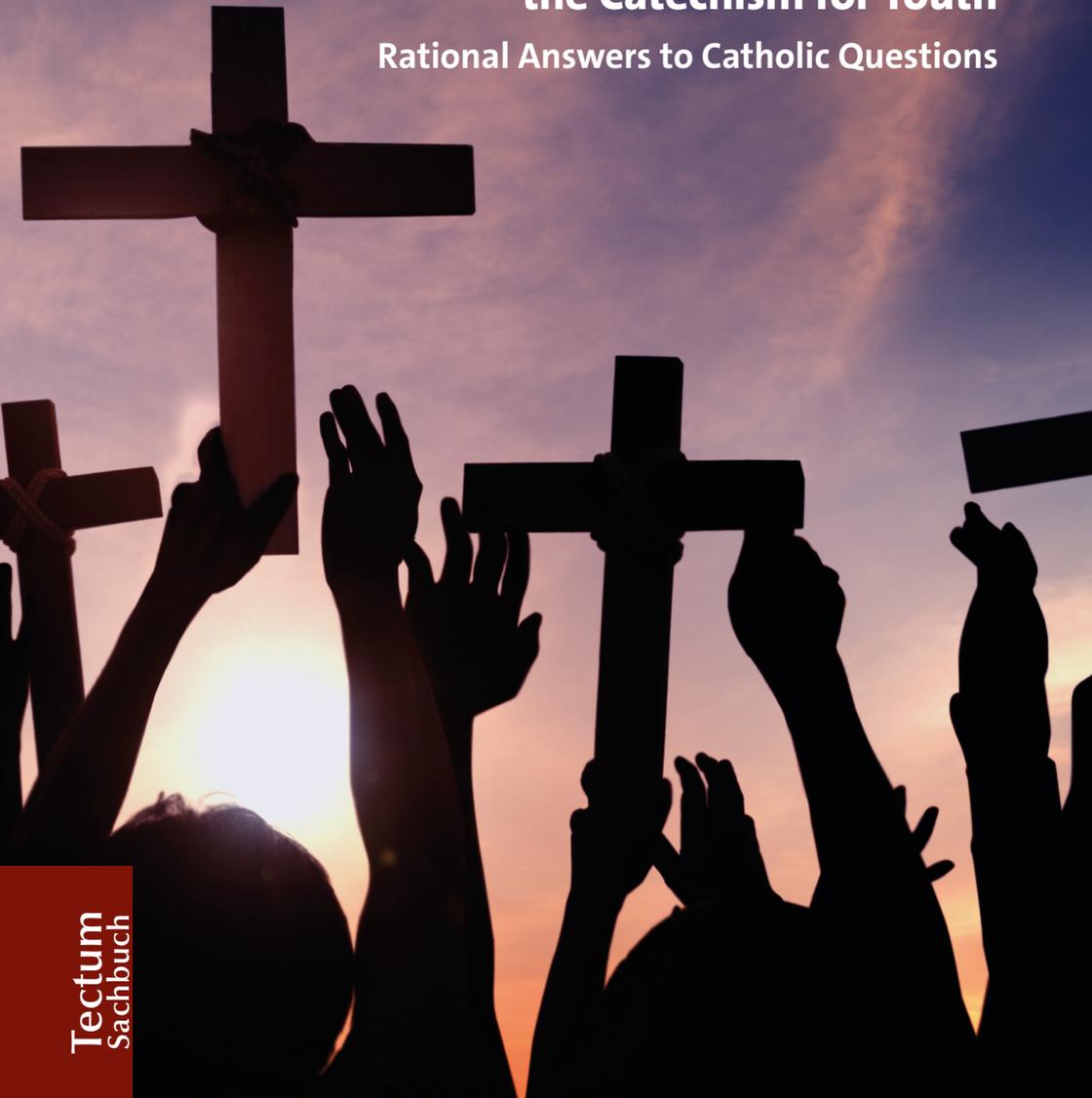


Heinz-Werner Kubitza

How the Catholic Church Seduces the Youth

**A Criticism of *Youcat*,
the Catechism for Youth**

Rational Answers to Catholic Questions



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Foreword

“How the Catholic Church Seduces the Youth” – reading that title, many will possibly think first of all of the cases of abuse that have convulsed the Catholic Church in recent years. But whoever thinks this book deals with that dark chapter of the Catholic Church, whoever is expecting salacious details, has got it wrong. In this book we are dealing with a mental or spiritual seduction printed in large numbers, for which responsibility is claimed not by individual priests but the Catholic Church as a whole institution.

