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The Church's commitment to the young:
from John Paul II to Pope Francis

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The theme that I was given, “The Church's commitment to the young: from Pope John Paul II to Pope Francis”, by its title suggests that my talk be divided into three parts according to the three pontificates. In each part I shall first attempt to present the core elements of each pontiff’s vision concerning the younger generations, and then I shall speak about their distinctive contribution to the World Youth Days they attended. This is only a methodological separation because the pronouncements made by the three pontiffs are very much in harmony and can be considered to be complementary. Nevertheless, because of the three different personalities and different experiences, we can highlight some specific approaches and emphases.

1. POPE JOHN PAUL II: YOUNG PEOPLE – MY HOPE

a. The unique quality of youth

After his first Angelus at the end of the solemn liturgy that inaugurated his pontificate (22 October 1978), Pope John Paul II improvised as he greeted the large number of young people gathered in St. Peter's Square. His words seem to me to be a concise summary of his personal and pastoral approach towards the younger generation: “You are the future of the world, the hope of the Church. You are my hope”.¹

¹ Only the *Osservatore Romano* (O.R., 23-24 October 1978,2) gave an account of Pope John Paul II's first Angelus and greeting to the people in St Peter's Square on 16 October 1978: “After reciting the Angelus prayer in Latin with some phrases in Polish, John Paul II spoke to the young people present once again before leaving. There were very many young people still in St Peter's Square after the ceremony cheering the Pope. He said to them: ‘You are the future of the world, the hope of the Church. You are my hope’. It was already 1:40 p.m. and John Paul II was reluctant to leave the magnificent scene in the Square. However, it was late and as he himself said in Polish, it was time for lunch. Once more he said goodbye to the crowd and returned to his apartment. Only then would the people leave the Square” [our translation]; see also: JOHN PAUL II with Vittorio Messori, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 125; JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Dilecti Amici* to the youth of the world on the occasion of the International year of Youth, 31 March 1985; JOHN PAUL II, Angelus, 12 October 2003: “Now, as I think back to the past with gratitude, I turn my gaze on the young people with whom I have built up a preferential dialogue since the very beginning of my Petrine ministry. I recall that at the end of that first Angelus I added a special greeting to them, saying, ‘You are the future of the world, the hope of the Church. You are my hope!’. I must recognize that their response was truly encouraging. Today I would like to thank them for having been constantly close to me in these years, and I would like them to know that I continue to count on them. I entrust them, O Mary, to you who are the eternal youth of the Church. Help them to be ready and available to do

These few words show us Pope John Paul II's approach to the young. He loved them and he sought them out. He trusted them and saw them to be a great hope for the Church and for the world.² The new Pope could see the youthful face of the Church in young people, and he was firmly convinced that the Church had need of their enthusiasm and fresh approach.³ He said that their youthful *joie de vivre* reflects "something of the original joy God had in creating humankind. The young experience this same joy within themselves. This joy is the same everywhere, but it is also ever new and original".⁴ The Pope saw huge potential in youth for good and creative possibilities. This wealth requires attention and a listening ear on the part of the Church before we can answer their questions and respond to their needs.⁵

John Paul II always dealt with the great challenges and opportunities of youth ministry, even though some people felt that this was an area that should be discontinued. In the twenty-six and a half years of his pontificate, he devoted no less than 904 speeches and writings to the subject of "youth". These were homilies, speeches, messages and letters that fill three large volumes of 2,242 pages.⁶

About fifteen years after the beginning of the pontificate, the journalist Vittorio Messori, in an interview book called *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, takes up the subject of the Pope's outlook regarding young people. He asks if this really corresponds to reality or whether it is just an illusion on the part of adults.⁷ John Paul II said: "What are young people of today like, what are they looking for? It could be said that they are the same as ever. There is something in human beings which never changes ... This is true especially in the young. But today's youth are also different from those who came before".⁸ The Pope recalled the painful experiences of the generations that lived through the war as he did and other dehumanising events. These, however, revealed traits of great heroism among the young.⁹ These experiences of heroism helped the Pope himself to find his own personal vocation.

