



# The Holy See

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**LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO H. EM. CARD. JOSEPH RATZINGER  
FOR THE PREPARATION OF A COMPENDIUM  
OF THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

*To my Venerable Brother Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger  
Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*

Last 7 December, we marked the 10 years that have passed since the promulgation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), a decade that has demonstrated the importance of this text, desired and suggested by the Synod of Bishops in 1985. As I said to the participants in the International Catechetical Congress that gathered last October to commemorate this event, the *Catechism* has kept unaltered its character as a privileged *gift*, made available for the entire Catholic Church. It is a *gift* offered to every man and woman who asks Catholics to account for the hope that is in them, because they are interested in knowing what it is that the Church believes.

The far-reaching dissemination of the text in the different regions of the world is an obvious proof of its usefulness and timeliness. Especially in recent years, many summaries of the *Catechism* have been prepared in various languages and in many countries. This shows how broad and deeply felt is the need for a *brief compendium* which contains all the fundamental elements of Catholic faith and morals, formulated simply and clearly. Experience shows, however, that it is not easy in these syntheses always and entirely to preserve the full integrity of the content of the Catholic faith.

At the recent Congress, the urgent need to have a brief *Catechism* for the faithful emerged and many asked for an authoritative, reliable and complete compendium to be drafted. Indeed, it is indispensable that, on the essential aspects of Christian faith and morals, this text faithfully reflect the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

I too consider this to be a relevant proposal, and therefore, I ask you, Your Eminence, in accord with the Secretariate of State, to set up a Special Commission whose task it will be to draft a *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*. To this Commission, which you will head, will be joined an apposite Editorial Committee.

The *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* should contain, in a concise form, the essential, fundamental content of the faith of the Church whose completeness and doctrinal integrity it must fully respect so as to be a *vademecum* (handbook) that will allow persons, believing or not, to embrace in a general way, the entire panorama of the Catholic faith. It will take as its constant source, model and point of reference the current *Catechism of the Catholic Church* whose authority and importance will be kept intact. A *compendium* of this kind will be an incentive to examine the *Catechism* more deeply and, more generally speaking, will serve as a further instrument for education in the faith.

Before it is approved, the *Compendium* will be submitted for the assessment of all the Cardinals and the Presidents of the Bishops' Conferences.

I am conscious that this new publication will entail a great deal of work, but, confident in the help of God and knowing your capacity and industriousness, Your Eminence, and that of your collaborators, I am sure that it will be completed in a relatively short time.

As I thank you for the constant dedication that defines your service to the Apostolic See, and for the availability you have shown on this occasion, upon you and upon all who will work with you to produce the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, I invoke the motherly protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Incarnate Word, and I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to all.

*From the Vatican, 2 February 2003*

**IOANNES PAULUS II**