



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO A GROUP OF BISHOPS
FROM THE DIFFERENT EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES
IN THE ENGLISH-LANGUAGE COUNTRIES**

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

I gladly welcome this occasion of the launching of the English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, an occasion which has brought you together today, to thank the various English-speaking Bishops' Conferences, and you in particular, for all that has been done to prepare this text and for your efforts now to promote its distribution.

I express my deep appreciation to those who have contributed to this translation. Your task has certainly not been an easy one. It has required fruitful collaboration between Bishops and experts from the different Episcopal Conferences in the English-language countries and representatives of the Roman Curia, especially the members of the special Interdicasterial Commission set up in February 1993 to deal with all questions regarding the *Catechism* following its promulgation. It has thus been possible to prepare a single translation for use in the many countries of the world where English is spoken, a translation which is faithful to the text of the *Catechism* which I approved for the whole Church on 8 December 1992, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception.

We are all well aware of the importance of this publication, which responds to a deeply felt need on the part of millions of English-speaking faithful who desire to read and meditate upon the text of the *Catechism*, seeking therein a full and balanced exposition of the Catholic truth professed, celebrated, lived and prayed by the Church throughout the world.

At the first meeting, held in November 1986, of the Commission established to draw up the *Catechism* in accordance with the recommendation of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, I recalled that: "a catechism is not the same thing as catechesis. Whereas a catechism is a compendium of the Church's doctrine, 'catechesis, as that ecclesial activity which leads

communities and individual Christians to maturity in faith' (*General Catechetical Directory*, 21), passes on this doctrine by methods adapted to the age, culture and circumstances of different persons, so that Christian truth can become, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, the life of believers". At the same time, as the age-old experience of the Church clearly demonstrates, the texts used in catechetical instruction are of fundamental importance in an exact formulation of the Christian message and the Church's teaching.

Consequently, we can consider as fully justified the great care and the amount of time and resources which many individuals and institutions have given to the task of drawing up this text and then translating it into the various modern languages. This is all the more readily understandable if we consider that the "[Catechism of the Catholic Church](#)" - as I wrote in the Apostolic Constitution "[Fidei Depositum](#)" - is meant to serve as "a valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion" and as "a sure and authentic reference text for teaching Catholic doctrine and particularly for preparing local catechisms".

As a result, the publication of the *Catechism*, to say nothing of the publication of each of its modern language translations, represents a highly significant ecclesial event. The *Catechism* is a precious gift primarily entrusted to you, the Bishops, who, "as teachers of the faith and pastors of the Church" ([Catechism of the Catholic Church](#), n. 12), are the ones chiefly responsible for catechesis at every level. Through you, it is entrusted to all Catholics and to all who seek an account of the hope that is in us (Cf. 1Pt. 3: 15). The times in which we live, especially in the vast areas of the world where English is spoken, are marked by great promise and at the same time by elements of concern. As you carry out your mission to bear authoritative and courageous witness to the apostolic faith, preserved and taught by the Church down the centuries, you will find in the *Catechism* an excellent means to help you in responding fully to the thirst for the Truth experienced by so many people today, as well as in meeting the need for clear moral teaching on questions vitally affecting individuals and society.

It is true that it will be necessary to prepare local catechisms adapted to the specific needs of the faithful. These in turn must make the "[Catechism of the Catholic Church](#)" their effective and all-encompassing point of reference. In this way national and diocesan catechisms, having their own catechetical and pastoral language and methods, will faithfully communicate what the Universal Church believes and teaches, as expounded fully and systematically in the "*Catechism of the Catholic Church*".

The *Catechism* is an instrument at the service of the unity and universality of God's people. Here we have a sure point of reference for all catechesis, an appropriate means of formation for catechists and adults, a support for the new evangelization, a reference work for theological research, and an aid to personal and community prayer. Difficulties with translation or expression ought not to lessen appreciation of its great value for the life of the whole Christian community. We must not cease to give thanks to God who bestowed on the Church as a grace the idea, the

realization and the completed work of the Catechism. I welcome and encourage every initiative which you and your Brother Bishops will promote to make the Catechism as widely known and used as possible.

In this month specially dedicated to Mary, on the feast of whose Immaculate Conception the *Catechism* was solemnly promulgated, may her powerful intercession sustain the whole English-speaking Church's commitment to embrace the *Catechism* and take it to heart, so that the bonds of ecclesial communion may be strengthened and the genuine renewal of ecclesial life be further enhanced.

Praying that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ will confirm you in this endeavour, I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to the Churches and lands which you represent.

From the Vatican, 27 May 1994.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II