In March 2011 there appeared in the German book market the German edition of the Catholic catechism for young people, *Youcat*. Printed as an easy-to-manage volume with bright pictures and a foreword by Benedict XVI, that book enjoyed an unusually big success. After three months more than 100,000 copies had been sold. The Catholic Church has big ambitions with this catechism for youth. It has been translated into 72 languages, and more than 5 million copies have already been sold. 750,000 (!) free copies are said to have been handed out at the World Day of Youth in Madrid alone. Next to the two books on Jesus by Pope Ratzinger, that catechism for the young, *Youcat*, is probably the biggest publishing campaign of the Catholic Church in years.

The comprehensive attempt to obtain a firm foothold in the thinking and personality of children and adolescents, to attract them to a dubious set of dogmas with absurd teachings and dogmas, gave rise to this book. Instead of stimulating and appealing to belief in an allegedly modern fashion, the book will stimulate and appeal to reason in an allegedly old-fashioned way.

The title may seem provocative. Must we really speak of *seduction*? Does not the Church also have a right to present itself in the market of possibilities and to find followers? But that the expression is justified is just what this book sets out to prove. It again asks the 165 questions of *Youcat* that deal with the basis of the Catholic faith

and gives for every question its own *critical* answer. It will be shown from question to question that many statements in *Youcat* are, first of all, simply *flippant*, and secondly that the Church that makes them shows many characteristics of an *ideology*, in this case a religious ideology unacceptable in a pluralistic and open society. Both characteristics, flippancy and the stain of ideology, linked with the powerful propaganda machinery set in motion by the Catholic Church to spread its catechism for youth, justify us in speaking not of *promotion* but of *seduction*.

In anticipation of the critical answers to the Catholic questions, that is the first justification.

The Catholic Church is *flippant* with the catechism it has published for the following reasons:

- *Youcat* consistently conceals from its readers results of research on the historical Jesus. It gives no indication that the picture of Jesus in the Church is vastly different from a scholarly view of Jesus, and that the Church presents an artificial and scientifically indefensible picture of Jesus. Such a procedure is flippant.
- *Youcat* conceals that the majority of New Testament scholars active today is of the opinion that the stories of the birth are later legends, the reports of miracles are mostly unhistorical, or that happenings from the environment have been assigned to Jesus, that the historical Jesus of Nazareth presumably did *not* see himself as a Messiah, and that he proclaimed God, yes, but not himself.
- *Youcat* conceals from its readers that New Testament research assumes that the teachings on Jesus (christology) were more and more escalated after his death. The human was slowly changed into a God.
- *Youcat* conceals from its readers the knowledge of modern historical scholarship on the early history of the Church. Remarks on that topic are introduced only when they can

support the dogmatic system of the Church. But critical facts are not mentioned.

- *Youcat* conceals from its readers that scholarly research has long since proved that many parts of the gospels do not contain historical material, but are inventions of the Christian community. That is expressly true also for many statements of Jesus, especially in John's gospel, which is regarded by researchers as almost completely an invention of the evangelist and his community.
- *Youcat* argues in an unhistorical manner with quotations from Jesus even though those are, with a probability bordering on certainty, later inventions. Adolescents have to get the impression that the Bible is homogeneous and trustworthy. But researchers have been able to show beyond doubt that that view is indeed pious but clearly false.
- *Youcat* suggests to its readers that the origins of the office of priest, the office of bishop, and of the Catholic hierarchy are derived from Jesus himself. However, serious scholarship places those origins in a much later time. Those facts too *Youcat* does not at all mention.
- *Youcat* mostly promotes or demands a literal interpretation of the Bible, even when it deals with obviously literary texts, for example in the story of creation or of the deluge. From literary texts it draws historical conclusions.
- The Catholic Church is in many places in *Youcat*, as in its other catechisms, guilty of false labeling, e. g., when it is suggested that in central concepts of his proclamation (the kingdom of God, the Spirit of God, hell, gentiles, end-time visions, the Son of Man) Jesus already thought in the dogmas that was fixed much later in councils. The *Spirit of God* Jesus understood in a totally different way from the later dogma of the Church. The adolescents learn nothing about that. *Youcat* is interested less in an historical picture of Jesus than in the dogmatic decisions on him made by the Church.

