
New Catholic Encyclopedia. 2nd edn.

Detroit ; Thomson/Gale; Washington, DC :
Catholic University of America, 2002-2003.
15 vols. ISBN 0787640042 (set)

Reviewed by Philip Harvey

Controversy

Critical controversy surrounded the publication of the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (NCE) when it first appeared in its bold green covers, back in 1967. A product of the spirit of renewal within the Roman Catholic Church, there were those who condemned it virtually for that reason alone: it marked a general upheaval of the old pious certainties, many of them epitomised in its original, the triumphalist *Catholic Encyclopedia* of 1907.

Saints were demythologised, doctrines were given nuanced readings, and modern issues were tackled. Others complained of its overemphasis on a largely Catholic worldview, that no subject was treated without the perspective (some saw it as intrusion) of Catholicism.

Such complaints were met with the understandable response: well, what would you expect? Still others felt the Encyclopedia didn't go far enough and was anyway representative of a conservative culture by definition.

Visionary

Whichever way it was viewed though, the NCE was a visionary production, a work of high erudition completed in a common spirit of positivity. The fanfares were loud and long. For thirty years it has been the first port of call for those wanting quick and informative answers on Catholicism, the Christian religion, and all things pertaining.

A new venture?

The new *New Catholic Encyclopedia* arrived with no such fanfares. The advertising was noticeably subdued and, ominously, was short on policy, structure, changes, contributors and other obvious

questions needing answers. Only a long list of eminently respectable church people on its Committee gave any sign that this was a new venture and that it might be credible.

That, and a prepublication blurb (<http://cuapress.cua.edu/NCE/NCEDescription.htm>) from Catholic University of America Press that made grandiose claims not matched by the end product. Its actual physical appearance (yes, bold, green, with gold stripes) in the very same set of fifteen volumes, a mirror image of 1967, could only prompt the thought that if there were additions there must be quite a lot of deletions.

Colourful reactions

Reaction since its appearance has been colourful, with ongoing email opinions on library lists of an alarmist strain and reviews that leave one wondering if the whole project is a publisher's ploy first and a reference triumph second. The alarm bells keep ringing. Here are just a few samples from a flurry of e-mails to the ATLA list Atlantis last May:

- I asked one staffer here who contributed several articles and whose work is footnoted in many other articles ... He says he was not even asked to revise articles he had written for the Jubilee Edition. He was mildly perturbed because his is an area (Ecumenism) that changes from one year to the next. I suspect this is a work that will have to be revised again in the (relatively) near future.¹
- One wouldn't expect a Catholic encyclopedia to devote great space to Lutheranism and Lutheran churches in America; one would expect entries in the bibliographies to reflect sources

later than 1965 (except for a 2001 statistical handbook). The bibliography in the article on Luther does go to the later 1980s ...

Post-modernism has also not been an issue for the Catholic Church, as the index has but one reference to the 'post-modernity movement' in an article on eschatology in v.5 (p. 348) and none to 'post-modernism' ...

And here is the *pièce de résistance*: One searches in vain for the term "Host" in the index (not even a "see" reference.) Is that term not important to Catholics (and other liturgical Christians)? The 1914 edition on our shelf has a half-column in small print under "HOST", with sub-headings such as "consecration," "elevation," "oblation," etc. (Yes, there are entries for Eucharist and Lord's Supper in the *NCE*.)²

- A different (but not unrelated) matter is currency. I've dipped in a few times unscientifically, only to discover that the article sought hadn't been updated at all (Teilhard de Chardin, e.g.)³
- I had occasion ... to find quickly some background historical information about Mesopotamia. The old edition being at hand, I looked at the entry for Iraq, and rapidly found exactly what I wanted. For comparison, I looked at the new edition, and discovered that nearly all the historical background had been removed.⁴
- ...here's another example that galls: "Culture", by G. O. Lang (the author in the 1967 ed.). Bibliography: not a single title published after 1965.⁵

Critical controversy

Clearly, critical controversy continues to dog the *NCE*, though this time around the central issue is not its spin on Catholicism but the credibility of its reference standards, and how much is new.

