietro, CSB
Executive Vice President and Academic
Dean
Saint Patrick's Seminary & University

Dr. Roger Loucks
Associate Prof. of Physics
Alfred University

J. Daniel Hammond
Professor of Economics
Wake Forest University

Kenneth R. Hoffmann, Ph.D.
Professor of Neurosurgery
SUNY at Buffalo

Timothy T. O'Donnell, STD, KGCHS
President Christendom College

Thomas W. Jodziewicz
Department of History
University of Dallas

Sr J. Sheila Galligan IHM
Professor of Theology
Immaculata University

Maura Hearden
Assistant Professor of Theology
DeSales University

Robert Gorman
University Distinguished Professor of
Political Science
Texas State University

Steven Justice
Professor of English
University of California, Berkeley and
University of Mississippi

Carol Nevin (Sue) Abromaitis
Professor of English
Loyola University Maryland

Dr. Sean Innerst
Theology Cycle Director,
St. John Vianney Theological Seminary

Robert A. Destro
Professor of Law & Director
The Catholic University of America

Richard Sherlock
Prof. of Philosophy
Utah State University

Adrian J. Reimers
Adjunct Assistant Professor in Philosophy
University of Notre Dame

Dr. Jessica M. Murdoch
Assistant Professor of Fundamental and
Dogmatic Theology
Villanova University

Mary Shivanandan, S.T.L., S.T.D.
Professor of Theology Retired
John Paul II Institute for Studies on
Marriage & Family at the Catholic
University of America

Alice M. Ramos
Professor of Philosophy
St. John's University

Dennis J. Marshall, Ph.D.
Professor of Theology
Aquinas College

Dennis D. Martin
Associate Professor of Theology
Loyola University Chicago

Janet E. Smith
Father Michael J. McGivney Chair of Life
Ethics
Sacred Heart Major Seminary

Leonard J. Nelson, III
Retired Professor of Law
Samford University

Charles D. Presberg, PhD
Associate Professor of Spanish
University of Missouri-Columbia

Brian T. Kelly
Dean
Thomas Aquinas College

Michael F. McLean
President
Thomas Aquinas College

Philip T. Crotty
Professor of Management (Emeritus)
Northeastern University

James Matthew Wilson
Assistant Professor of Literature
Villanova University

R. E. Houser
Bishop Wendelin J. Nold Chair in Graduate
Philosophy
University of St. Thomas (TX)

Gary D. Glenn
Distinguished Teaching Professor Emeritus
Department of Political Science, Northern
Illinois University

Cynthia Toolin, Ph.D.
Professor of Dogmatic and Moral Theology
Holy Apostles College and Seminary

Virginia L. Arbery, Ph. D.
Associate Professor of Humanities
Wyoming Catholic College

Maryanne M. Linkes, Esquire
Adjunct Professor
University of Pittsburgh & Community
College of Allegheny County

James Likoudis, M.S.Ed.
Education writer
Montour Falls, NY 14865

Dr. Emil Berendt
Assistant Professor of Economics
Mount St. Mary's University

David F. Forte
Professor of Law
Cleveland State University

Anthony W. Zumpetta, Ed.D.
Professor Emeritus
West Chester University (PA)

Thomas D. Watts
Professor Emeritus
University of Texas, Arlington

Catherine Ruth Pakaluk, PhD
Assistant Professor of Economics
Ave Maria University

Craig S. Lent
Freimann Professor of Electrical
Engineering
University of Notre Dame

Christina Jeffrey, Ph.D.
Lecturer on the Foundations of American
Government
Wofford College

Robert G Kennedy
Professor of Catholic Studies
University of St Thomas (MN)

Holly Taylor Coolman
Assistant Professor, Dept. of Theology
Providence College

Raymond F. Hain, PhD
Assistant Professor of Philosophy
Providence College

David Whalen
Provost
Hillsdale College

David M. Wagner
Professor of Law
Regent University School of Law

John G. Trapani, Jr., Ph.D.
Professor of Philosophy
Walsh University

Tina Holland, Ph.D.
South Bend, Indiana

James F. Papillo, J.D., Ph.D
Former Vice President of Administrative
Affairs and Associate Professor in the
Humanities
Holy Apostles College and Seminary

Dr. J. Marianne Siegmund
Theo. Department and SCSS member
University of Dallas

Dr. Daniel Hauser
Professor of Theology
University of St. Francis

Joshua Hochschild
Mount St. Mary's University

William Edmund Fahey, Ph.D.
Fellow and President
The Thomas More College of Liberal Arts

John C. McCarthy
Dean, School of Philosophy
The Catholic University of America

Christopher O. Blum
Academic Dean
Augustine Institute

Chiyuma Elliott
Assistant Professor of English and African-
American Studies
University of Mississippi

Mark C. Henrie
Senior V.P., Chief Academic Officer
Intercollegiate Studies Institute

Jeffrey Tranzillo, Ph.D.
Professor, Systematic Theology

Craig Steven Titus, S.Th.D/Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Director of Integrative Studies
Institute of the Psychological Sciences

Rev. Peter M.J. Stravinskias, Ph.D., S.T.D.
Executive Director
Catholic Education Foundation

William W. Kirk
Vice President for Student Affairs and
General Counsel
Ave Maria University

Curt H. Stiles, Ph.D.
Professor of Business Policy
Cameron School of Business
University of North Carolina