

YOUCAT

Youth Catechism of
the Catholic Church



YOUCAT

ENGLISH

YOUTH CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

With a Foreword
by Pope Benedict XVI

Translated by Michael J. Miller

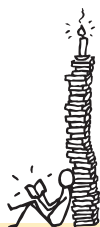
CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY



Original German edition:
YOUCAT deutsch
Jugendkatechismus der Katholischen Kirche
© 2010 by Pattloch Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, Munich, Germany

Nihil Obstat, March 3, 2010

Austrian Bishops' Conference Imprimatur, Austrian Bishops' Conference with the approval of the German Bishops' Conference, November 29, 2010; the Swiss Bishops' Conference, December 6, 2010 with the prior approval of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Congregation for the Clergy, and the Pontifical Congregation for the Laity.



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

Layout, Design, Illustrations by Alexander von Lengerke, Cologne, Germany
2011 (English language edition) published by Incorporated Catholic Truth
Society, London.

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ISBN 978-1-86082-728-0

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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



We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Rom 6:4



Through Baptism each child is inserted into a gathering of friends who never abandon him in life or in death. ... This group of friends, this family of God, into which the child is now admitted, will always accompany him, even on days of suffering and in life's dark nights; it will give him consolation, comfort, and light.

POPE BENEDICT XVI,
January 8, 2006



Therefore if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.

2 Cor 5:17

SECTION TWO

The Seven Sacraments of the Church

193 *Is there some inner logic that unites the sacraments with each other?*

ALL → SACRAMENTS are an encounter with Christ, who is himself the original sacrament. There are sacraments of → INITIATION, which introduce the recipient into the faith: Baptism, → CONFIRMATION, and → EUCHARIST. There are sacraments of healing: Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick. And there are sacraments of communion and mission: Matrimony and Holy Orders. [1210–1211]

Baptism joins us with Christ. Confirmation gives us his Spirit. The Eucharist unites us with him. Confession reconciles us with Christ. Through the Anointing of the Sick, Christ heals, strengthens, and consoles. In the sacrament of Matrimony, Christ promises his love in our love and his fidelity in our fidelity. Through the sacrament of Holy Orders, → PRIESTS have the privilege of forgiving sins and celebrating the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

CHAPTER ONE

The Sacraments of Initiation

The Sacrament of Baptism

194 *What is Baptism?*

Baptism is the way out of the kingdom of death into life, the gateway to the → CHURCH, and the beginning of a lasting communion with God. [1213–1216, 1276–1278]

Baptism is the foundational → SACRAMENT and the prerequisite for all other sacraments. It unites us with Jesus Christ, incorporates us into his redemptive death on the Cross, thereby freeing us from the power of Original Sin and all personal sins, and causes us to rise with him to a life without end. Since Baptism is a covenant with God, the individual must say Yes to it.

In the baptism of children, the parents confess the Faith on behalf of the children. → 197

195 *How is Baptism administered?*

The classical form of administering Baptism is the threefold immersion of the candidate in the water. Usually, however, water is poured three times over the head of the candidate, while the minister of the sacrament speaks the words, “N., I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” [1229–1245, 1278]

Water symbolizes cleansing and new life, which was already expressed in the baptism of repentance performed by John the Baptist. The Baptism that is administered with water “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” is more than a sign of conversion and repentance; it is *new life in Christ*. That is why the ceremony also includes the signs of anointing, the white garment, and the baptismal candle.

196 *Who can be baptized, and what is required of a candidate?*

Any person who is not yet baptized can be baptized. The only prerequisite for Baptism is faith, which must be professed publicly at the Baptism. [1246–1254]

A person who turns to Christianity is not just changing a world view. He travels a path of learning (the → CATECHUMENATE), in which he becomes a new man through personal conversion, but especially through the gift of Baptism. He is now a living member of the Body of Christ.

197 *Why does the Church adhere to the practice of infant Baptism?*

From antiquity the → CHURCH has practiced infant Baptism. There is one reason for this: before we decide on God, God has decided on us. Baptism is therefore a grace, an undeserved gift of God, who



Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Mt 28:19



The night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light ... Put on the Lord Jesus Christ [like a new garment].

Rom 13:12, 14



CATECHUMENATE

(from Greek *kat' echein* = to instruct, to teach by word of mouth): Especially in the early Church candidates for adult Baptism (catechumens) went through a three-stage preparation, the catechumenate, in which they were instructed in the faith and were gradually allowed to participate in the Liturgy of the Word.





” The gift received by newborn infants needs to be accepted by them freely and responsibly once they have reached adulthood: the process of growing up will then bring them to receive the sacrament of Confirmation, which precisely strengthens the baptized and confers upon each one the “seal” of the Holy Spirit.

POPE BENEDICT XVI,
January 8, 2006

accepts us unconditionally. Believing parents who want what is best for their child want Baptism also, in which the child is freed from the influence of original sin and the power of death. [1250, 1282]

Infant Baptism presupposes that Christian parents will raise the baptized child in the faith. It is an injustice to deprive the child of Baptism out of a mistaken liberality. One cannot deprive a child of love so that he can later decide on love for himself; so too it would be an injustice if believing parents were to deprive their child of God’s grace in Baptism. Just as every person is born with the ability to speak yet must learn a language, so too every person is born with the capacity to believe but must become acquainted with the faith. At any rate, Baptism can never be imposed on anyone. If someone has received Baptism as a little child, he must “ratify” it later in life – this means he must say Yes to it, so that it becomes fruitful.

198 *Who can administer Baptism?*

Normally a → BISHOP, a → PRIEST, or a → DEACON administers the sacrament of Baptism. In an emergency, any Christian, indeed anyone, can baptize