



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

Implications of previous research for World Youth Day Sydney 2008

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Highlights

- * *In Cologne, tension and even some animosity developed between members of 'traditionalist' groups, and 'ordinary' Catholic youth.*
- * *'Preaching to the converted' is often very fruitful; they are always capable of deeper conversion, which fuels more zealous outreach; they would derive considerable benefit from a WYD in which they were the only participants.*
- * *The ePilgrimage newsletter on the WYD website contains some direct 'testimonials' by young people which are exceptionally well presented, and would appeal to a very wide range of young Catholics.*
- * *Taking into account the different groups who will be present at WYD08, it seems that the 'seekers' should have pastoral priority in the planning of WYD08:*
 - *the faith of those already highly committed to Christ and the Church will thrive through all the events of WYD week, even those not shaped particularly for them;*
 - *those who go as 'tourists' are not open to much of a serious nature, and positive religious outcomes for them will probably be rare;*
 - *The most important group are the 'seekers', who range from the 'almost-committed' down to the level of 'on the verge of letting it all go, but taking a last look just to be sure'. The seekers stand to gain the most from WYD; and they should be privileged above others – even the highly committed -- in the planning of WYD events.*
- * *However besides being a religious event, appealing to Committed and Active Catholics, WYD has proved to be something else as well – it is an international Youth event – and this has its own strong appeal. This dimension of WYD exercises its own mysterious magnetism, and will attract youth who are not particularly religious or not religious at all, including some who are not Catholic, nor even Christian.*
- * *Those who stage youth events need to be aware that they will not be able completely to control or dictate the meaning or style of those events. Youth are part of a global youth culture which is stronger in them than religious or Christian or Catholic culture.*
- * *Much of the force of positive WYD experience can be channelled back into different forms of involvement with Church in everyday life, and into reshaping their lives towards the Gospel pattern ... but it will not be effective in most cases simply to point them towards their parishes and hope that they will find adequate resources there.*

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References

1. Research as an aid to planning for WYD

This reflection was prepared early in 2007 for the Sydney 2008 WYD Administration (WYDA) to assist in preparations for the event. Its perspective is that of pastoral theology, not scientific sociology of religion. The author is not privy to any information or plans existing within WYDA. The aim is simply to share the fruit of a researcher's routine document-based 'review of previous research'.

Planning for WYD08 is already well advanced, and by the time the research project on WYD08 begins, and results from the survey of registrants are available, most of the work of shaping it will have been done.

So quite apart from the research to be done in the future, it may be useful at this earlier stage to collect relevant previous research and to offer for consideration the implications it appears to carry for Sydney 2008 – especially to reflect on the research project by Gebhardt et al. on the Cologne WYD, which has just been made available in translation.

The principles underlying the use of research in planning are: that not all futures are equally probable; that planning should benefit from the fullest possible awareness of the multiple dimensions of a planned event, and of its potential unintended consequences; that all available information relevant to forecasting future circumstances or conditions affecting the event should be mustered. Some likely future developments will not be amenable to control, but if they are anticipated, they can be better accommodated. In many other cases, once a likely development is known, planning can take advantage of foresight to avoid some outcomes and achieve others. Where this review of research suggests implications of the second kind for WYD in Sydney, (i.e. reveals outcomes that can be shaped by planning), I have tried to formulate tentative recommendations.

In a sociological study of the Cologne World Youth Day 2005 which is about to be published in Germany,¹ one of the joint authors, Prof. Winfried Gebhardt of the University of Koblenz, contributes a chapter on the topic of what WYD meant for its youthful Catholic participants. Prof Gebhardt and his co-authors very generously made the manuscript of the entire book available to us in advance of its publication. Naturally, we are not free to publish anything from that study in advance of the release of the entire work (in German), scheduled for around the middle of 2007. Everything in what follows concerning Cologne (except for studies of Australians who attended) is either quoted or paraphrased from Professor Gebhardt's chapter.

Other sources of relevant research are the recently completed study of the religion / spirituality of young Australians by Mason et al, *The Spirit of Generation Y*,² and the work of Richard Rymarz and others on previous World Youth Days, and on Australian Catholic youth more generally.

¹ Gebhardt, Winfried, (2007-- in press). *References are listed at the end of this paper.* Astrid Weston, PA to WYD Director Geoff Morris, very kindly provided at short notice a working translation of the complex and difficult academic German of the original.

² Mason, M et al. 2006 *The spirit of Generation Y: final report of a 3 year study.* [Distributed to project sponsors; copy with Dr. M. Casey]. To appear in book form about July this year: Mason, M, Webber, R & Singleton, A (forthcoming, 2007).