- The Catholic Church also attempts in *Youcat* to create the impression that later dogmatic developments, such as the teaching on the Trinity and the two natures, are implicitly contained in the New Testament texts. New Testament research sees that differently.
- *Youcat* makes out that it is modern, but in its contents it makes no concessions to a modern understanding of Catholicism. It clings to the old dogmatic positions of the Catholic Church. A discussion of that with adolescents is presented pro forma, but is actually not desired.
- *Youcat* is promoted with the claim that adolescents participated in its composition. But in fact it seems that their influence was limited to the choice of photos. And presumably those adolescents were almost totally youngsters who already believed and even because of their age could scarcely have been able to formulate positions contrary to the usual dogmatic teachings of Catholicism.
- Hence the adolescents were only means to an end; the conversations with them were in the last analysis feigned dialogs with the aim of selling and advertising the Youth Catechism better. Actually questions that are of particular impact for adolescents (sexuality, other religions, hell, infallibility, equal rights for women) are all answered in line with the official magisterium, and nowhere do they leave the well-worn path of Catholic dogma. A dialog looks different.

All of that is flippant. Ostensibly *Youcat* favors openness towards science, but mentions it nowhere where it contradicts the dogmatic positions of the Church. But a merely verbal acceptance of science is unscientific.

That flippancy is comprehensible from *the Catholic Church's being tainted with ideology*. Catholicism is a major representative of religious ideology. That can be recognized in the following points:

- The Catholic Church makes for itself a special claim to truth. It cannot err in questions of faith, and so cannot be criticized either. Such a view is ideological.
- It invokes holy writings that are supposed to prove that truth, but were made holy writings by the Church itself.
- A magisterial politburo watches over the correct interpretation of those holy writings and bans interpretations that differ.
- Like a radical political party, it claims to have understood the law of history, enthuses over a proto-community, and expects a kingdom of peace that will come about when all enemies have been disposed of by divine judgment.
- The Catholic Church detests democratic structures in its own organization and is hierarchically built up. The upper echelons are co-opted, not elected. That hierarchy is derived and justified in a religious way.
- The leaders of that hierarchy enjoy quasi-religious reverence. As with a May Day procession, the leaders are the center of a ritualism aiming at pomp and circumstance.
- The religious foot soldiers on the other hand have almost no possibility of influencing the hierarchy. They are to be led by the Church.
- Like other ideologies the Catholic Church too has big problems with elementary basic rights, such as freedom of opinion, freedom of religion, or the equality of women. And the disenfranchisement of women is justified on religious grounds.
- The Catholic Church adheres to a religious-ideological world view that it upholds even when its unscientific nature has long been proved. It demands of its followers the internalization of that false world view.

The similarity of the Catholic Church to a political ideology has often been noted and described. That, together with the flippancy we have remarked, quite justifies speaking of *seduction of youth*. Just how that happens will be illustrated in this book question for question.

The anticipated objection that certainly will be raised as a reaction to the title, namely that Socrates was accused of *seduction of youth*, is not convincing. Unlike the Church, Socrates was on the search for truth and did not imagine he was in possession of it.

Adolescents deserve something better than old and long since refuted religious cant that does not get more correct through ritual repetition. Young people are generally more open-minded, more tolerant, and more freedom-loving than the somewhat rigid gentlemen of an old religion. We can only hope that they do not fall into the net of the Catholic fishers of men (Mark 1:17), and are not ideologically twisted by outsiders, but try to lead a life in free responsibility and self-determined goals; that they prefer to observe human rights rather than the Ten Commandments, feel themselves committed to human dignity instead of church services.