Today's youth, however, are growing up in a different context which is that of a consumer society. They also experience greater freedom. This, however, does not mean that young people reject traditional values or abandon the Church. Today's youth are idealistic too, but this is

God's will, in order to build generously a world that is more just and more fraternal".

² Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Address to Italian youth, 8 November 1978: "The Pope wishes everyone well, each and every person, but he has a preference for the youngest because they had a preferential place in the heart of Christ...".

³ JOHN PAUL II, *Dilecti Amici*, no. 15: "The Church looks to the young; or rather, the Church in a special way sees herself in the young – in you as a group and in each of you as individuals".

⁴ JOHN PAUL II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 125.

⁵ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 124: "Whenever I meet them ... I wait first of all to hear what they want to tell me about themselves, about their society, about their Church. And I always point out: 'What I am going to say to you is not as important as what you are going to say to me. You will not necessarily say it to me in words; you will say it to me by your presence, by your song, perhaps by your dancing, by your skits, and finally by your enthusiasm'".

⁶ Cf. ULRICH CYRILLE MIYIGBENA, *Giovanni Paolo II parla ai giovani. Opera Omnia. Collana completa di tutti I discorsi rivolti ai giovani nell'arco del pontificato nelle lingue originali*, 3 vol., Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2011.

⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 118.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 136: "Precisely in that period of absolute contempt for human beings, when the price of human life had perhaps never been considered so cheap, precisely then each life became precious, acquiring the value of a free gift".

sometimes expressed in the form of criticism rather than commitment to duty as in previous generations.¹⁰

As a young priest, Karol Wojtyła had already discovered the unique quality of youth. It is not simply a natural step in the course of life, but it “is also a time given by Providence to every person and given to them as a responsibility. During that time they search, like the young man in the Gospel, for answers to basic questions; they search not only for the meaning of life, but also for a concrete way to go about living their lives”.¹¹ Here I am reminded of a nice play on words in the German language. Pope John Paul II sees the years of youth as a *Gabe* and as an *Aufgabe*, that is, as a great “gift” and at the same time as a huge “task” to fulfill. For this reason, it is of fundamental importance that parents, teachers and priests be available to them because young people are in need of benevolent and safe guides by their side.

John Paul II found that a sense of communion is a second characteristic of youth. “Young people ... know they must live for others and with others, they know that their life has meaning to the extent that it becomes a free gift for others”.¹² Herein lies the origin of the diversity of vocations – priesthood, religious life and marriage – and the consequent decision “for life”. These vocations are all to be considered as gifts.

b. The institution of World Youth Day

It seems to me that the surprising success of the Youth Jubilee in the Holy Year of the Redemption (11-15 April 1984) was the final trigger in convincing John Paul to implement a “pastoral plan” for young people at the level of the universal Church. This would also serve as a model for renewal of youth ministry at national and diocesan levels.¹³

The United Nations International Year of Youth that followed in 1985 was a good opportunity to put youth at the centre of attention in the Church. This was the year in which Pope John Paul II devoted his message for the 18th World Day of Peace (1 January) to the theme “Peace and Youth Go Forward Together”.¹⁴ He also published the apostolic letter *Dilecti Filii* (31 March)