2. Who went to Cologne WYD in 2005? Diversity and tension between different groups

Observers of previous WYDs such as the US *National Catholic Reporter's* John L. Allen commonly distinguish three groups among youthful attenders : the committed, 'seekers' and 'tourists'. While the first and last are obviously at opposite ends of the scale, the 'seekers' vary widely.

Australian youth attending the Cologne WYD appear to have been highly committed. Richard Rymarz administered questionnaires to two separate groups of pilgrims attending meetings before they set off to Cologne, and conducted interviews with small numbers of them: he analysed responses from 72 pilgrims aged 18 or over from Melbourne and Sale dioceses.³ Nearly all responded that they attended Mass every week; 60% even claimed to attend Reconciliation weekly or monthly!⁴ About half were members of some type of faith-based peer support group. We cannot judge whether they were typical of 18+ attenders from Australia, but if their questionnaire responses were taken at face value,⁵ they would be among the top 2% of the most highly committed young Catholics in the country. The personal interviews, however, showed rather more variation in level of commitment.

From the age group under 18, attending Catholic Schools, 90 pilgrims also responded to a questionnaire,⁶ and 19 were interviewed. The younger students did not claim, in their questionnaire responses, the extremely high levels of church involvement seen in the older group, but still presented as highly committed and involved. The interviews again revealed that considerably lower levels of religiosity were quite common among this group. In some cases, the person chosen to attend was only mildly interested, but there was no one else eligible: one respondent was the only person under age forty attending Mass (not very regularly) in a small parish!

We should probably conclude that the Australians who went to Cologne were more committed to their faith than the average here for their age, and were concentrated towards the 'highly religious' end of the scale, but that there was also a good sprinkling of less committed 'seekers', and even, especially among the school-age group, some whose interest in the religious aspects of WYD was fairly slight.

As Rymarz points out, a pilgrimage from Australia to Europe or the USA takes longer and is more expensive; the post-school-age pilgrim misses more of work or tertiary study; so it makes sense that Australians in this age group are highly motivated in their attendance, since it comes at significant cost. On the other hand, there are likely to be more 'seekers' and 'tourists' from among those for whom the journey to WYD is short and the cost small.

³ Rymarz 2007a forthcoming.

⁴ This would be most implausible except in the context of membership in a traditionalist group (such as *Opus Dei*, for example), where the practice was firmly imposed as one element of a highly disciplined spiritual regimen.

⁵ Respondents may have seen the questionnaire as some kind of test of whether they were appropriate persons to attend WYD, to receive subsidies etc. – and may have 'gilded' the portraits of their beliefs and involvement. Tests for social desirability bias should be included in such instruments.

⁶ Rymarz 2007 forthcoming.

At Cologne, this was the case for adjacent European countries. In Sydney, it will be for the first time true of Australians.

During the Cologne WYD Prof. Winfried Gebhardt observed that a good deal of tension and even some animosity developed between two groups of youth attenders, reflecting the diversity, even polarisation, which exists among German Catholic youth.

The first group comprised Catholic youth from 'traditionalist'⁷ movements: about 25% of the registered attenders at Cologne were from groups or movements such as the Neo-Catechumenate, Focolare, Shönstatt, Totus Tuus, Sant' Egidio or Youth 2000. They were very visible and vocal – they wore more conservative clothes and bore symbols / identity badges of their communities. They moved in large groups, tended to lead in the activities such as the Stations of the Cross and the Walk to the 'Dom', and avoided the informal 'parties'. They were serious about their faith, very loyal to the Church, to the Holy Father, to their bishops and priests, and supportive of the authority of the Church, seen as stemming from Christ. They participated eagerly in the various devotional activities such as those to the Eucharist and to Mary. They were the ones, says Gebhardt, who gave WYD its traditional / spiritual / religious face.

The second group could be called 'ordinary' Catholic youth. They constituted the majority of attenders, coming from parish and diocesan youth groups, school groups, altar server groups, etc.. The very diverse sub-groups in this category had in common an attitude of 'independence' from the official church in how they interpreted their faith. Their dress was more casual, and although they participated in activities, they were more 'choosy', and felt free to drift away from activities that did not hold their interest. To some extent, they 'did their own thing', which included a fair degree of extra-curricular partying. They did not feel bound by the announcements on who was eligible to receive Communion. This group, Gebhardt remarks, gave WYD its pop-cultural, open, joyful note.

The two groups developed rhyming chants which they sang competitively in the streets, on the Underground, at WYD events – one was devotional, the other derived from a current pop-song; they tried to drown each other out. Some animosity developed between them; the traditionalist groups were more militant and assertive; in response, the others labelled them derisively as "crazy Fundis" (fundamentalists). However the contest remained for the most part light-hearted, and overall, the atmosphere was tolerant of differences.

