

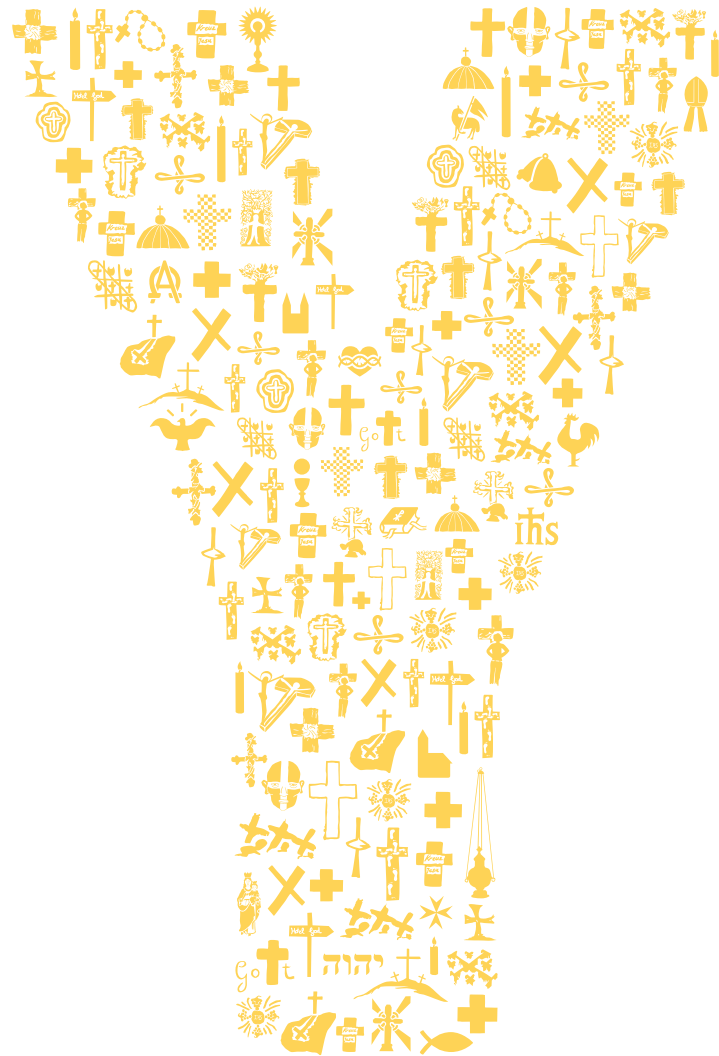


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# YOUCAT

ENGLISH

YOUTH CATECHISM  
OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

With a Foreword  
by Pope Benedict XVI

Translated by Michael J. Miller

IGNATIUS PRESS SAN FRANCISCO



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### Instructions for Use

The Youth Catechism, which is written in language suitable for young people, deals with the entire Catholic faith as it was presented in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC of 1997), without aiming, however, at the completeness provided in that volume. The work is structured in **Question-and-Answer** format, and **numbers** after each answer refer the reader to the more extensive and in-depth treatments in the CCC. A **commentary** following the answer is meant to give the young person additional help in understanding the questions that are discussed and their significance in his life. Furthermore, the Youth Catechism offers in the margin a continuous series of supplementary elements, such as **pictures**, summary **definitions**, citations from **Sacred Scripture**, quotations from **saints** and reliable **teachers of the faith** but also from non-religious authors. At the conclusion of the book, there is an **index of subjects and persons** to facilitate finding specific topics.

### Symbols and Their Meaning:



Citation from Sacred Scripture



Quotations from various authors, including saints and other Christian authors



Definitions



See definition given for the term

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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.

Benedictus PP XVI

Benedictus P.P. XVI





PART ONE



# What We Believe

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 [God] desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

1 Tim 2:4

” You cannot imagine at all how much you interest God; he is interested in you as if there were no one else on earth.

JULIEN GREEN  
(1900–1998, French writer)

” One must know man and human things in order to love them. One must love God and divine things in order to know them.

BLAISE PASCAL,  
(1623–1662, French mathematician and philosopher)

 God is love.  
1 Jn 4:16b

” The measure of love is love without measure.