The Pope's call: "I invite you: Study this catechism! That is my heartfelt desire," we cannot support. We do not have to accept every invitation. And the Pope's statement: "You must know what you believe," really means: "You must know what you *should* believe." It is Catholic tradition to present the contents of the faith, not to discuss.

Hence this book aims to do what the Catholic Church on principle does not *want to* do, that is, to allow critical voices and questions to be heard and to give reasonably rational answers to Catholic questions. The intention is not to do that in a humorlessly serious way, but in a quite ironic manner. In any case, the new answers to the 165 questions offer a critical contrast to *Youcat*, and it is definitely desired that you switch channels and compare the programs. "Study the catechism!" the Pope exhorts young people. But then please study also the critical objections to the catechism! Or as the apostle Paul put it: "Examine everything, keep the best" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

The ecclesiastical magisterium will certainly be of a different opinion. Here I wish to send it hearty greetings.

Marburg, December 2018

Heinz-Werner Kubitzka

Love of God as the meaning of life?

1 For what purpose are we on earth?

Youcat asks as the first thing the question of the meaning of life. And the representatives of an ideology, in this case a religious ideology, mostly are not able to do otherwise than prescribe the *same* meaning for all men. Just as in the countries of the old, actually existing socialism, all were condemned to construct that socialism and serve it, in a religious ideology like Catholicism every person is supposed to *get to know God and love him*. Immediately the question is raised: what about people who do not want to follow that? Who see for their lives other paths and other goals than the beaten track of Catholic paths? Who believe in another God than the Catholic one? Or in no God at all? Who as individuals do not want to decide for a ready-made life off the religious shelf, or to have any standards and goals set for them? They have been dealt bad cards. For dissidents, whether religious or political, no ideology lets them rest in peace; they are distrustfully observed and persecuted. That persecution of people of another faith or free thinkers has been bloodily carried out by the Catholic Church for centuries. Today it cannot do that any more, but there is still the threat of hell, because all who do not want to jump through the hoop held out by Catholics will not “some day go to heaven”. For them there is only the other place in the transcendental world.

Adolescents – and not only they – should be critical on principle towards all who want to cheat them into believing that the meaning of existence consists of a very specific behavior or in the acceptance and pious repetition of quite specific ideological faith teachings. They should not let any guru or pope or sect leader or fisher of men take the conduct of their life out of their own hands. Bearers of salvation and their propagandists are *per se* suspicious, however nicely they might smile and invoke old traditions. It is always

false when the variety of blueprints for life and the manifold ways of thinking and living are supposed to be forced into the narrow channels of an allegedly unique and true religious or political ideology. Human beings have for too long suffered under religious paternalism of thought. In many countries they are still suffering under it today. Enlightened societies have been able to free themselves of that religious domination only with difficulty. Instead of allowing eloquent political or religious preachers to capture us and incorporate us in their intended uniform society, each one of us should ourselves give our life a meaning chosen by ourselves and on our own responsibility. It is of course more difficult to shape our lives on our own responsibility than to surrender to the pressure of the mob. But it is part of human dignity to try to do it.

2 Why did God create us?

Did he really create us? According to the position taken up by current scientific research the human species – and all other living beings as well – has come about in an evolutionary process stretching over billions of years, and has in no way originated from the creative act of a God.

