

## Featured Review

### 'An Extraordinary Book'<sup>1</sup>

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Brendan Leahy

Young people travelling to the World Youth Day in Madrid last August found a copy of *YouCat* included in the 'pilgrim-pack' given to them. The handsome bright yellow-coloured book, with high quality graphics, quality paper, images and pictures is an attempt to present the Church's summary of the Gospel message to a new generation that so often is unable to relate to what's currently on offer in Church circles.

One of Pope Benedict's first acts when he became Pope was to publish the *Compendium of the Catholic Church*, a shorter version of the Catechism. However, in his preface to *YouCat* he calls this Youth Catechism 'an extraordinary book' which he clearly is enthusiastic to promote.

Cardinal Schoenborn of Vienna undertook the initiative. Along with young people he has put together a catechism for young people to help them 'to know and live the faith of the Church'. The actual shape of the material is similar to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: what is it we believe? (Creed), how do we celebrate our faith? (sacraments) how do we live our life in Christ? (commandments), how are we to pray? (the Our Father). The format is question and answer (there are 527 questions) but after each answer there are short commentaries that aim at helping the reader understand the significance of the topic under consideration. Other references to Scripture, saints, writers and doctors of the Church are also provided.

#### POPE BENEDICT'S ADVICE TO YOUNG PEOPLE

In his preface to *YouCat*, Pope Benedict repeats a comment he has so often made – the faith needs to be translated into language that can be understood. He shares how he himself had reservations when Pope John Paul II entrusted him with the task of putting

1. *YouCat: Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011).

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together the Catechism of the Catholic Church. How was that to be done when you consider the geographical spread of Catholics and the sheer variety of language, culture and life experiences? And yet, he saw come to life what he called the 'miracle' of a book that, despite the limits that will always be part of every human enterprise, is a great sign of unity in diversity.

Work on that Catechism, nevertheless, also convinced him that it needed to be translated further. He recounts how for him and others who worked on the Catechism, it became ever more apparent that the text needed to be 'translated' for different cultural worlds, in order to reach people in those worlds in ways that correspond to their own questions and ways of thinking.

Naturally, they were thinking of young people in particular:

In this context we asked ourselves if we should not seek to translate the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* into the language of young people and make its words penetrate their world. Of course also among the young people of today there are many differences; thus, under the tested guidance of the archbishop of Vienna, Christoph Schoenborn, a *YouCat* was formatted for young people. I hope that many young people will let themselves be fascinated by this book.

In a robust act of trust in young people and with his typically engaging imagery, the Pope comments:

Some persons tell me that the catechism does not interest today's youth, but I do not believe this affirmation and I am sure I am right. Youth is not as superficial as it is accused of being; young people want to know what life truly consists of. A crime novel is fascinating because it involves us in the fate of other persons, but which could also be our own; this book is fascinating because it speaks to us of our very destiny and that is why it concerns each one of us very closely.

Just as young people recognise their need to know computer skills or artistic forms, so too they need to know the faith. Pope Benedict suggests that young people need to know their faith more than their parents did. And so he encourages them:

Study the catechism with passion and perseverance! Sacrifice your time for it! Study it in the silence of your room, read it together, if you are friends, form groups and study networks, exchange ideas on the Internet. In any case remain in dialogue on your faith!

Pope Benedict in the Preface to *YouCat* acknowledges how young people can be turned off by scandals: You all know in what way the community of believers has been wounded in recent times by the attacks of evil, by the penetration of sin in the interior, in fact in the heart of the Church.' And yet he urges them 'Do not take this as a pretext to flee from God's presence; you yourselves are the Body of Christ, the Church! Carry intact the fire of your love in this Church every time that men have obscured her face'. He points to the example of the people of Israel when it reached its darkest point in its history. It was precisely then that 'God called to the rescue no great and esteemed persons, but a youth called Jeremiah; Jeremiah felt invested with too great a mission: "Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth!" (Jeremiah 1:6). But God did not let himself be misled: "Do not say, 'I am only a youth"'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak' (Jeremiah 1:7).

#### A BOOK IS NOT ENOUGH

When it comes to the transmission of the faith we profess books alone are not enough. Pope Benedict knows that. Already in the 20th World Day in Germany he encouraged young people to 'form communities based on faith!' and added how in recent decades groups, movements and communities have come to birth in which the power of the Gospel is keenly felt. There is a lively interactive dynamic in these communities and that is important. It is clear that *YouCat* will need to be used in a pastorally creative way. Bringing a few young people together to read the text will not be enough. It requires a creative linking of life experience and dialogue, actions and reflection. And that'll mean investing time with young people. But it is worth experimenting with the text, remembering above all that to communicate the faith is not only about 'what' our faith entails but about 'who' it is we believe in.

*YouCat* comes in a year when the first *National Directory for Catechesis* in Ireland, *Share the Good News* was launched.<sup>2</sup> In his remarks at the launch, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin pointed out that the *Directory* 'is not a magic formula or a programme which can be launched in the way one would launch a sales push or a political platform. Faith is a deeper matter; it is a matter of a deep encounter between the individual and God.' The same could be said about *YouCat*. And yet it can be a valuable tool. It is clear to all that the transmission of the faith to the next generation is one of the major tasks and problems of the Church today. Archbishop

2. Dublin: Veritas, 2011.

## THE FURROW

Martin saw the *Directory* as 'an invitation to break away from our current situation which is overly school-oriented and bring back into the picture in a more focused way the central role of the parish and the family.' Catechesis does not end with the Leaving Cert. The *YouCat* initiative could be a helpful tool to achieve some of the goals of the *Directory* in terms of parish, group and family catechesis as we move towards the *Year of Faith* called by Pope Benedict.

**Building the crib.** The crib is still at hand to provide a stunning incarnation of Advent words. The crib can be set up on the First Sunday of Advent and people can be added on subsequent Sundays, crowning it with the infant at Midnight Mass. A lectern with as big and beautiful a Bible as can be found can be set out by the "stable". The ox and the ass can be placed at the lectern's foot. Nearby the Angel Gabriel can stand, for he comes out of the Book of Daniel, a witness to the final coming (Daniel 8:16 and 9:21). It is not easy to try something new. But if our cribs are built throughout Advent and not in a hurried and hidden afternoon on Christmas Eve in preparation for Midnight Mass, they will be built in the sight of the people and the mystery can be explained of our journey together towards the coming (then, now, and in the time to come) of Jesus Messiah, Son of God.

— JOSEPH O'HANLON, 'Slow Steps to Behtlehem' (*The Tablet*, 12 November 2011) p.15