In interviews conducted by Gebhardt's team during WYD, (a 'convenience sample', not necessarily representative of the entire body of attenders) half of those willing to be interviewed considered themselves 'very religious' or 'religious' and more than half said they attended Mass regularly; most of the remainder (about 40%) considered themselves "somewhat religious" and admitted they did not regularly attend Mass.

⁷ 'Traditionalist' and 'ordinary': it is difficult to find names for these two groups which are suitably neutral. The intent is to describe each group non-judgmentally in a way that helps understanding. The first group are sometimes described as traditional, orthodox, conservative, institutional; the second, larger, group could be labelled liberal, progressive, independent.

Despite the differences in outlook, participation of both groups in Cologne WYD events was very high, and they clearly considered the activities as expressions of their faith.

3. Who will come to WYD in 2008? Diversity to be expected among youth in Sydney

Youth at WYD in Sydney will reflect, to some extent, the diversity present among Australian Catholic youth generally, but the profile of attenders will likely be very different from that of the general Catholic youth population, and very different also from the Australian contingent at previous World Youth Days.

The *Spirit of Generation Y* study⁸ classified Australian Catholics aged 13-29 as follows on the basis of their beliefs and their level of active involvement in the Church:

Committed	Active	Marginal	Nominal	Eclectic
15%	14%	23%	30%	17%

Considering just Mass attendance, the Committed were those who attended Mass weekly or more often; the Active less often but at least monthly; the Marginal attended occasionally, the Nominal only once or twice a year. Eclectics were Catholics who were significantly involved in alternative belief systems or practices alongside their (usually merely nominal) Catholicism.

WYD will have great appeal to the Committed, precisely as a religious event, and one would expect a high proportion of this group to attend 'regardless'.

The number of the less committed who come will depend on how they *perceive* WYD, which in turn will depend partly on how WYDA and diocesan and parish and school agencies present it. Perceptions will also be influenced significantly by how WYD is treated in the mass media. What attitudes to it will be expressed by youth and adult 'opinion leaders'? (See n. 10 below).

The religious dimension of WYD will exercise little drawing power over the 53% of young Catholics in the Nominal and Marginal categories.

However besides being a religious event, appealing to Committed and Active Catholics, WYD has proved to be something else as well – it is an international Youth event – and this has its own strong appeal, for reasons to be explored in a later section (n.7 below). This dimension of WYD exercises its own mysterious magnetism, and will attract youth who are not particularly religious or not religious at all, including some who are not Catholic, nor even Christian.

It was shown above that Australian pilgrims to Cologne, especially those who had finished school, were quite highly committed; they had to make some sacrifices to go. This is likely to be the case this time with those who come to Sydney from overseas.

⁸ Mason et al 2006, p. 65 ff.

But for Australians in 2008, the journey is short and the cost is low, and one hears of plans for dioceses to send very large numbers of school age youth. It follows that a much higher proportion of Australian pilgrims than ever before will likely come from the Marginal or Nominal groups, and their motives for attendance are more likely to be non-religious – especially among those of school age. Nonetheless, because of the particularly strong response to be expected from the more committed, the Australian pilgrims will still be a good deal more religious than typical Australian Catholic youth.

Traditionalist groups are likely to be over-represented among attenders from overseas, since they are more likely than others to go to the trouble and expense of coming. Although the numerical strength of traditionalist groups within Australia is a matter of speculation, they are also more likely to attend WYD. The potential for polarisation and conflict will depend mostly on how the traditionalist groups present themselves.

In Cologne, the tension between the two groups was generated by the aggressive self-promotion of the traditionalist groups, provoking the ‘ordinary’ Catholic youth by appearing to present themselves as the only ‘true’ Catholics. In contrast to the ‘ordinary’ group, they seem to have come prepared for confrontation. Probably they considered their ‘challenge’ to the others as evangelisation: an attempt on the part of the ‘leaven’ to ‘raise the consciousness’ of the ‘lumpenproletariat’ of ‘lax’ ordinary youth. Their stance appears, however, to have had an opposite effect: their claims for themselves and their ‘way’ were perceived as arrogant, and rejected with indignation by the majority, stung into retaliation.

Whether open polarisation and conflict develop or not, the ‘definition’ of WYD – what it is really about, what it means -- will be ‘contested’ by these two groups at WYD in Sydney.

Recommendations

One of the highlights of the Cologne experience was the reigning spirit of good-natured tolerance of differences, which triumphed over the polarisation described just above.

WYD08 may have little effect on the relationship between ‘traditionalist’ and ‘ordinary’ Catholic youth, but also has the potential either to sharpen the differences into full-blown polarisation or even conflict; or to steer away from polarisation, and promote tolerance and cross-fertilization between the two groups.