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 121.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Cf. Guzmán Carriquiry, *World Youth Days*, in: Pontifical Council for the Laity (ed.), *Together on the European Roads*. Proceedings of the 2nd European Meeting on Youth Ministry, Loreto, 12-16 September 1995, Laity Today Collection 31, Vatican City 1996; Paul Josef Cordes, “Immer nur alte Steine! - Wo sind die jungen Leute?”. Wie eine Kette, die Nationen und Völker verbindet: Ein Bericht über die Entstehung und Wirkungsgeschichte der Weltjugendtage, in: *Die Tagespost*, 03.04.2004, 4; Stefan Meßner, *Die Weltjugendtage mit Erlebnisberichten von jungen Teilnehmern*, Ed. Miriam, Jestetten 2004; M. Guggenberger, *Der Weltjugendtag - Ein religiöser Event in der individualisierten Gesellschaft*, unpublished thesis (Diplomarbeit) at *Facoltà di Teologia Cattolica dell'Università di Passau* 2005; Gino Concetti, *Le giornate della gioventù. Da Giovanni Paolo II a Benedetto XVI*, Ed. VivereIn, Collection: “Parva itinera” 32, Roma 2006; Renato Boccardo, *Giovanni Paolo II e le Giornate Mondiali della Gioventù*, in: *Il Pontificato di Giovanni Paolo II*, edited by Elio Guerriero and Marco Impagliazzo, Collection: *Storia del Cristianesimo*, vol. 11, Edizioni San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2006, 103-125; Mimmo Muolo, *Generazione GMG, La storia della Giornata Mondiale della Gioventù*. Preface by Card. Stanislaw Rylko. Introduction by Marcello Bedeschi, Ancora Editrice, Milano 2011; Jan Balik, *Giovanni Paolo II in dialogo con i giovani*. Introduction by Mons. Renato Boccardo. Preface by Mons. Ladislav Hucko, Publishers *Città Nuova della P. A. M. O. M.*, Roma 2013, 69-92.

¹⁴ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Message for the 18th World Day of Peace, “Peace and youth go forward together”, 8 December 1984.

on the value and the sense of youth,¹⁵ and he sent a brief letter accompanying the letter *Dilecti Filii* to the bishops of the whole world¹⁶ and another to priests for Holy Thursday.¹⁷ For Palm Sunday (30-31 March), he called a new “International Meeting of Youth”. We could speak of a “general mobilisation” by the Pope for the cause of youth ministry!

The response was beyond all expectations. Pope John Paul II, in his *Urbi et Orbi* message on Easter Sunday, 7 April 1985, announced the establishment of *World Youth Day*.¹⁸ I quote his words: “I met hundreds of thousands of young people last Sunday and the festive image of their enthusiasm remains imprinted on my heart. With the hope that this wonderful experience may be repeated in future years and that Palm Sunday may become World Youth Day, I confirm my conviction that youth have the difficult but exciting task of transforming the basic ‘mechanisms’ in relations between individuals and nations that encourage selfishness and oppression, and of creating new structures that are inspired by truth, solidarity and peace”.¹⁹

John Paul II confirmed this decision at the end of the year during his Christmas encounter with the Roman Curia.²⁰ In a moving speech, the Pope attributed the success of this great encounter to the help and grace of the Holy Trinity. He expressed his deepest gratitude by saying: “It is God who guides history, the history of humankind and the world. This history, as we know, is only and solely ‘salvation history’ with the purpose of redemptive love that culminates in the Incarnation of the Word. It is he who guides his Church and makes it a privileged instrument in his plan of redemption”.²¹ According to the Pope, it is only in this light that the exceptional events of the year that had passed found their full meaning.

With regard to the reason for WYD and its purpose, he said: “All young people must feel the care that the Church has for them. Therefore, the whole Church, in union with the successor of Peter, must be more and more engaged at a global level in caring for youth, in responding to their anxieties and concerns and to their receptiveness and hopes. We must try to match their expectations, and we must communicate the certainty that is Christ, the Truth that is Christ, and the love that is Christ. We must do so through appropriate instruction, as this is a necessary and contemporary method of evangelisation”.²²

I would like to take up an idea of our president Cardinal Stanislaw Rylko and summarise the option made by John Paul II by speaking of three aspects that illuminate the meaning of WYD

¹⁵ Cf. note 1.

¹⁶ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Letter to all the bishops of the Catholic Church, 31 March 1985: “The current year 1985, International Year of Youth, is also an opportunity for us to present Christ to young people and, at the same time, to show them the place that they have in the Church” [our translation].

¹⁷ JOHN PAUL II, Letter to all the priests of the Church on the occasion of Holy Thursday 1985, 31 March 1985, Italian version in: *Insegnamenti* VIII/1 (1985), 748-756.

¹⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 124.