Steve Perisho of Seattle Pacific University Library has said,

The more I think about it, the more convinced I become that the question is not so much 'How much new (or at least revised) material did we get for our money?' No, the question is rather 'For how much of the *NCE* have we now paid twice, once in 1967 (or the date of the supplement), and once again in 2002?'⁶

Up-to-date?

The promise in the advertising that the entire encyclopedia would be brought up-to-date has angered many reference acquisitions librarians, who only have promises to go on. Similarly, although many new subjects are covered (one analyst cites "such topics as Liberation Theology, the Human Genome, AIDS, Feminist Theology, and Womanist Theology"). The same person discovered that

Remarkably, the terms 'computer', 'Internet' and 'World Wide Web' are nowhere to be found in the index, perhaps because the entry on 'Libraries' has been dropped!⁷

A general conclusion is that commercial necessity (or avarice, as some would have it) has overridden quality and standards. The subsequent release of an e-book version has not calmed the cynics.

What to do?

Any library with a 1907 Catholic Encyclopedia has the good sense to keep it and have it permanently in reference. The same can now be said of the 1967, with its excellent supplements. Quite simply, there is essential information in both these sets lacking in the 2002 edition.

Any intelligent user knows that each of these sets represent a time and a culture, that knowledge is necessarily prone to fallibility, and yet that in the making of these encyclopedias we have a combination of special reference conditions the results of which must be kept available at all cost.

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together with its predecessors.

References

1. Anne LeVeque, e-mail to Atlantis, May 14, 2003. (Anne is Library Director, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington DC.)
2. Dave Berger (Concordia Seminary), e-mail to Atlantis, May 15, 2003.
3. Steve Perisho (Seattle Pacific University Library), e-mail to Atlantis, May 14, 2003.
4. Hal Cain (Joint Theological Library, Melbourne), e-mail to Atlantis, May 13, 2003.
5. Steve Perisho, e-mail to Atlantis, May 14, 2003.
6. Ibid.

7. Steve Kuehler (Episcopal Divinity School and Weston Jesuit School of Theology), e-mail to Atlantis, May 12, 2003.

Philip Harvey

Joint Theological Library
Parkville, Vic. 3052

STOP PRESS:

From Atlantis e-list: The New Catholic Encyclopedia online! Released November 1. As predicted they are charging an arm and a leg for it—\$1424—a one time cost plus an annual access fee (waived for this year but in future it will be \$110 p.a.) What's going online is no different from what's in print. Anne LeVeque, Library Director, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.



SA Chapter visits new State Library

Wendy Davis

On a chilly morning in August, the intrepid librarians of the South Australian chapter, lined up outside the 'new' State Library. Our main business was with Lindy Bohrnson and Peter Zajicek from the conservation section: however we did have a brief guided tour of the new facilities of the Spence wing (named after Catherine Helen Spence, the famous South Australian writer, teacher, social and political reformer).

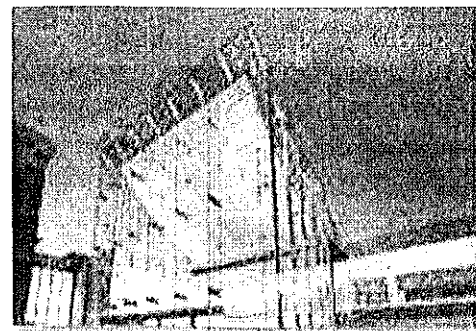
After being slightly overwhelmed by the glass and steel of the new entrance way (decorated with specially commissioned works of art), we gasped in awe at the banks of new computer terminals, lingered in front of the new display cabinets of Bradman memorabilia and the history of printing/newspapers in South Australia, then hurried past the construction workers, down into the bowels of the Mortlock wing.

Lindy shared with us the secrets of micro-filming and proudly showed us the latest technology that could scan documents (mainly newspapers) and preserve them on microfilm as well as creating a digital

copy.

Peter shared some of the difficulties and joys of preservation and conservation—they were busy working on various items that will be displayed in the new 'treasures' display in the refurbished Mortlock wing.

They and their staff work in cramped conditions, made more difficult by the presence of tradespeople whose work won't be completed for many more months. We appreciated the time and the informative talks they gave, and enjoyed our hot coffee in the Art Gallery Café next door afterwards.



New foyer to State Library of SA