ST. FRANCIS OF SALES  
(1567–1622, distinguished bishop, brilliant spiritual guide, founder of a religious community, and Doctor of the Church)

## SECTION ONE

### Why We Are Able to Believe

#### 1 For what purpose are we here on earth?

**We are here on earth in order to know and to love God, to do good according to his will, and to go someday to heaven. [1–3, 358]**

To be a human being means to come from God and to go to God. Our origin goes back farther than our parents. We come from God, in whom all the happiness of heaven and earth is at home, and we are expected in his everlasting, infinite blessedness. Meanwhile we live on this earth. Sometimes we feel that our Creator is near; often we feel nothing at all. So that we might find the way home, God sent us his Son, who freed us from sin, delivers us from all evil, and leads us unerringly into true life. He is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6). → 285

#### 2 Why did God create us?

**God created us out of free and unselfish love. [1–3]**

When a man loves, his heart overflows. He would like to share his joy with others. He gets this from his Creator. Although God is a mystery, we can still think about him in a human way and say: Out of the “surplus” of his love he created us. He wanted to share his endless joy with us, who are creatures of his love.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Man Is Receptive to God

#### 3 Why do we seek God?

**God has placed in our hearts a longing to seek and find him. St. Augustine says, “You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” We call this longing for God → RELIGION. [27–30]**

It is natural for man to seek God. All of our striving for truth and happiness is ultimately a search for the one



## RELIGION

” We can understand religion generally to mean a relationship to what is divine. A religious person acknowledges something divine as the power that created him and the world, on which he is dependent and to which he is ordered. He wants to please and honor the Divinity by his way of life.

” The noblest power of man is reason. The highest goal of reason is the knowledge of God.


ST. ALBERT THE GREAT  
(ca. 1200–1280, Dominican priest, scientist, and scholar, Doctor of the Church, and one of the greatest theologians of the Church)

who supports us *absolutely*, satisfies us *absolutely*, and employs us *absolutely* in his service. A person is not completely himself until he has found God. “Anyone who seeks truth seeks God, whether or not he realizes it” (St. Edith Stein). → 5, 281–285

#### 4 Can we know the existence of God by our reason?

**Yes. Human reason can know God with certainty. [31–36, 44–47]**

The world cannot have its origin and its destination within itself. In everything that exists, there is more than we see. The order, the beauty, and the development of the world point beyond themselves toward God. Every man is receptive to what is true, good, and beautiful. He hears within himself the voice

 They [men] should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, for “In him we live and move and have our being.”

Acts 17:27–28a





” So it happens that men in such matters easily persuade themselves that what they would not like to be true is false or at least doubtful.

POPE PIUS XII Encyclical *Humani generis*

” Man’s unique grandeur is ultimately based on his capacity to know the truth. And human beings desire to know the truth. Yet truth can only be attained in freedom. This is the case with all truth, as is clear from the history of science; but it is eminently the case with those truths in which man himself, man as such, is at stake, the truths of the spirit, the truths about good and evil, about the great goals and horizons of life, about our relationship with God. These truths cannot be attained without profound consequences for the way we live our lives.

POPE BENEDICT XVI, January 9, 2006

” Something incomprehensible is not for that reason less real.

BLAISE PASCAL (1588–1651)

of conscience, which urges him to what is good and warns him against what is evil. Anyone who follows this path reasonably finds God.

**5** *Why do people deny that God exists, if they can know him by reason?*

**To know the invisible God is a great challenge for the human mind. Many are scared off by it. Another reason why some do not want to know God is because they would then have to change their life. Anyone who says that the question about God is meaningless because it cannot be answered is making things too easy for himself. [37–38] → 357**

**6** *Can we grasp God at all in concepts? Is it possible to speak about him meaningfully?*

**Although we men are limited and the infinite greatness of God never fits into finite human concepts, we can nevertheless speak rightly about God. [39–43, 48]**

In order to express something about God, we use imperfect images and limited notions. And so everything we say about God is subject to the reservation that our language is not equal to God’s greatness. Therefore we must constantly purify and improve our speech about God.

## ◇ CHAPTER TWO ◇ God Approaches Us Men

**7** *Why did God have to show himself in order for us to be able to know what he is like?*

**Man can know by reason that God exists, but not what God is really like. Yet because God would very much like to be known, he has revealed himself. [50–53, 68–69]**

God did not have to reveal himself to us. But he did it—out of love. Just as in human love one can know something about the beloved person only if he opens his heart to us, so too we know something about

God’s inmost thoughts only because the eternal and mysterious God has opened himself to us out of love. From creation on, through the patriarchs and the prophets down to the definitive → REVELATION in his Son Jesus Christ, God has spoken again and again to mankind. In him he has poured out his heart to us and made his inmost being visible for us.