¹⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *Urbi et Orbi* message to “the city and the world” on Easter Sunday, 7 April 1985 [our translation]; See also: JOHN PAUL II, *Regina Coeli*, Milan Cathedral, 22 May 1983: “Who can accept the breadth and depth of Christian hope better than you young people? You are learning, in the present, how to build a more just society for humankind. Who more than you can feel the need for Someone to free humankind from the many roots of evil that are within them and that seriously mark so much of people’s being and actions?” [our translation].

²⁰ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Address to the College of Cardinals and members of the Roman Curia before Christmas, 20 December 1985.

²¹ JOHN PAUL II, Address to the Curia before Christmas 1985 [our translation].

²² JOHN PAUL II, Address to the Curia before Christmas 1985 [our translation].

and explain their positive acceptance by young people.²³ In the first place there is the confidence that the Pope had in the young. John Paul II had the courage to trust young people. He considered them to be key players in the life and mission of the Church. Youth is not personal property. It is a gift – as we said before – that should be shared with everyone, with society, with the Church and with all humanity.²⁴

The second aspect concerns the format of WYD as an occasion for true dialogue with young people.²⁵ Young people deserve to be listened to, and it is in conversation with them that Jesus Christ is proclaimed.²⁶ Many young people had never before met with the bishops of the Church in such a personal and direct way as was now possible in the catecheses and other events of WYD. John Paul II rejected any reservations about the large number of participants. He was convinced that the event was not a gathering of an “anonymous mass. It is not a number, but rather a living and personal presence ... (participating) with overwhelming yet orderly joy in a community act of love and faith in Christ the Lord ...”.²⁷ This great gathering of faith brings individuals out from their isolation and allows them to experience their membership of the universal Church. It displays the youthfulness and vitality of the Church.

It should be added that WYD makes it possible in today's context to give worldwide visibility to the Church. People can see that you cannot reduce faith to the private sphere, but that it is by nature a public event. In this sense, WYD can be considered to be an event that goes “against the grain” with respect to certain political agendas. The fact that there is always a different host diocese shows how this is a people on the move. They are on a continuous pilgrimage that crosses the continents.

Pope John Paul II refused to be called the inventor of World Youth Day. “No one invented World Youth Day. It was the young people themselves who created it. Those days, those encounters, then became something desired by young people throughout the world. Most of the time these Days were something of a surprise for priests, and even bishops, in that they surpassed all their expectations”.²⁸

The third aspect is the most decisive as regards WYD as a privileged place for a personal and community meeting with Jesus Christ.²⁹ The whole event is focussed on the person of Christ, both in liturgical celebrations and in the catecheses, the Way of the Cross and the exchange of experiences of faith. A permanent “sign” of this Christological stamp on WYD has been the WYD Cross since 1984 and the icon of Our Lady *Salus Populi Romani* since 2004. When Pope John Paul II entrusted the Cross to young people he said: “My dear young people, at the

²³ Cf. Card. Stanislaw Rylko, *World Youth Day: “a cascade of light and hope”*, manuscript, February 2012.

²⁴ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Dilecti Amici*, no. 1.

²⁵ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Prayer Vigil, 15th World Youth Day, Tor Vergata, Rome, 19 August 2000.

²⁶ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 124.

²⁷ JOHN PAUL II, Address to the Curia before Christmas 1985 [our translation].

²⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 124. See also: Letter of John Paul II to Cardinal Eduardo Francisco Pironio on the occasion of the Seminar on World Youth Day organized in Czestochowa, 8 May 1996. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/1996/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_19960508_czestochowa-gm_g_en.html

²⁹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Letter to Cardinal Pironio: “The principal objective of the Days is to make the person of Jesus the centre of the faith and life of every young person so that he may be their constant point of reference and also the inspiration of every initiative and commitment for the education of the new generations. This is the slogan of every Youth Day, and through this decade, the Days have been like an uninterrupted and pressing call to build life and faith upon the rock, who is Christ.”; JOHN PAUL II, Address to the Curia before Christmas 1985; cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millenio Adveniente*, 10 November 1994, 58).

conclusion of the Holy Year, I entrust to you the sign of this Jubilee Year: the Cross of Christ! Carry it throughout the world as a symbol of Christ's love for humanity, and proclaim to everyone that it is only in Christ, who died and rose from the dead, that salvation and redemption are to be found".³⁰