It would probably be possible so to present, frame and stage the event, and so to filter prospective participants, as to confine the attendance largely to loyal, highly committed young Catholics, and to discourage and exclude others. The event would then involve many fewer participants, but would not necessarily be wasted effort. ‘Preaching to the converted’ is often very fruitful; they are always capable of deeper conversion, which fuels more zealous outreach; they would derive considerable benefit from a WYD in which they were the only participants.

Scattered throughout contents of the *ePilgrimage* newsletter (April – Sept, 2006) on the WYD website are some direct ‘testimonials’ by young people themselves which are exceptionally well presented, and would appeal to a very wide range of young Catholics.

Traditionalist groups have the potential to contribute much to others; in some cases, they may also have a lot to learn from 'ordinary' youth. They need better pastoral guidance than those at Cologne in 2005 appear to have had. Their missionary strategy should be not to parade themselves as a superior elite; rather to adopt an evangelical humility, not clinging defensively within their own group, but mingling with the others and engaging them in conversation; witnessing to their faith simply and unpretentiously in this setting.

Choosing instead a wider focus for WYD -- the inclusion of a range of 'ordinary' Catholics, even some whose faith and motivation are very ordinary indeed -- would be based on the hope that the less committed, much larger in number, may also be able to profit from WYD. This hope seems well grounded in previous research.

Taking into account the different groups who would then be present, it seems that the 'seekers' should have pastoral priority in the planning of WYD08:

- the faith of those already highly committed to Christ and the Church will thrive through all the events of WYD week, even those not shaped particularly for them;
- those who go as 'tourists' are not open to much of a serious nature, and positive religious outcomes for them will probably be rare;
- The most important group are the 'seekers', who range from the 'almost-committed' down to the level of 'on the verge of letting it all go, but taking a last look just to be sure'. The seekers stand to gain the most from WYD; and they should be privileged above others -- even the highly committed -- in the planning of WYD events.

4. Attitudes to the Church

Only 10% of the Cologne young people interviewed by Gebhardt (not necessarily a representative sample) described their attitude to the Church as very positive; 35% as positive; 40% were reserved / neutral / neither positive nor negative; 15% negative or very negative. Comparing these responses with a recent large-scale survey of the religion of German youth, Gebhardt concludes that the WYD participants were more religious than average. For most young people in the wider population, belief was seen as a non-binding personal option with no real consequences for one's lifestyle. The WYD attenders, by contrast, saw their faith as implying attendance at Mass and involvement with their parish, and gave Church teachings importance in their own lives, particularly "the universal Christian values of peace, justice, solidarity with the poor, and neighbourly love". Their criticisms of the church focussed mainly on dull liturgies and what they saw as outdated moral teaching.

There was a certain ambivalence here: the Church's defense of traditional moral principles was valued as providing ideals and guidelines, and respected as a voice challenging the dominant secular economic and sexual emphases in the contemporary world. However, youth insist on their right to make independent decisions about applying these teachings in their own lives. They are prepared to listen to the voice of authority, but not necessarily or automatically to follow it. Interestingly, Gebhardt found this attitude even among members of the traditionalist movements.

The Australian *Spirit of Generation Y* study found the same strong emphasis on moral individualism and relativism among even the highly committed members of all faiths

(especially Catholics) – most surprisingly of all, even among some young Muslims. And it is also increasingly true, even in religiously conservative denominations, in the US; it is the dominant note in youth spirituality in Western developed countries.

Recommendations

Despite all the recent bad publicity, (some of it well-deserved), the ‘official’ Church at WYD occasions is obviously among friends; more – these are its own children; grown-up and not uncritical, but still acknowledging their parent with loyalty and love. It would seem important that the Church’s stance with these young people is apt to be perceived as defensive, aggressive, condemnatory or punitive: there are obvious large areas of common ground which can be further developed.

The Cologne youth welcomed the participation of their bishops, while at the same time considering them to be ‘strangers in the world’, and out of touch with the reality of the issues youth are facing. One girl murmured, on leaving a catechesis by a German bishop on the dangers of ‘irresponsible sexuality’: ‘They are talking at us instead of with us’. Nevertheless, few complained. Gebhardt concludes: ‘They did not want another church, only a more living church’.

WYD08 meetings and catecheses should be structured with a component of dialogue: a programmed interval for young people themselves to speak and express their views, attitudes, perplexities, problems, criticisms, without immediately being corrected / set right / put down. Their primary desire is to be heard. Bishops don’t have to have an answer for everything.

