



FOREWORD
POPE BENEDICT XVI



Dear young friends!

Today I recommend for your reading an unusual book. It is unusual both because of its content and because of the way it came to be. I would like to tell you a little about how it was written, because then it will be clear why it is so unusual.

You could say that it came to be from another work, whose origins go back to the 1980s. It was a difficult time for the Church and for society worldwide. New guidance was needed to find the path to the future. After the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) and in a changed cultural situation, many people were confused about what Christians actually believe, what the Church teaches, whether in fact she can teach anything at all, and how everything can find its place in a culture that had changed from its very foundations. Is it still reasonable today to be a believer? These were the questions that even good Christians were asking.

At that time Pope John Paul II made a bold decision. He decided that bishops from all over the world should together write a book in which they would answer these questions. He gave me the task of coordinating the work of the bishops and seeing to it that from the contributions of the bishops a book would result—a real book, not just a haphazard collection of all sorts of documents. This book would have the old-fashioned title *Catechism of the Catholic Church* but would be something entirely new and exciting. It would show what the Catholic Church believes today and how one can with good reason believe.



I was alarmed by this task. I must admit that I doubted whether something like this could succeed. For how was it possible that authors scattered all over the world could together produce a readable book? How could men who not only geographically but also intellectually and spiritually lived on different continents create a text with an inner unity, one that would also be understandable throughout all those continents? And there was the further difficulty that these bishops would not be writing as individual authors but would be in contact with their brother bishops and with the people in their dioceses. I must admit that even today it still seems to me to be a miracle that this project finally succeeded.

We met for a week three or four times a year and vigorously discussed the different individual sections that had taken shape in between meetings. First, of course, we had to determine the structure of the book. It had to be simple so that the individual groups of authors that we established would have a clear task and would not have to force their work into a complicated system. It is the same structure you will find in this book. It is simply taken from centuries of catechetical experience: What we believe—How we should celebrate the Christian mysteries—How we have life in Christ—How we should pray. I will not describe now how we slowly made our way through so many and varied questions until finally a book came from it all. One can, of course, criticize some things or even many things in such a work: Everything that man makes is inadequate and can be improved. Still it is a marvelous book: a witness to unity in diversity. We were able to form a single choir from many voices because we had the same score, the faith that the Church has borne through the centuries from the apostles onward.

Why am I telling you all this? We realized at the time we were working on the book that not only are the continents and

cultures diverse, but that even within individual communities there are again diverse “continents”: The worker thinks differently from the farmer; a physicist differently from a philologist; an executive differently from a journalist; a young man differently from an old man. So we had to find a way of thinking and speaking that was in some way above all these differences, a common space, so to speak, between different worlds of thought. In doing this it became ever more apparent to us that the text needed to be “translated” for different cultural worlds in order to reach people in those worlds in ways that correspond to their own questions and ways of thinking.

In the World Youth Days since the introduction of the Catechism of the Catholic Church—Rome, Toronto, Cologne, Sydney— young people from all over the world have come together, young people who want to believe, who are seeking God, who love Christ, and who want fellowship on their journey. In this context the question arose: Should we not attempt to translate the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* into the language of young people? Should we not bring its great riches into the world of today’s youth? Of course, there are many differences even among the youth of today’s world. And so now, under the capable direction of the Archbishop of Vienna, Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, YOUCAT has been produced for young people. I hope that many young people will let themselves be fascinated by this book.

Many people say to me: The youth of today are not interested in this. I disagree, and I am certain that I am right. The youth of today are not as superficial as some think. They want to know what life is really all about. A detective story is exciting because it draws us into the destiny of other men, a destiny that could be ours. This book is exciting because it speaks of our own destiny and so deeply engages every one of us.



So I invite you: Study this Catechism! That is my heartfelt desire. This Catechism was not written to please you. It will not make life easy for you, because it demands of you a new life. It places before you the Gospel message as the “pearl of great value” (Mt 13:46) for which you must give everything. So I beg you: Study this Catechism with passion and perseverance. Make a sacrifice of your time for it! Study it in the quiet of your room; read it with a friend; form study groups and networks; share with each other on the Internet. By all means continue to talk with each other about your faith.

You need to know what you believe. You need to know your faith with that same precision with which an IT specialist knows the inner workings of a computer. You need to understand it like a good musician knows the piece he is playing. Yes, you need to be more deeply rooted in the faith than the generation of your parents so that you can engage the challenges and temptations of this time with strength and determination. You need God’s help if your faith is not going to dry up like a dewdrop in the sun, if you want to resist the blandishments of consumerism, if your love is not to drown in pornography, if you are not going to betray the weak and leave the vulnerable helpless.

If you are now going to apply yourselves zealously to the study of the Catechism, I want to give you one last thing to accompany you: You all know how deeply the community of faith has been wounded recently through the attacks of the evil one, through the penetration of sin itself into the interior, yes, into the heart of the Church. Do not make that an excuse to flee from the face of God! You yourselves are the Body of Christ, the Church! Bring the undiminished fire of your love into this Church whose countenance has so often been disfigured by man. “Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the

Spirit, serve the Lord!” (Rom 12:11). When Israel was at the lowest point in her history, God called for help, not from the great and honored ones of Israel, but from a young man by the name of Jeremiah. Jeremiah felt overwhelmed: “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth” (Jer 1:6). But God was not to be deterred : “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I send you you shall go, and whatever I command you you shall speak” (Jer 1:7).

I bless you and pray each day for all of you.

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