During the Angelus prayer on Palm Sunday, 20 March 2005, two weeks before his death, John Paul II left what could be called a "spiritual testament" for the younger generation: "Twenty years ago, right in this Square, World Youth Days were initiated. Because of this, I address today in a particular way the young people ... Today, you adore the Cross of Christ, which you carry across the world, because you have believed in the love of God that was revealed in the crucified Christ. Dear young people, I realize more and more how providential and prophetic it was that this very day, Palm Sunday and the Passion of the Lord, should have become your Day. This feast possesses a special grace, that of joy united to the Cross, which in itself sums up the Christian mystery. Today, I tell you: continue unflaggingly on the journey on which you have set out in order to be witnesses everywhere of the glorious Cross of Christ. Do not be afraid! May the joy of the Lord, crucified and Risen, be your strength, and may Mary Most Holy always be beside you".³¹

To summarise the path being taken, we can say that WYD is a prophetic initiative, a great celebration and a "laboratory" of faith, a powerful tool for evangelisation centred on the person of Jesus Christ and dedicated to the essentials of the faith (*Kerygma*).³² WYD responds to a search for meaning, it offers authentic values and it helps young people to rise above themselves in dealing with the difficulties of life. Quite a few young participants have changed the direction of their lives, have found their vocation and have made decisive decisions.

WYD is a powerful sign of ecclesial communion. It brings together young people from all over the world and many different groups, movements, associations and communities come together with the pope and bishops. It is a true pilgrimage both from the spiritual point of view and from the practical point of view.³³ World Youth Day is a "model" for youth ministry and it needs to be integrated into the life of parishes and dioceses. It is a providential gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church and a precious legacy of Pope John Paul II.

2. POPE BENEDICT XVI: THE CHALLENGE OF EDUCATION

a. A life for the younger generations

Like his predecessor, Benedict XVI also took the opportunity given by the beginning of his pontificate to show his closeness to the younger generations. His words were in complete harmony with Pope John Paul II: "Dear young people: Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ, and you will find true life".³⁴

³⁰ JOHN PAUL II, words on entrusting the Cross of the Holy Year of the Redemption to young people, Easter Sunday, 22 April 1984.

³¹ JOHN PAUL II, Angelus, Palm Sunday, 20 March 2005.

³² Cf. JOHN PAUL II, WYD Prayer Vigil, Rome, Tor Vergata, 19 August 2000.

³³ Cf. Pontifical Council for the Laity, *World Youth Day Memorandum for Organisers*, 2005, 7.

³⁴ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Mass for the inauguration of the pontificate, St Peter's Square, 24 April 2005.

As we look back on Pope Benedict XVI's relationship with the world of young people, I would like to emphasize that his whole life was marked by a commitment to the younger generations.³⁵ Joseph Ratzinger saw his vocation to be in academic work transmitting a deeper knowledge of the faith to young people in particular. He invested all his strength to this goal as a professor of dogmatic and fundamental theology (1952-1977), as a cardinal and archbishop of Munich and Freising (1978-1981), as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (1981-2005) and as pope (2005-2013).

In this respect, his words are significant in the introduction to "*Youcat*", a catechism for young people published before World Youth Day in Madrid. "Study this Catechism with passion and perseverance. Make a sacrifice of your time for it! Study it in the quiet of your room; read it with a friend; form study groups and networks; share with each other on the Internet. By all means continue to talk with each other about your faith. You need to know what you believe. You need to know your faith with that same precision with which an IT specialist knows the inner workings of a computer. You need to understand it like a good musician knows the piece he is playing. Yes, you need to be more deeply rooted in the faith than the generation of your parents so that you can engage the challenges and temptations of this time with strength and determination".³⁶

In view of the various crises that clearly affect the younger generations, Pope Benedict XVI has repeatedly agreed with the diagnosis that speaks of a "great educational emergency". It calls for the attention of parents, teachers, priests and all those who have educational responsibilities.³⁷ One example of his concern can be seen in his "Letter to the Diocese and City of Rome on the urgent task of educating the new generations" that he presented and delivered in St. Peter's Square on 23 February 2008.³⁸