5. Young people’s response to the Pope

The Pope is a ‘celebrity’ -- never mind that he would loathe most of the connotations of the term. He is world famous, often seen on television, mentioned in the media, and there is an aura around him, a charisma that is not necessarily personal, but which goes with his position. Celebrities -- film stars, rock musicians and sporting personalities -- dominate youth popular culture. At personal appearances and concerts, they are greeted with screaming, waving, and (if they are male) the tossing of female underwear from the mosh pit to the stage.

While young people know the Pope is not that kind of celebrity, they lack the language, the concepts, the cultural categories and behavioural models, to make sense of their fascination with the Pope, to express the spiritual dimension which makes him different from other celebrities, and makes WYD different from a rock festival. When the King of Thailand appears in public, everyone knows what to do: the people prostrate themselves; when the Dalai Lama, preceded by hundreds of monks, emerged in ceremonial procession from the Potala in former Tibet, there was a similar spontaneous, yet precisely choreographed response. Gebhardt perceptively notes the religious inarticulateness of the Cologne youth: ‘the dominance of cultural youth patterns in their everyday world, as well as their increasing ignorance of traditional church teachings’.⁹

⁹ Richard Rymarz has an amusing and revealing anecdote about a young Australian Catholic asking: ‘Who is this person called Grace?’

So after the build-up, the long wait under sun or rain, the rumours of his impending appearance, the SMS messages flying back and forth, at his arrival the Pope is greeted with shouts, cheering, acclamation, jubilation, a much-toned-down version of the only kind of popular response they know.

At the same time, youth's fascination with the Pope contained a strong element of respect for his moral authority, for his role as a kind of 'world moral conscience', as one who 'demands individual responsibility in the face of unquestionable values', who has himself lived those values with authenticity, standing up for what he believes in, going against the tide.

6. Influence of youth culture on WYD

From day one, but especially during the closing ceremony, the Cologne WYD was a blend of classical Catholic doctrinal and liturgical elements with themes from profane pop-culture. The WYD organisers did not succeed in keeping these separate. 'Typical youth cultural behaviour was seen throughout the official events and gave the whole a casual imprint which the young people loved'. People sported tattoos of the Pietà, faces painted with the WYD logo. The youth appropriated 'religion' for themselves, took it in their own hands, made it their own, expressed it in their own way. Religion could be fun, religion could be cool. For them, this was the key to WYD's success.

Recommendations

Those who stage youth events need to be aware that they will not be able to completely control or dictate the meaning or style of those events. Youth are part of a global youth culture which influences (most of) them more strongly than religious or Christian or Catholic or church culture. (The only large-scale 'youth events' many of them have attended have been rock festivals, or other events, not exclusively for youth, but involving large numbers of young people such as sporting events, political demonstrations, parades such as the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras and the like.) If they really 'get into' the event, it will be in their own way, adapting and interpreting religious symbols into their own cultural vocabulary. The freedom to do this seems to have been crucial to young people's positive experience of previous World Youth Days. Attempting to suppress their 'style' is likely to be unsuccessful, to be perceived as oppressive, and to generate animosity.

7. WYD as a *community* event

'In almost all the interviews which took place within the framework of the project, during and after [the Cologne] WYD, the community experience was the most central and important one.'

Although 'most group members stayed the whole time within their group', their experience of being part of the much larger body of participants, 'immersed in a sea of like-minded people ... in a temporary other world' was something new and very powerful. Gebhardt's quotations from interviews, and his interpretive comments on this theme, deserve to be excerpted in full:

A young A-Level student in Berlin: "At school, in religious classes there were only two of us. People look at you as if you are weird if you tell them you go to church. But here I can see that I am not alone, and that there are many others like me."

Another girl from Cologne expressed it more clearly: "To see people from all over the world, who are celebrating and to see for once that it is not that bad when someone actually believes a little in God. What I mean is that I am an altar server and that is seen in Trier as being a bit daft. People look at you and think what sort of person are you? It is great to see that there are really are enough cool people about who do believe in God."

And in a similar way another girl describes it: "It was lovely to see the candles lit, you could really see that you were not alone, because there were always more lights and you realized there were many more people there – it gave a lovely community feeling, and sitting there with the candle made you realize that there were almost a million people sitting there just like me."

The young people were particularly impressed by the way they could discuss God and the world if they wanted to in a relaxed and informal manner. To be able to express and reveal their affiliation to their faith was a new discovery which many of them had not previously experienced. Many described their everyday situation as believers, like a "Catholic diaspora" which led them to keep their religious in the background for fear of discrimination: "At home there are only a few of us, a bit like the diaspora." Many pilgrims from the newly-formed German states felt they were marginalized.

The most significant experience the pilgrims took home with them was that they were not alone in their faith, as Catholics marginalized within their own surroundings, but rather were part of a large, happy and self-aware community.

These comments highlight a sense of the great support and encouragement provided to individuals and small groups from a strong experience of *solidarity in faith* with a wider Church – a particularly Catholic theological emphasis.