If God had created man, would he not have proceeded in an extremely strange way? First of all, populating the earth over billions of years with unicellular creatures; then through the invention of sexuality creating a rapid advance to higher life forms; in an obviously directionless process making a wild variety of living beings appear and then vanish; making more than 99 % of all of our ancestral species die out; populating the earth over many millions of years with gigantic dinosaurs and then annihilating them too and leaving the way open to small rodents, and from them then via thousands of intermediate stages developing man? Would you act like that if you were a God? And would not such a creator also be responsible for the

innumerable bacteria and viruses on the earth that sometimes decimate in a brutal way even his believers? The malaria pathogen, the Ebola virus, and many other deadly little creatures (that of course snatch away the poor first), are they also creatures of God? Have you been created, as the author of *Youcat* seems to suggest, “from free and altruistic love”? Hearty thanks then! Justified doubts about the mental condition of a God who acted like that would be legitimate. But we do not need that God hypothesis, indeed it would be only a nuisance; the variety and the changes in life on earth are explained much better by the doctrine of evolution than by all the mythological stories in the Bible. The theory of evolution can explain the emergence of viruses and infectious sicknesses; a religion that seriously has a loving God as its starting point cannot. So whoever wants to know about the factual emergence of life and its varieties must not consult mythological texts. The Old Testament contributes nothing, nothing at all, to answering that question; the knowledge of that comes only and solely from scientific research.

The Bible does not have just minor errors, it transmits a basically false picture of the world. But all churches, not just the Catholic, still insist that the biblical creation myths, even if we do not interpret them literally, have something to contribute to the question of the emergence and variety of life. But that is pure wishful thinking on the part of the churches. However, about 80 % of Christians actually believe in the literal correctness of the creation myths in Genesis.

Adolescents, but not only they, should ask themselves if they want to stick with a faith doctrine that so basically opposes the findings of science; and whether they want their picture of the world to be decided by ancient writings that could not have known any better, or by allegedly modern churches that still maintain that their religion can make a substantial contribution to the question of the emergence and variety of life.

Is God a question of reason or unreason?

3 Why do we seek God?

The churches still today act as though the search for God is somehow implanted in man, as though it were a part of human nature. Of course men want to get answers to the basic questions of being human (*Where do I come from? Where am I going to? How should I act?*), but that is not inevitably bound up with the question of God. And in any case: which of the ten thousand gods of this world is to give the answers? It seems clear that the emergence of religion (in general) brought mankind evolutionary advantages at a distinct phase of development, e. g., explanations of incomprehensible natural phenomena, or the stronger group and tribal solidarity caused by a common religion. All of that is of course totally independent of the *correctness* of a religious faith. Which religion you belong to is a result first of all of where you are born. That is not a question of truth but of socialization. A person of religious principle like Pope Benedict, if he had grown up not in Bavaria but in a suburb of Teheran, would surely have risen high in the world of Islamic faith.

That today many people cope without that religious feeling shows that the yearning for God is not innate in men; it is not an anthropological constant even if the churches claim that time after time. If it were otherwise, the increasing disappearance of religion in the most developed and best educated nations, e. g., in Europe, would be hard to explain. In Europe millions of people live without belief in God, and only the churches are of the opinion that they are missing something because of that.

4 Can we know the existence of God by our reasoning?

The Catholic Church claims that, in fact it thinks man can know God even *with certainty*. In doing so it invokes especially a passage of Paul's epistle to the Romans. If he wrote it, then it must be correct, that, it seems, is what the Church is suggesting. Here as in many other places it would be good for the Church to invoke less the statements of an ancient missionary and more human commonsense that does not observe the world through the dark glasses of dogma. And by the way, Paul probably took over the thought of God's intelligibility from the Stoics. The question of God's intelligibility through reason is really not a theological but a philosophical one. In fact it was taken for granted, especially in the Middle Ages, that the very existence of God was knowable for every person. But those days philosophy was still the *hand maiden of theology* and a non-Christian philosophy was quasi forbidden. But those days are long gone. The proofs of God's existence, which the Catholic Church still likes to peddle, have been at the latest since the time of Immanuel Kant an unacceptable currency. Philosophy, castrated by the Church in the Middle Ages, has found its voice again and manages today without the concept of God, indeed such a concept is regarded today as quite unreasonable. And whoever as a philosopher thinks he has to use it still, like the Catholic philosopher Robert Spaemann, is looked upon among his colleagues as bizarre or off with the fairies. The intelligibility of God by the light of reason: that dust-gathering bit of Catholic theology can impress nobody today except the ignorant. Or perhaps adolescents, at whom the Youth Catechism is aimed.