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Foreword

The intention of this booklet is to help us grow in faith and love. To be a Christian is to embrace and live the truth revealed by God in Jesus Christ. This truth is handed on securely in the Tradition and the Scriptures of the Catholic Church by means of the teaching office with which Christ endowed his Church. Pope John Paul II's call for a new evangelization is prompted by the silent loss of faith in a large part of Christianity. Faith is replaced often by a tolerance which makes all truth relative.

No one is Catholic on his or her own terms: not the pope, not bishops or priests, not religious, not laypeople. It is necessary to accept with integrity the body of belief which the Church, the Body of Christ, holds to be true. Whether one is a member of the company of believers or a theologian or teacher of the apostolic faith in it, all of us are bound by the Church's rule of faith. It is not enough for an individual to read the Bible, praiseworthy though that is in itself, in order to grasp the meaning of what is in those inspired texts. It is necessary to do so in light of the faith of the Church. There are aspects of understanding which become available to the indi-

vidual only because the Church's Tradition makes them intelligible.

This booklet carries in it a selection of Catholic prayers. We cannot know Christ, we cannot live the faith of the Church without prayer, which unites our hearts to God. It is essential to accept the truths of the faith, but those truths have to become one's own personal adhesion to God in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. The objective truth of the faith has to be interiorized to become the basis of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ that will change and shape one's life. Here and now one must begin to live by the knowledge that one day will be the vision of God in heaven.

This little book comes as a challenge to Catholics to be alert to contemporary difficulties of belief. It is a support in living the faith. It is an invitation to keep close to the teaching of the Church in order to draw closer to God. The immediate source of the teaching set out here is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which is the "new authoritative exposition of the one and perennial apostolic faith." The *Catechism* is "a sure norm for teaching the faith" and remains the basic text; a useful piece of writing such as the present booklet simply helps make some of its teaching more accessible not claiming to be complete or to cover all important questions equally well. It can, however, serve to lead the reader to the text of the *Catechism*. May the reader use it well and grow in faith and love.

*Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I.
Archbishop of Chicago*

Introduction

We live in a new century. We live in a place where we can explore the planets around us and talk about living on the moon. This is much different from the beginning of the twentieth century. That was a century of dreams and plans and promise. Sometimes the dreams succeeded beyond all expectation. For most of the twentieth century the Catholic Church stood as a seemingly unchanging reality that helped us keep our balance.

The Catholic Church in the third millennium is both different from the Church of the twentieth century and the same as that Church. The Second Vatican Council in the second half of the twentieth century set the Church on a path of renewal. In the midst of that renewal, we look to the unchanging things that we believe and the developing ways in which we can express those beliefs.

The purpose of this handbook is to look at some basic doctrines of the Catholic Church and explain them for the present generation. Here you will find the unchanging truths revealed by God seen through the filter of modern culture. There is no new teaching here. There is no ambiguous expla-

nation. There is today's language and scholarship explaining the truths from Genesis to Revelation. The explanations are faithful to the great ecumenical council of our age, Vatican II.

You will also find in these pages some of the prayers and practices of the Catholic Church. These things do change, of course, over the centuries. Each culture and age finds appropriate ways of celebrating Mass, praying to God, and honoring the saints. The essentials, though, do not change.

One of the great projects of the Church in the past century was to prepare and publish a universal *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. This edition of the *Handbook* is fully indexed to the *Catechism*. The numbers found in square brackets, “[],” refer you to specific articles in the *Catechism*. You will also find references to documents from Vatican II cited in the text where appropriate.

Section One: Beliefs. This section relies upon the Nicene Creed, the summary of our beliefs as Catholics, to explain the revelation Jesus gives us. In this part of the *Handbook* are the teachings about Jesus, the Holy Trinity, the Church, the sacraments, and other basic dogmas that Catholics believe and by which they live.

Section Two: Practices. Here you will find the fundamental moral teaching of the Church. Morality is about how we behave—how we act—in this world. The basis of the moral teaching is the Ten Commandments, but the precepts of the Church are also mentioned here. There are some practical points about sacraments, holy days, and some other elements of Catholic practices.

Section Three: Prayers. Prayer is communication with God. As individuals we pray and as the universal Church we pray together in our liturgy. Section Three offers some prayers common to Catholics.

Section Four: Living the Faith in the Spirit of Vatican II. This expanded section of the *Handbook* explains the influence Vatican II continues to have on Catholic practice and belief. The Church after Vatican II is one that offers expanded roles for the laity in the Church. This council also emphasized the importance of the liturgy in the life of the Church and called for renewal of our understanding of Scripture, sacraments, social responsibility, faith formation, and evangelization. This section also treats the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults that was renewed and expanded after the Council.