The letter that the Pope addressed to the diocese and city of Rome had to put forward arguments that were acceptable to both believers and non-believers. However, in his speech in St. Peter's Square he could present the Christian response to this urgent need in a more explicit way. The Pope emphasised that believers should face all difficulties, uncertainties and doubts with "great hope and strong trust: by the certainty, that is, that the clear and definitive 'yes' which God in Jesus Christ has said to the human family (cf. *2Cor* 1: 19-20), is also valid for our boys and girls and young people... Therefore, it is also possible to teach goodness in our time; it is a passion we must carry in our hearts, a common enterprise to which each one is called to make his own contribution".³⁹

The Pope first addressed parents, as it is they who make a unique contribution to their children's education with fidelity to their mutual love: "this is the first great gift your children need if they are to grow up serene, acquire self-confidence and thus learn to be capable in turn of authentic and generous love".⁴⁰ In order to educate well, we need to have a proper and consistent lifestyle, firmness in tempering youthful characters, clarity in distinguishing right from wrong so that

³⁵ Cf. JOSEPH RATZINGER, *La mia vita. Ricordi (1927-1977)*, Edizioni San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 1997, 115.

³⁶ BENEDICT XVI, Preface to *Youcat*.

³⁷ Cf. Fabio Attard, *L'emergenza educativa. L'impegno della Chiesa e il recente Magistero*, in: Quaderni cannibali, Dicembre 2009.

³⁸ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Letter to the Diocese and City of Rome on the urgent task of educating young people*, 21 January 2008; BENEDICT XVI, Address to the Diocese of Rome at the presentation of the "Letter on the urgent task of education", St. Peter's Square, 23 February 2008.

³⁹ BENEDICT XVI, Address to the Diocese of Rome at the presentation of the "Letter on the urgent task of education".

⁴⁰ Ibid.

young people themselves can build their lives on safe beliefs and guidelines.

Benedict XVI reminded us that teachers have a duty to transmit, not only information and knowledge, but also answers to the big question of the truth that can guide them through life.⁴¹ He told the men and women of the Church involved in the educational sector that they must have the same sentiments as Jesus Christ (cf. *Phil* 2:5) and be reliable friends of the young and witnesses to the truth that sets us free (cf. *Jn* 8:32).

In the last part of his speech, Pope Benedict involves young people themselves in an original way in the task of education. He said that it is a relationship between people in which “as they grow older, the freedom and responsibility of those who are educated comes increasingly into play”.⁴² He reminds young people: “you yourselves are called to be the architects of your own moral, cultural and spiritual growth. It is up to you, therefore, to freely accept in your hearts, your minds and your lives, the patrimony of truth, goodness and beauty which has taken shape in the course of centuries and whose cornerstone is Jesus Christ”.⁴³ He tells them that not only educators are with them, “but above all the God who created us and is the secret guest of our hearts”.⁴⁴ God enlightens our understanding and guides our freedom to good. God is our hope and the foundation of our lives, the One in whom we can put all our trust.⁴⁵

The concrete educational efforts of the Church can be divided, according to Benedict XVI, into five “areas of action” that are interconnected with each other and complement each other. They are:⁴⁶ (1) to communicate God in a world without God,⁴⁷ (2) to reveal the Church to be a trustworthy companion,⁴⁸ (3) to be like a parent in accompanying young people⁴⁹ (4) to be prepared to search for the truth,⁵⁰ and (5) to show the way to the path of charity.⁵¹

It is worth noting that, in this broad educational programme, Pope Benedict XVI places particular emphasis on the discovery of the beauty and reasonableness of faith, a commitment that has

⁴¹ BENEDICT XVI, *Letter to the Diocese and City of Rome on the urgent task of educating young people*, cit.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ BENEDICT XVI, Address to the Diocese of Rome at the presentation of the “Letter on the urgent task of education”, cit.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY (ed.), *The Evangelisation of Young People Today. What Benedict XVI has to say on the subject*, Città del Vaticano 2012.; FABIO ATTARD, *Ripensare la pastorale giovanile*, Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, Roma 2013, 65-75; JOSÉ M^a HERRANZ MATÉ, *El mensaje de Benedicto XVI a los jóvenes*, in: *La ciudad de Dios*, Revista agustiniana, vol. CCXXVI, n. 2, Real Monasterio de el Escorial 2013, 333-362.