**8** *How does God reveal himself in the Old Testament?*

**God shows himself in the → OLD TESTAMENT as God, who created the world out of love and remains faithful to men even when they have fallen away from him into sin. [54–64, 70–72]**

God makes it possible to experience him in history: With Noah he establishes a covenant to save all living things. He calls Abraham so as to make him “the father of a multitude of nations” (Gen 17:5b) and to bless “all the families of the earth” in him (Gen 12:3b). The people Israel, sprung from Abraham, becomes his special possession. To Moses he introduces himself by name. His mysterious name יהוה → YHWH, usually transcribed Yahweh, means “I AM WHO I AM” (Ex 3:14). He frees Israel from slavery in Egypt, establishes a covenant with them on Sinai, and through Moses gives them the Law. Again and again, God sends prophets to his people to call them to conversion and to the renewal of the covenant. The prophets proclaim that God will establish a new and everlasting covenant, which will bring about a radical renewal and definitive redemption. This covenant will be open to all human beings.

**9** *What does God show us about himself when he sends his Son to us?*

**God shows us in Jesus Christ the full depth of his merciful love. [65–66, 73]**

Through Jesus Christ the invisible God becomes visible. He becomes a man like us. This shows us how far God’s love goes: He bears our whole burden. He walks every

**REVELATION**  
Revelation means that God opens himself, shows himself, and speaks to the world voluntarily.

” We cannot talk about God, but woe to the one who remains silent about him.

ST. AUGUSTINE (354–430, Doctor of the Church, the most important writer and theologian of the early Church)

” This is his [the theologian’s] mission: in the loquacity of our day and of other times, in the plethora of words, to make the essential words heard. Through words, it means making present the Word, the Word who comes from God, the Word who is God.

POPE BENEDICT XVI, October 6, 2006

” All that is said about God presupposes something said by God.

ST. EDITH STEIN (1891–1942, Jewish Christian, philosopher, and Carmelite nun, concentration camp victim)




” In Jesus Christ, God took on a human face and became our friend and brother.

POPE BENEDICT XVI,  
September 6, 2006

## ? INCARNATION

(from the Latin *caro, carnis* = flesh, “becoming flesh”): God’s act of becoming man in Jesus Christ. This is the foundation of Christian faith and of hope for the redemption of mankind.

 In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son.

Heb 1:1–2

” Apart from Jesus Christ we do not know what God, life, death, and we ourselves are.

BLAISE PASCAL

” I have no imagination. I cannot picture God the Father. All that I can see is Jesus.

BL. TERESA OF CALCUTTA  
(1910–1997, foundress of the Missionaries of Charity, Nobel Peace Prize winner)

path with us. He is there in our abandonment, our sufferings, our fear of death. He is there when we can go no farther, so as to open up for us the door leading into life. → 314

10 *With Jesus Christ, has everything been said, or does revelation continue even after him?*

**In Jesus Christ, God himself came to earth. He is God’s last Word. By listening to him, all men of all times can know who God is and what is necessary for their salvation. [66–67]**

With the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the → REVELATION of God is perfect and complete. To make it comprehensible to us, the Holy Spirit leads us ever deeper into the truth. God’s light breaks so forcefully into the lives of many individuals that they “see the heavens opened” (Acts 7:56). That is how the great places of pilgrimage such as Guadalupe in Mexico or Lourdes in France came about. The “private revelations” of visionaries cannot improve on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. No one is obliged to believe in them. But they can help us understand the Gospel better. Their authenticity is tested by the → CHURCH.

11 *Why do we hand on the faith?*

**We hand on the faith because Jesus commands us: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19). [91]**

No genuine Christian leaves the transmission of the faith exclusively to specialists (teachers, pastors, missionaries). We are Christ for others. This means that every genuine Christian would like God to come to other people, too. He says to himself, “The Lord needs me! I have been baptized and confirmed and am responsible for helping the people around me to learn about God and ‘to come to the knowledge of the truth’ (1 Tim 2:4b).” Mother Teresa used a good comparison: “Often you can see power lines running alongside the street. Unless current is flowing through them, there is no light. The power line is you and I! The current is God! We have the power to allow the current to flow



” The happiness you are seeking, the happiness you have a right to enjoy, has a name and a face: it is Jesus of Nazareth.

POPE BENEDICT XVI,  
August 18, 2005

” There is an urgent need for the emergence of a new generation of apostles anchored firmly in the word of Christ, capable of responding to the challenges of our times and prepared to spread the Gospel far and wide.

