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The 20<sup>th</sup> World Youth Day, Cologne 2005

As we come to the end of this European symposium on the University and the Church in Europe, the purpose of this short intervention is to present the 20<sup>th</sup> World Youth Day that is scheduled to take place in Cologne in August 2005. Over the years, WYD has become a major event in the world of youth. It can no longer be overlooked or ignored, and its influence extends beyond the Church for it also has an impact on society at large. After Buenos Aires, Santiago de Compostela, Czestochowa, Denver, Manila, Paris, Rome and Toronto, the Pope has invited young people to gather in Cologne in Germany from 16 to 21 August 2005. The fact that the 20<sup>th</sup> WYD will take place in Europe provides an excellent opportunity to attract a large number of youth from the countries of Europe, east and west. Each new World Youth Day becomes part of history, while following the outline of dynamics launched by Pope John Paul II almost twenty years ago. First of all, I shall focus on the fact that WYD is an appropriate response to the expectations of the younger generation and is contributing to the creation of a “new culture” in the world of youth. Then I shall suggest how it can give rise to a new “engagement “ in the faith of many young people and can be an opportunity for the evangelisation of the university world.

**I. WYD, a response to the expectations of youth**

**1) The search for meaning and the need for clear points of reference**

Young people all share the same desire to find happiness and to discover the meaning of their existence. Today more than ever, they are in search of points of reference, and they show their need to be instructed, guided and to receive clarification on the intellectual, moral and doctrinal levels. Although some of them are distant from the Church, they accept that the teachings of the Pope are demanding and unwavering because they recognise him as a true father who takes care to guide them along the paths of life, and who also knows how to listen to them, encourage them and love them.

The expectations of these young people are as great as their needs are many and their shortcomings apparent. These young people generally know very little about their faith and live cut off from their Christian roots because their parents have not always considered religion as a precious heritage to be transmitted. Many of these young people have never been baptised nor have they received religious instruction. A large number of them have suffered from the separation of their parents and have grown up in broken families. They know what it is to be lonely. As they are young, they want to

believe in happiness and cannot accept the bitter fruit of scepticism and despair that comes with an aging society, full of doubt and fear.

## **2) A “mystical” and “incarnated” generation**

We could say that this generation is “mystical” because, in their search for the essential, their hearts are unreservedly open to God. It is also a generation well inserted in the times. They can laugh and enjoy themselves, and also show their generosity and solidarity with those who are more deprived. These young people wish to be engaged in working for others, and they see that voluntary service is a special way to deepen one’s faith. They respond to the distress of humanity, but they cannot be satisfied with a humanism without God. These young people feel distant from a Church that they feel is more concerned with its internal organisation than in the well-being of humanity and the fundamental questions of existence. They are disappointed by the Church when they have the impression that it is abandoning its reasons for belief and hope. However, young people love the Church when it joyfully gives witness of its faith.

## **II. WYD - ferment of a “new culture”**

WYD contributes to the creation of a “new culture”, or, to be more exact, a “counter-culture” that is an antidote to the “culture of death” that arises in an increasingly secularised society that excludes God from the social field and reduces faith to the private domain. In this short presentation, I shall confine myself to pointing out some essential characteristics of WYD that serve to “reveal” - in the photographic sense of the term - and to “trigger” this “new culture” that is receptive to transcendence and the universal.

### **1) A culture receptive to transcendence**

World Youth Day is a very special means of evangelising the world of youth by allowing a very large number of them to have a spiritual and ecclesial experience that is kerygmatic, sacramental and catechetical at the same time. The programme of WYD is conceived as a pilgrimage in which catecheses form an essential part and in which more and more youth are taking part. For three days they hear about the great questions of human existence and the basic tenets of faith. The objective is to help them to have a personal encounter with Christ and to follow a road of conversion, especially through the sacrament of reconciliation. The Eucharistic celebrations and the liturgies in general, when they are joyful and recollected, are also essential elements of WYD. The younger generations do not want to be satisfied with a religion that they follow out of duty, because they have had, and want to have, an experience of the joy of believing.

World Youth Day is a great festive celebration of faith. After this revitalising experience, young people feel better armed to keep going when they feel isolated in their universities and offices. They are stronger and able to resist the virus of discouragement and despair that has contaminated the Church and society to a great extent. Many young people get back their joy and pride in being Christians. World

Youth Day makes them realise that it is possible to affirm their faith with simplicity, without arrogance and without complexes.

## **2) A culture receptive to the universal dimension (globalisation)**

The younger generations are particularly sensitive to the phenomenon of globalisation, and they do not hesitate to publicly manifest their disagreement with a particular concept of globalisation based on the primacy of economic and financial criteria. WYD allows youth to discover and experience the cultural and religious dimension of globalisation, too often unknown to the wider public and the media, even though the Church has been living and promoting it since Pentecost! In fact, WYD is an occasion of deep communion with the universal Church in which the determining factor is the encounter between the Pope and the young people. The Pope, as the visible sign of unity and communion in the Church, gathers and unites this diversified crowd of young people. Communion, lived beyond differences in culture, language and nationality, is by far the best way to discover the catholicity, i.e. the universality, of the Church. WYD is therefore a true lesson in communion for young people and a concrete parable of peace and reconciliation, irrespective of frontiers. WYD is a source of hope because it reveals a vision of globalisation based on the inestimable worth of the human person. It shows up the positive aspects of globalisation that should be humanised and “christianised” in order to be put at the service of essential values like the dignity of every human being, solidarity and the common good.