The Cologne youth, Gebhardt concludes, had a strong sense of this event as special, as something extraordinary, as *their* event, and as combining, not separating, the serious style of religion and the youthful style of light-hearted fun, music, celebration. And it was no sooner over than they were planning within their groups, to come to Sydney.

We can discern an additional aspect of WYD as a community experience. Not the same as the 'group solidarity' experience; something quite different. Catholic anthropologist Victor Turner (1972) used the Latin term *communitas* to denote the particularly intense experience of group cohesion – of oneness, unity, that can occur, in particular circumstances, within even very large gatherings.¹⁰ It takes place especially (but not

¹⁰ Turner was acknowledged as one of the twentieth century's foremost scholars in the study of rites of passage, ritual and pilgrimage. He chose the Latin term *communitas* to distinguish a

exclusively) in 'liminal'¹¹ situations – intervals when participants are temporarily drawn into an 'other world', situated on the threshold, between 'before and after' phases of everyday life.¹² Within this space, a unique mode of consciousness may be entered, which Turner termed 'flow'.¹³ It is no exaggeration to say that in this concept, Turner seems to have identified the key element that makes peak human experiences absorbing and intensely rewarding. Very few can find words to describe their experiences of 'flow', but it seems a virtually universal experience, and can have very powerful and enduring effects. *Communitas* and 'flow' provide the addictive 'buzz' that electrifies youth in festivals, rock concerts and demonstrations, and which they eagerly seek to experience again and again.

WYD week has all the elements required to provide a very strong experience of *communitas*, and at least intermittently, of 'flow'. This is true of WYD both as a whole event, and, at higher intensity, in its shorter components such as liturgies, particularly the larger ones, but also in meals, parties, dancing. The whole week and the journeys to and from it are a kind of pilgrimage: participants travel to a different place, spend the time in absorbing activities different from those of everyday life; take part in lengthy and carefully structured rituals, interact with many new people, etc..

These dimensions of WYD, considered as a *human* experience, are what make it attractive to youth, enjoyable and successful. And of course, from a theological perspective, without ceasing to be a human experience, it is at the same time far more than that: it is

particular type of experience from other kinds of experience of community. This is not the place to discuss its characteristics at length. It does not occur in every large crowd; it appears to be a very common experience of fans at football matches, but much less so at race meetings.

¹¹ From the Latin *limen* – threshold – imagined as an 'in-between' space; having moved out of one zone, and not yet moved into the next one.

¹² He applied this concept primarily to rites of passage, such as initiation ceremonies. Australians would be reminded of Aboriginal initiation ceremonies, taking place for periods lasting from a few hours up to a year. There are analogies with groups on pilgrimage and with religious-order novitiates, at least in their older traditional forms. Turner also analysed individual rituals with great insight, particularly, in a memorable article (1976), the Catholic Mass (in its Tridentine form). Today it seems that it is most often through sporting and musical crowd events that participants are drawn temporarily out of everyday life into a 'world' experienced as removed, separate, different.

¹³ University of Chicago psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi took up Turner's concept of 'flow' in the 1970s, and explored it in detail in a whole series of articles and books. This mode of consciousness is not confined to religious activities of communal worship or solitary prayer and contemplation; it has been found to occur in many other situations (provided its occurrence is not impeded by anxiety about achieving a successful outcome): in sport, intellectual work, creative activity, singing, dancing, playing music, sexual activity. Other authors at about the same time were writing of *The Zen of Archery* – speaking of the state of being 'in the zone' etc. Here is a simplified description: 'You are totally absorbed in what you are doing, so that you don't notice anything apart from the central activity, and you forget yourself and your thoughts, and don't notice time going by. Playing your part seems to come almost automatically, and you feel intense pleasure and satisfaction, and want this to go on forever'. Fifty years earlier, one of sociology's founding fathers, Émile Durkheim, coined the concept of 'collective effervescence' to describe a unique type of experience which he discerned in the accounts he read of Aboriginal ceremonies such as the *corroboree*.

sacramental: for those capable of faith, it is, in and through the human and sensory experiences of seeing, hearing, being present with others, standing, kneeling, praying ... nothing less than an encounter with the Living God.

*Recommendations*¹⁴

The key injunction for those charged with preparing liturgies (and in this case, the whole WYD event and even its non-liturgical components) is simple: *get out of the way!* Trust God! Believe that sacred liturgical symbols have their own power beyond our comprehension, and do not require our assistance in order to have their effects. The function of planning and organisation in this sphere is simply to set, unobtrusively, an appropriate environment for Word and Sacrament, but then to retire, to stand back, to disappear, to 'let go and let God'.