SECTION ONE

Beliefs

1. You the Seeker, God the Seeker

Man is by nature and vocation a religious being. Coming from God, going toward God, man lives a fully human life only if he freely lives by his bond with God.

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, 44

You: A Human Being Who Seeks God

[1, 1701-1715]

As a human person you ask questions and you make decisions. You wonder about things, which is where your questions come from, and you choose what to do and how to act, which are your decisions. These two things reveal that you have a *free will* that enables you to choose, and a questioning *intellect* [1-3].

*The ultimate
reality you
seek...is God.*

Things change over time. The way you look, the way you view life will change. At your core, you do not change. You are constantly reaching out, seeking that for which you were created. This questing, spiritual core of your being has been called by many names. Common names for it are *soul*, *spirit*, or *heart* [27, 44-47].

The Ultimate Reality you seek—which is present in everything you reach out to—has also been called by many names. The most common name for this Ultimate Reality is *God* [43]. You are so bound to God that without him you would not live or move or have your being. You are so bound to God that if you did not sense his presence in some way, you would view life as pointless and cease to seek... [1701-1715, 1718].

God: The Divine Lover Who Found You

[50-53, 142, 1719]

Meanwhile, as you seek God, God seeks you. The Vatican II *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* expresses it this way: “The invisible God, from the fullness of his love, addresses men and women as his friends, and lives among them, in order to invite and receive them into his own company” (2) [1719].

As a Catholic you are called to seek and find Christ. But you did not begin this quest on your own initiative. The initiative was all God’s. All who follow Christ were once lost but were searched for and found. God first found you and made you visibly his in baptism. What he seeks now is that you seek him. In a mysterious way your whole life with God is an

ongoing quest for each other by two lovers—God and you—who already possess each other [50-53, 521].

2. Revelation, Faith, Doctrine, and Doubt

God wished to manifest and communicate both himself and the eternal decrees of his will concerning the salvation of humankind.

DOGmatic CONSTITUTION ON DIVINE REVELATION, 6

Revelation and Faith

[50-64]

In revealing, God has not only communicated information; he has communicated *himself* to you. Your personal response to God’s communication of himself and his will is called *faith*. “By faith one freely commits oneself entirely to God, making ‘the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals,’ and willingly assenting to the revelation given by God” (*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, 5) [36-38, 51-53, 142, 143, 153-164, 1814-1816].

Catholic Doctrine

[84-100]

The words we use to explain what God has revealed to us about our relationship with him are called doctrines or dogmas. The key characteristic of the Church’s dogmas is that they agree with sacred Scripture. The teachings communicate the unchangeable content of revelation by using the changeable thought-forms and languages of people in every

SECTION TWO

Practices

1. God's Two Great Commandments

[1877]

The basis of all law (your rule of life) rests on two commandments: “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.... You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37,39) [2055, 2083].

2. Commandments of God

[2084-2557]

These are an extension of the two great commandments. The first three tell you how to love your God; the rest show you how to love your neighbor [2196].

The Ten Commandments

1. I am the Lord your God; you shall not have strange Gods before me [2084-2141].
2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain [2142-2167].
3. Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day [2168-2195].
4. Honor your father and your mother [2197-2257].
5. You shall not kill [2258-2330].
6. You shall not commit adultery [2331- 2400].
7. You shall not steal [2401-2463].
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor [2464-2513].
9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife [2514-2533].
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods [2534-2557].

SECTION THREE

Prayers

[2559-2565, 2697-2699]

Introductory Note

According to an ancient definition, prayer is “keeping company with God.” Prayer is *you* relating to God in the deepest recesses of your personality. It is you seeking and communing with the living God—responding to him as he has made himself known to you through the teachings of the Church.

As intimately personal as it is, prayer makes use of word formulas. Liturgical prayer—the official community prayer of the Church—uses approved formulas. So does unofficial group prayer. Even in solitary private prayer, traditional formulas can be of great help.

At its most personal, private prayer is spontaneous or impromptu—and sometimes even wordless. Nonetheless, formulas are practical helps for breaking into prayer and expressing faith. For this reason some of the most loved, time-approved formulas of Catholic devotion are offered here—prayers that express the whole range of prayerful attitudes:

adoration, thanksgiving, petition, and atonement. Also offered in this section is a suggested method of private meditative prayer [2700-2704].

There are prayers that Catholics learn from their youngest days. The following are those basic Catholic prayers.

1. Sign of the Cross

[232-237]

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. (*Said at the beginning and end of prayers.*)

2. Our Father

[2759-2865]

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

3. Hail Mary

[2676, 2677]

Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.