POPE BENEDICT XVI,  
February 22, 2006

through us and thus to generate the light of the world: JESUS—or to refuse to be used and, thus, allow the darkness to spread.” → 123

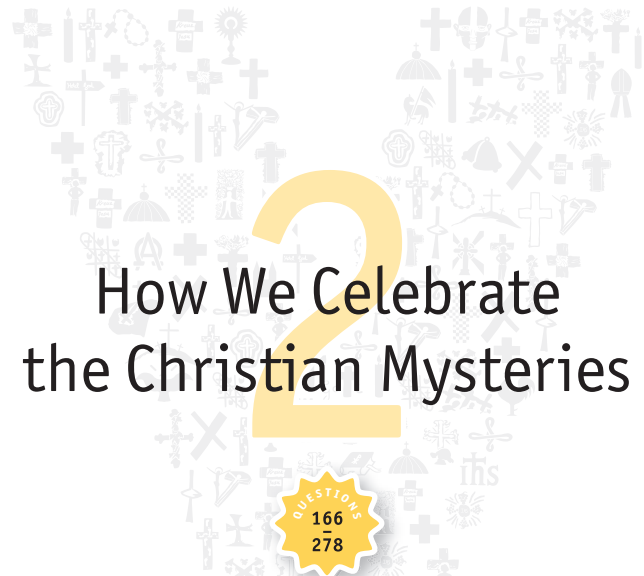
12 *How can we tell what belongs to the true faith?*

**We find the true faith in Sacred Scripture and in the living Tradition of the Church. [76, 80–82, 85–87, 97, 100]**

The → NEW TESTAMENT developed out of the faith of the Church. Scripture and Tradition belong together. Handing on the faith does not occur primarily through documents. In the early Church it was said that Sacred Scripture was “written on the heart of the Church rather than on parchment”. The disciples and the → APOSTLES experienced their new life above all through a living fellowship with Jesus. The early Church invited people into this fellowship, which continued in a different way after the Resurrection. The first Christians held fast “to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and to



PART TWO



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” *Contemplata aliis tradere.* (To contemplate and to give to others the fruits of contemplation.)

Motto of the Dominican Order

## ? CONTEMPLATION

(from Latin *contemplare* = becoming absorbed in God’s presence in prayer. *Contemplation* (the interior, spiritual life) and *action* (the active life) are two sides of devotion to God. In Christianity the two belong inseparably together.



### 472 How did Moses pray?

**From Moses we learn that “praying” means “speaking with God”. At the burning bush God entered into a real conversation with Moses and gave him an assignment. Moses raised objections and asked questions. Finally God revealed to him his holy name. Just as Moses then came to trust God and enlisted wholeheartedly in his service, so we too should pray and thus go to God’s school. [2574–2577]**

The → BIBLE mentions Moses’ name 767 times—so central is he as the liberator and lawgiver of the people of Israel. At the same time Moses was also a great intercessor for his people. In prayer he received his commission; from prayer he drew his strength. Moses had an intimate, personal relationship with God: “The

Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Ex 33:11a). Before Moses acted or instructed the people, he withdrew to the mountain to pray. Thus he is the original example of contemplative prayer.

### 473 How are the Psalms important for our prayer?

**The Psalms, along with the Our Father, are part of the Church’s great treasury of prayers. In them the praise of God is sung in an ageless way.**

There are 150 Psalms in the → OLD TESTAMENT. They are a collection of songs and prayers, some of them several thousand years old, which are still prayed today in the Church community—in the so-called Liturgy of the Hours. The Psalms are among the most beautiful texts in world literature and move even modern readers immediately by their spiritual power. → 188

### 474 How did Jesus learn to pray?

**Jesus learned to pray in his family and in the synagogue. Yet Jesus broke through the boundaries of traditional prayer. His prayer demonstrates a union with his Father in heaven that is possible only to someone who is the Son of God. [2598–2599]**

Jesus, who was God and man at the same time, grew up like other Jewish children of his time amid the rituals and prayer formulas of his people, Israel. Nevertheless, as the story of the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple demonstrated (Lk 2:41ff.), there was something in him that could not be learned: an original, profound, and unique union with God, his Father in heaven. Like all other men, Jesus hoped for another world, a hereafter, and prayed to God. At the same time, though, he was also part of that hereafter. This occasion already showed that one day people would pray to Jesus, acknowledge him as God, and ask for his grace.

### 475 How did Jesus pray?

**Jesus’ life was one single prayer. At decisive moments (his temptation in the desert, his selection of**

” The Lord is my shepherd, / I shall not want; / he makes me lie down in green pastures. / He leads me beside still waters; / he restores my soul. / He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. / Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, / I fear no evil; / for you are with me; / your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Ps 23

” “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”

Lk 2:49

” To pray means to think lovingly about Jesus. Prayer is the soul’s attention that is concentrated on Jesus. The more you love Jesus, the better you pray.

BL. CHARLES DE FOUCAULD (1858–1916)



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