The necessary 'mechanisms' of organisation should as far as possible be in the background, out of sight, down in the engine-room; not cluttering up the foreground, competing for attention with the primary symbols, distracting from them, even to the point of destroying altogether the integrity of the event and preventing the basic dynamics of *communitas* and *flow* from functioning. Consider an analogy from the profane world of theatre: suppose, at the crucial dramatic moment of a play, the Stage Manager were to pop out on stage and urge those standing at the back to take the seats available at the front. The play would never recover its dramatic momentum.

The ideal WYD organisation would be totally invisible to the ordinary participants. 'Housekeeping' and 'announcements' of all kinds should be kept to an absolute minimum, and if unavoidable, introduced with great sensitivity to what is occurring at the time. There will be many moments when they should be completely forbidden. An inappropriate intervention, by dragging everyone back into the 'everyday life' mode of consciousness, can effectively destroy a sacred moment. It is best if no 'directions' at all are given during a Mass.

Lack of understanding of this simple principle of respect for sacred symbols and actions is responsible for the failure of many contemporary liturgies by depriving them of their sense of sacredness.

There are many alternatives to lengthy and repetitive announcements over public address systems, particularly by using contemporary electronic technology. A specific, non-dominant area of a display screen, visible to all, can be reserved for housekeeping announcements and directions. SMS messages to group leaders can be employed. Third-generation mobile phones can be set to browse a particular website on which up-to-the-minute information can be posted; this last is potentially the most useful technique of all. It should be possible to avoid voice announcements altogether, except perhaps in the case of an emergency.

8. The 'voice of authority'

¹⁴ These recommendations flow from the author's research on liturgy and religious experience, (Mason 2004) and from years of teaching and writing on this topic.

Voice announcements have another dimension: they also represent the sound of *authority* – that of the organisers, of World Youth Day Administration, which youth will naturally associate with the official Church. A dominant-sounding (especially male) voice, a hectoring tone, a peremptory style – any of these would immediately reinforce the worst stereotype of a bullying ‘Big Brother’ church. Hence, if voice announcements are to be used at all, considerable care should be used in choosing a person, a voice and a style and tone. A pleasant, firm, clear, fairly young female voice, a polite tone, a light touch, a style that is never ‘pushy’, but assumes that the hearers are good-willed and cooperative, would come as a very welcome surprise to young people. It would combat the negative stereotype, and likely be most effective in obtaining compliance. Large groups (especially containing many young males) can easily be led in positive directions, compliant as lambs, but only by gentleness and respect; if they feel pushed, or above all, ‘disrespected’ – demeaned -- the response is instant animosity and revolt; a peaceful scene can degenerate in seconds into angry chaos.

9. Youth, Community and Church beyond WYD week

Will WYD be a ‘one-off’?

A huge ‘happening’, after which all will soon settle back into routine ‘business as usual’, and Australia’s young Catholics, while perhaps planning to attend the next WYD, will resume their former lives largely unchanged?

It’s possible, although the strongly committed will almost certainly be further strengthened, and some of those who were already active and involved will take the decisive step into real discipleship.

But without carefully structured and programmed continuing support, it is most likely that many others will ‘try harder’ for a while, then resume their former patterns of spirituality with only minor changes.

The fundamental and distinctively Catholic theological principle applying to this issue is that life in the Spirit, the new life of grace, is the life of the Body of Christ; is the life of the Church, and is given to individuals in and through their membership and participation in the community of the Church. Coming to life in Christ is not an individualistic enterprise that takes place on a private line between God and me.

Nothing could be more contrary than this principle to the dominant spirit of the times. Western youth, but especially Australians, and especially Catholics, are characterised by a very strong religious individualism, which is taken for granted as unquestionable, defended fiercely, and invested with absolute moral value.

But a strong experience of community at WYD, if youth are helped to rekindle the feeling and reflect on its meaning and implications, can begin to create a breach in this otherwise impregnable wall. Especially because it is not a matter of mere intellectual insight, but a potent experience of hope that the deepest desires of the heart can be satisfied; an almost physical hunger which has been fed, a thirst quenched for a time, and now renewed. Perhaps at first only a crack appears in the wall which imprisons the modern individual, in which a blade of new grass can grow. It may take some longer time for the wall to give way.

Recommendations

Youth will come away from WYD with a certain momentum, with an appetite for more, a desire for an indefinable something that was part of WYD -- with, theologically speaking, a hunger for Word and Eucharist, expressed in wanting to continue to be with people in this new way, to experience that particular exhilaration.

They need help to understand that the disciples weren't allowed to take up permanent residence on Tabor; that you can't breathe pure oxygen all the time; that after the 'rush' comes the 'down', so it isn't healthy to get addicted; life goes on, back down on the plain, but that even there, the 'special something' is still available, even if not in quite so intense a form.