## **3) A culture where Christians are willing and courageous enough to go against the current**

In a world characterised by great mobility, youth tend to prefer instantaneity and to escape into the imaginary. Young people today are faced with all kinds of different possibilities, also in the religious domain. They are immersed in a “zapping culture” that leads to fragmentation, dispersion and superficiality rather than rooting in real and long-term structures and frameworks. WYD allows young people to experience the personal and community dimension at the same time. It helps them to find the inner wholeness of their being by allowing them to articulate faith and reason, the sensorial and the rational, the emotional and the spiritual.

In the countries of “old Christianity”, the Church used to be a sort of precondition for faith. Nowadays the opposite happens. It is experience of faith that generally leads to the Church. Young people want to believe, but they are reticent about belonging to an institution. There is certainly a return to religious fervour, but also with the risks of exoticism and syncretism. WYD has thrown light on the fact that the new generations allow themselves to be evangelised without reserve. They display a thirst for the absolute that demands clear answers, that takes into account the religious dimension of existence and that does not hide its specific Christian dimension.

Unlike their parents who were generally Catholics by tradition if not by convention, these young people have to make a free choice to live as Christians in a world no longer Christian. For a young person today, to believe does not mean to conform to social norms, but to be willing to accept being different in our post-Christian society. WYD helps young people to become aware of their Christian identity and of the demands implicit in the vocation of the baptised. It helps them discover that they are

all called to holiness by living according to the Gospel and by proclaiming it through their daily lives. By encouraging young people to come and draw from the source, to persevere in faith and to be witnesses, WYD displays a clear vocational and missionary dimension. By encouraging youth to go against the tide in a society dominated by passing fashions and superficial beliefs, they generate a “counter-culture” of hope and life.

### **III. WYD 2005 in Cologne, an opportunity for the evangelisation of the university world**

WYD has given new life to youth ministry in many countries. It can also bring new impetus to the university milieu. It is good to remember that WYD is for all youth, but especially for the 18-25 age range. Students are therefore directly involved in the large events, and besides, they form the large majority of WYD participants, even though few of them register through your chaplaincies. So, in what way can WYD 2005 in Cologne stimulate and renew your ministry in the university milieu?

#### **1) The impact on “ordinary” ministry**

It would be a mistake to contrast the “exceptional” aspect of WYD with the “ordinary” aspect of youth ministry that is more down-to-earth and immediate. These “high points” are irreplaceable, but their effect on the Christian community and the spiritual fruits in the lives of young people cannot be fully deployed unless pastors are attentive to the existence of WYD. We know from experience that the most important aspects of World Youth Day are to be found more in the *preparation* and *follow-up* than in the *event* itself. It is certainly not a question of reproducing WYD in the dioceses and university campuses, but of trying to integrate the key elements of WYD into “ordinary” ministry and deriving from it some priorities of pastoral ministry. I shall just place them in four complementary sections, but I shall not develop it further for lack of time. Our mission is to help young people grow in faith in a life firmly rooted in Christ (1), structured by solid instruction (2), animated by love for the Church (3), engaged in the world and oriented towards mission (4).

#### **2) An itinerary of pastoral preparation**

In order to facilitate your pastoral itinerary towards the meeting in 2005, the Pope has already announced the theme: “*We have come to worship him*” (*Mt 2:2*), that links with the ancient tradition of the veneration of the relics of the Magi in Cologne Cathedral. This theme will be preceded by that of 2004, an important stage in the spiritual preparation: “*We wish to see Jesus*” (*Jn 12:21*). These two themes confirm the Christocentric character of WYD and refer to the attitude of “seeing”. They emphasise the importance of the search for meaning and truth, lived through prayer and the interior life. Both themes have “we” as the subject, and this allows youth to apply it to themselves. It shows that they are called to be active subjects and emphasises that the preparation and participation in WYD is not only an individual journey but is also communal and ecclesial.

The theme for 2004 also underlines the voluntary aspect of this venture: “we wish”. This allows for reflection on free will and human freedom. It also invites us to reflect on the link between contemplation and evangelisation, according to the indications

given by Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte: The men and women of our own day — often perhaps unconsciously — ask believers not only to "speak" of Christ, but in a certain sense to "show" him to them. And is it not the Church's task to reflect the light of Christ in every historical period, to make his face shine also before the generations of the new millennium?* (n. 16)

The theme for 2005 provides an opportunity for catechesis on the sacrament of the Eucharist and how it is linked to the prayer of adoration, by deepening into the meaning of the “real presence” and of adoration as an offering of one’s person that one makes to God in response to his love. It brings in the dimension of pilgrimage, of “moving”, both internally and externally. WYD is an adventure, just like the Christian life, where God invites us to leave our securities to confidently follow him and to welcome and keep the newness brought to our lives by the presence of Christ. The Magi were pagans who travelled from afar, and likewise this pilgrimage is open to all. It is an invitation to evangelise those at the margins of the Church and those who are not Christians. They can also be attracted by curiosity or the desire to meet Christ and know him personally. The themes proposed by the Pope for 2004 and 2005 can be used to inspire your orientations for the next two years and be studied in depth in small groups. They can also be taken as themes for particular activities during the academic year like gatherings and pilgrimages. Beyond the benefits for motivation and instruction, it can create synergy with the activities of students outside campus chaplaincies (in their parishes, prayer groups or Ecclesial Movements). There is nothing to stop you from organising groups for WYD in your university, even if they usually register at the diocesan or national level.

One of the key points about WYD is that they are carried out for young people and by young people. They have helped adults to understand that they have to trust youth and place them in situations of responsibility. This was deep insight on the part of Pope John Paul II who has put this in action throughout his pontificate. We know well that the key to any mission with youth is to make them feel included and to inspire their confidence. The Church must not shy away from its mission. It must transmit its rich experience to young people, but it must also know how to listen. The Holy Father says this in his Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*: “*The Church has so much to talk about with youth, and youth have so much to share with the Church*” (n. 46).