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Straight Catholicism for the Curious

Purgatory. The Seven Sacraments. Mary and the Saints. The Pope and the Vatican. When we hear these terms, we instantly think of the Roman Catholic Church, the oldest institution in the western world. Yet despite its massive membership, public profile, and long history, numerous myths and misconceptions about Catholicism exist, even among the church's own members. Countless books and websites on Catholicism are available, but many are overly evangelistic or riddled with jargon. Those who seek a candid, conversational account of Catholic beliefs, however—be they non-Christians, non-Catholic Christians, or even curious Catholics—now need look no further than Jack Mulder's new book, *What Does It Mean to Be Catholic?*

"When I joined the Catholic Church ten years ago," Mulder writes, "I would have found something like this book to be helpful, and that is why I wrote it." As someone who was raised as a Protestant but converted to Catholicism as an adult, Mulder brings a fresh, honest perspective to his readers. He makes no effort to hide his love for Catholicism, but his writing reflects a desire to give readers the information they seek, not to convert them.

In eight accessible chapters, Mulder addresses such matters as "The Church and Her Magisterium," "Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory," and "The Human Person," which covers more controversial topics like contraception and abortion. Other hot-button issues, such as women's ordination and homosexuality, are also addressed in this book. Mulder's explanations are thorough but easy to understand, as he illustrates Catholic teachings using relatable analogies from his personal experience. He also discusses opposing viewpoints of other religions, encouraging readers to consider every angle for themselves.

As a professor of philosophy at a religious university, Mulder is well qualified to write a learned book on religion, but his sympathetic, conversational tone sets this book apart. Every chapter involves some personal, often humorous, anecdote about himself and his family or friends. Along the way, he celebrates his Dutch heritage, bemoans his lack of hair, and recalls an argument with his young daughter who unwittingly wore her nightshirt backwards. He shares more serious experiences as well, including a conversation with his Protestant parents about purgatory and the difficulty he faced living in a mixed Protestant/Catholic marriage.

While Mulder never casts doubt on his Catholic faith, he admits he still has much to learn, and he hopes that interfaith dialogue might move people of all religions—or no religion—closer together. "I hope that all non-Catholic readers of this book enjoy it," he writes, "but I also want to invite them to challenge its conclusions if they disagree. . . . For unity to progress, Christians must first understand why we are *not* one. . . . Only then can we fully experience the longing of Christ's own Sacred Heart."

Review copies of *What Does It Mean to Be Catholic?* are available upon request. To schedule an interview with the author, please contact publicist Ingrid Wolf.