In other words, with good pastoral care, much of the force of their positive WYD experience can be channelled back into different forms of involvement with Church in everyday life, and into reshaping their lives towards the Gospel pattern.¹⁵ Specific programs following up Australian participants in previous WYDs have been organised at diocesan level; and no doubt have focussed precisely on this goal, including systematic reflection on the WYD experience and the kind of 'debriefing' mentioned in the previous paragraph.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to suggest in detail the communal structures in which post-WYD youth will be sustained at a higher level of commitment, except to note that it will not be effective in most cases simply to point them towards their parishes and hope that they will find adequate resources there.

10. What are the likely views and attitudes adults will take to WYD?

It seems important to anticipate the range of these views as far as possible. In some cases a response will be required.

-There will be an official church perspective, largely shared by the WYD administration, most bishops, many priests); all of these will have a clear and strong and well-worked-out view of what they intend WYD to be; however, theirs is not the only view on the matter; it is one of many, and may not turn out to be the dominant one.

- 'Leaders / guides' who serve / supervise / coordinate at WYD often take a different view of what is going on from that of the youth themselves; their responses are of particular interest because their interpretations are those of committed Catholics, and they have a unique capacity for close observation of the behaviour and experience of the younger people, arising from their own intimate involvement in the activities. We hope to incorporate their perspectives into our research project.

-Mainstream Catholic adults will likely be predisposed to a tolerant and positive view, and will judge the event fairly on its conduct and outcomes.

-Maronite, Melkite and Ukrainian church leaders and members: their response will depend on whether they feel included, or disregarded / overwhelmed, with their youth proselytised by Latins.

-A conservative Catholic view (to the right of the official church) may well see WYD (as was the case in Germany) as a corrupting influence on the Church; as a betrayal or compromise of its fundamental principles, merely pandering to youth, swayed by the

¹⁵ This is not mere speculation; but based on some years of assisting youth in consolidating the gains from retreat experiences.

spirit of the times. The partying, the noisiness, the sexual behaviour of some attenders will be cited as examples of the typical experience-seeking pleasure-orientation of young people out to have fun, without any sense of, or understanding or feeling for, the spiritual depth of the Catholic faith.

-An important response will be a secular but not necessarily anti-religious or anti-Catholic view, relatively open-minded: e.g. the kind of view already expressed by the Australian Prime Minister. This will be the government official view, and will be taken up by some newspapers, some non-church youth organizations and many non-religious Australians. The further response of this group will depend on how event is framed, publicized, and what actually occurs; many decent secular Australians hold values which would incline them to see positively many aspects of WYD apart from the specifically Catholic-religious ones.

-Non-Catholic evangelical churches and their youth: it will be interesting to see the attitude expressed by the more vociferous among them: will the response be restrained / ecumenical / generally positive, out of a sense of common ground, or stem from the anti-Catholic component of evangelicalism? The event is taking place on their home turf; it will be hard for them not to take a public position.

-Non-Christian religious groups: especially Jews and Muslims, may largely ignore the event unless it attracts some of their own young people, or offends in some way (in some reported statements) their particular sensitivities.

Aboriginal / indigenous people: they have particular sensitivities, and may well have high expectations of the event acknowledging their special place in Australian society, given the extraordinarily creative and positive way in which this was expressed at the Opening Ceremony of the Sydney Olympic Games, given also Pope John Paul's striking interventions on their behalf on his Australian visit, and given the strongly positive outreach to them on the part of the Church, especially on the occasion of major events.

-Secularists: we can anticipate negative secularist responses before, during and after WYD from anti-Catholic individuals and organisations, some media commentators / some politicians on the Left . These may find some common ground with anti-Catholic evangelical responses in their negative attitude to institutional Catholicism: they may interpret WYD as a final public outburst of energy (as in a dying supernova) from a once powerful and now declining institution; or as a pseudo-religious fun event for youthful experience-seekers, created and manipulated by a powerful conservative Church (these types of interpretations were put forward in the German press).

11. WYD08 and 'Evangelicals'

WYD will probably be seen as a recruiting opportunity by evangelicals and even New Age groups; there may be some attempts to infiltrate, and to engage in recruitment under the guise of 'interviewing' for journalistic or even research purposes.

Partly, this may be in reaction to evangelicals most likely perceiving WYD as an (intended or unintended) attempt to appeal both to their own committed youth members, and much more, to appeal to the uncommitted mass of Australian youth, for whose allegiance they are in competition with us and all other groups – a competition in which they are unquestionably the most successful.

Recommendations

Particular care will be needed in accreditation of media to exclude press representatives whose real purpose is proselytising.

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