⁴⁷ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Message for World Youth Day in Madrid 2011: “In some parts of the world, particularly in the West, today's culture tends to exclude God, and to consider faith a purely private issue with no relevance for the life of society. Even though the set of values underpinning society comes from the Gospel – values like the sense of the dignity of the person, of solidarity, of work and of the family –, we see a certain ‘eclipse of God’ taking place, a kind of amnesia which, albeit not an outright rejection of Christianity, is nonetheless a denial of the treasure of our faith, a denial that could lead to the loss of our deepest identity”.

⁴⁸ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Address to the participants in the Ecclesial Diocesan Convention of Rome, 6 June 2005.

⁴⁹ Ibid.; Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Address to the participants in the Ecclesial Diocesan Convention of Rome, 11 June 2007.

⁵⁰ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Address to the participants in the Ecclesial Diocesan Convention of Rome, 5 June 2006; BENEDICT XVI, Welcome Ceremony, World Youth Day in Sydney, 17 July 2008; BENEDICT XVI, Address on his visit to the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Rome on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the institution of the “Agostino Gemelli” Department of Medicine and Surgery, 3 May 2012.

⁵¹ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Address to the participants in the Ecclesial Diocesan Convention of Rome, 2005, cit.; BENEDICT XVI, Address to the participants in the Ecclesial Diocesan Convention of Rome, 2007, cit.; BENEDICT XVI, To the General Assembly of the Italian Episcopal Conference, 29 May 2008.

characterised his entire pontificate. In his homily at the inaugural Mass of his pontificate, he stated: “There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him”.⁵² He told the participants in the Ecclesial Diocesan Convention of Rome (11 June 2007) that when dealing with the mass of information available and conflicting ideas and interpretations, “young people today nevertheless still have a great inner need for truth. They are consequently open to Jesus Christ who...called himself truth, not custom. It is up to us to seek to respond to the question of truth, fearlessly juxtaposing the proposal of faith with the reason of our time. In this way we will help young people to broaden the horizons of their intelligence, to open themselves to the mystery of God, in whom is found life's meaning and direction, and to overcome the conditioning of a rationality which trusts only what can be the object of experiment and calculation”.⁵³

It seems to me that special attention should be given to what Pope Benedict XVI had to say about the “law of growth” of faith. This does not only apply to World Youth Day: “God always sows in silence. The results are not immediately apparent in the statistics. And the seed the Lord scatters on the ground with World Youth Days is like the seed of which he speaks in the Gospel: some seeds fell along the path and were lost; some fell on rocky ground and were lost, some fell upon thorns and were lost; but other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth abundant fruit... To borrow other words from the Lord: the mustard seed was small, but it grew and became a great tree... we cannot say straight away that there will be an immense growth of the Church tomorrow. God does not act in this way. However, the Church grows in silence and vigorously. I know from other World Youth Days that a great many friendships were born, friendships for life; a great many experiences that God exists. And let us place trust in this silent growth, and we may be certain, even if the statistics do not tell us much, that the Lord’s seed really grows and will be for very many people the beginning of a friendship with God and with others, of a universality of thought, of a common responsibility which really shows us that these days do bear fruit”.⁵⁴

