



## The Holy See

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### **PRESENTATION OF THE *COMPENDIUM***

### **OF THE *CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH* ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT**

*XVII* Tuesday, 28 June 2005 Dear Brothers and Sisters, 1. "May he enlighten your innermost vision that you may know the great hope to which he has called you, the wealth of his glorious heritage" in the saints (Eph 1: 18). This is the hope that St Paul raises to the God of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, in the passage from the Letter to the Ephesians that has just been proclaimed. We can never thank God, Our Father, enough for this immense treasure of hope and glory that he has given to us in his Son Jesus. Our constant commitment is to let ourselves be continuously enlightened by him, so as to become more and more deeply acquainted with his mysterious gift. The *Compendium* of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* which today, at this prayerful celebration, I have great joy in presenting to the Church and to the world, can and must be a privileged means of growth in the knowledge and joyful acceptance of this divine gift. 2. It sees the light after the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in 1992. Since then, there has been an ever more widespread and pressing need for a concise catechism that would contain all and only the essential, fundamental elements of Catholic faith and morals, simply expressed in a way that is clear, concise and accessible to all. Moreover, it is precisely in meeting this need that in the past 20 years numerous attempts at summing up the above-mentioned *Catechism* have been made in various languages and countries, some more successful than others. They brought up certain problems concerning not only the fidelity to and respect of the structure and content, but also the completeness and integrity of Catholic teaching. Hence, the need arose for an authoritative, reliable and complete text on the essential aspects of the Church's faith, in full harmony with the *Catechism* mentioned, approved by the Pope and destined for the whole Church. 3. The participants in the International Catechetical Congress expressed this widespread need in October 2002 and presented an explicit request to the Servant of God John Paul II. It has been just over two years since my Venerable Predecessor decided, in February 2003, on the drafting of a *Compendium* of this kind, realizing that it would be good not only for the universal and particular Churches, but also for today's world that is thirsting for truth. These have been two years of intense and fruitful work. All the Cardinals and the Presidents of the Bishops' Conferences have also been involved. The vast majority, when questioned on one of the last drafts of the *Compendium*, expressed a very positive opinion. 4. Today, on the eve of the Solemnity of Sts Peter and Paul, 40 years after the end of the Second Vatican Council, I feel deep joy in presenting this *Compendium*, which I have approved, not only to all the members of the

Church - most of whose various members are represented here - but also to all of you who are taking part in this solemn meeting. However, through you, Venerable Brother Cardinals, Bishops, priests, catechists and lay faithful, I would also like in spirit to consign this *Compendium* to every person of good will who desires to know the unfathomable riches of the saving mystery of Jesus Christ. It is not, of course, a new Catechism, but a *Compendium* that faithfully reflects the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which continues to be the source from which to draw for a better understanding of the *Compendium*, the model to look at ceaselessly in order to rediscover a harmonious and authentic explanation of Catholic faith and morals, as well as a reference point that must encourage the proclamation of the faith and the drafting of local catechisms. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, therefore, keeps intact its full authoritativeness and importance, and this synthesis will be an effective means to make it better known and used as a fundamental vehicle of education in the faith.<sup>5</sup> This *Compendium* is a renewed proclamation of the Gospel in our time. Furthermore, through this authoritative and reliable text, "let us carefully preserve the faith we received from the Church", in the words of St Irenaeus whose liturgical Memorial we are celebrating today, "because under the action of God's Spirit, like a deposit of great worth contained in a precious vase, it is continuously rejuvenating and also rejuvenates the vase that contains it (cf. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus Haereses*, 1, 10, 2; Sc 264, 158-160). The *Compendium* presents the faith in Christ Jesus. Following the four-part structure of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, it actually presents Christ professed as the Only-begotten Son of the Father, the perfect Revealer of God's truth and the definitive Saviour of the world; Christ, celebrated in the sacraments as the source and support of the life of the Church; Christ, listened to and followed in obedience to his Commandments, as the source of new life in love and in harmony; Christ, imitated in prayer, as the model and master of our prayerful attitude to the Father.<sup>6</sup> This faith is expounded in the *Compendium* in the form of a dialogue. Thus, it intends to "reproduce", as I wrote in the Introduction to the *Compendium*, "an imaginary dialogue between master and disciple through a series of incisive questions that invite the reader to go deeper in discovering ever new aspects of his faith". "The dialogical format also lends itself to brevity in the text by reducing it to the essential. This may help the reader to grasp the contents and possibly to memorize them as well". The brevity of the answers fosters the essential synthesis and clarity of what is being communicated.<sup>7</sup> Images have also been incorporated into the text at the beginning of the respective part or section. This choice aims to illustrate the doctrinal content of the *Compendium*: indeed, images "proclaim the same message that Sacred Scripture transmits through words and help to reawaken and nourish the faith of believers" (*Compendium*, n. 240). Images and words are thus mutually enlightening. Works of art always "speak", at least implicitly, of the divine, of the infinite beauty of God, reflected in the Icon par excellence: Christ the Lord, the Image of the invisible God. Sacred images, with their beauty, are also a Gospel proclamation and express the splendour of the Catholic truth, illustrating the supreme harmony between the good and the beautiful, between the *via veritatis* and the *via pulchritudinis*. While they witness to the age-old and fruitful tradition of Christian art, they urge one and all, believers and non-believers alike, to discover and contemplate the inexhaustible fascination of the mystery of Redemption, giving an ever new impulse to the lively process of its inculturation in time. The same

images are found in the various translations of the *Compendium*. This will also be a way to identify and recognize this text easily in the variety of languages: the one faith is professed by each member of the faithful in the multiplicity of ecclesial and cultural contexts.<sup>8</sup> The text includes an Appendix at the end which consists of several common prayers for the universal Church and several catechetical formulas of the Catholic faith. The appropriate decision to add several prayers to conclude the *Compendium* is an invitation to rediscover a common way of praying in the Church, not only personally but also in community. In each one of the translations, the majority of the prayers will also be presented in Latin. Learning them, even in this language, will make it easier for the Christian faithful who speak different languages to pray together, especially when they meet for special circumstances. As I said in 1997, on the occasion of the presentation to my Venerable Predecessor of the Typical Edition in Latin of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: "Precisely in the multiplicity of languages and cultures, Latin, for so many centuries the vehicle and instrument of Christian culture, not only guarantees continuity with our roots but continues to be as relevant as ever for strengthening the bonds of unity of the faith in the communion of the Church".<sup>9</sup> I am truly grateful to everyone who has worked on the publication of this important work, especially the Cardinal members of the special Commission and the editors and experts: all those who have collaborated with great dedication and competence. May the Lord God, who sees all things, in his infinite goodness reward them and bless them. May this *Compendium*, the fruit of their efforts but above all a gift that God bestows upon his Church in the third millennium, give a new impetus to evangelization and catechesis, on which depend "[not] only her geographical extension and numerical increase, but even more her inner growth and correspondence with God's plan" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 7). May Mary Most Holy and the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul support with their intercession this hope for the good of the Church and of humanity. And I impart my heartfelt Apostolic Blessing to you all.

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