I would like to conclude this section by presenting Pope Benedict XVI’s “decatalogue” to the youth of the twenty-first century. It was recently drawn up by a young Augustinian priest, José M^a Herranz Maté, who worked with WYD 2011 in Madrid. (1) Jesus has a plan for your life. Do not be afraid. Accept it because he never disappoints; (2) As a Christian you are called to be a witness to the truth, and it will convert you so that you will be a missionary among your contemporaries; (3) Be vigilant, for youth is a period of great ideals. Do not allow yourself to be drawn by that which does not give true happiness; (4) Make every effort to discover the true love that comes from God and that transforms everything; (5) Experience the community and be part of the Church. Communicate and celebrate in the Church, for there you find real life; (6) Do not turn a blind eye to suffering. You can change the world and bring consolation to those who suffer. You can make your environment a welcoming place for all; (7) Here is your mother. She will lead you to Jesus. Open up your heart; (8) Open your eyes and see God's presence in your life. Allow God’s Spirit to dwell in your heart; (9) There is no true faith where there is no joy. Joy comes from an awareness of being precious to God, loved by God, chosen by God and

⁵² BENEDICT XVI, Homily at the Mass for the inauguration of the pontificate, 24 April 2005.

⁵³ BENEDICT XVI, Address to the participants in the Ecclesial Diocesan Convention of Rome, 2007, *cit.*

⁵⁴ BENEDICT XVI, Meeting with journalists during the flight to Madrid, 18 August 2011; cf. JOSEPH RATZINGER, *Speranza del grano di senape*. Meditazioni per ogni mese dell'anno, Editrice Queriniana, Brescia 1974; KURT KOCH, *Das Geheimnis des Senfkorns. Grundzüge des theologischen Denkens von Papst Benedikt XVI.*, Ratzinger-Studien 3, ed. Papst Benedikt XVI Institute. Regensburg, Ed. Friedrich Pustet, Regensburg 2010.

redeemed by God; (10) You are the hope of the Church. The Church needs you.⁵⁵

b. WYD as a cenacle of Catholicism

Pope Benedict XVI wholeheartedly took up the WYD project started by John Paul II, and he enriched it with his specific qualities and gifts as a theologian.⁵⁶ It can be said without exaggeration that the themes of the three WYDs that were led by Pope Benedict XVI (Cologne 2005, Sydney 2008 and Madrid 2011) connect to a surprising extent to important fields in his theological reflection.⁵⁷ The themes of Eucharist and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament (Cologne 2005) are among his favourite theological subjects.⁵⁸ The same applies to reflection on the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, on the essence and action of the Holy Spirit (Sydney 2008).⁵⁹ The christological emphasis at WYD 2011 in Madrid also holds a prominent place in his theological work, as we can see from his trilogy on Jesus of Nazareth.⁶⁰

World Youth Day in Cologne served as a providential “archway” to enter his pontificate in perfect continuity with John Paul II.⁶¹ At the conclusion of that World Youth Day, he emphasised to the German bishops that WYD was not simply an “insight” on the part of his predecessor, but a real “inspiration”.⁶² It could be seen that there was mutual “give and take” between the Church

⁵⁵ Cf. MATÉ, *El mensaje de Benedicto XVI a los jóvenes*, 356 s.

⁵⁶ BENEDICT XVI, Meeting with journalists during the flight to Madrid, 18 August 2011: “After personally experiencing two WYDs, I can only say that Pope John Paul II was truly inspired when he created this important meeting of young people and of the world with the Lord. I would say that these World Youth Days are a sign, a cascade of light; they give visibility to the faith and to God’s presence in the world, and thus create the courage to be believers. Believers often feel isolated in this world, almost lost. Here they see that they are not alone, that there is a great network of faith, a great community of believers in the world, that it is beautiful to live in this universal friendship. And thus, it seems to me, friendships are born, friendships beyond the confines of different cultures and different countries. And this birth of a universal network of friendship that links the world and God, is an important reality for the future of humanity, for the life of humanity today. Naturally, WYD cannot be an isolated event; it is part of a larger process, it should be prepared for by this journey of the Cross that transmigrates to different countries and already unites young people in the sign of the cross and in the marvellous sign of Our Lady. So it is that the preparation for the World Youth Day is of course far more than the technical plan for an event with a great many technical hitches; it is an inner preparation, a starting out towards others, together towards God. Then, later, the foundation of groups of friends follows, preserving this universal contact that opens the boundaries between cultures, between human and religious differences, hence it is a continuous journey that leads subsequently to a new summit, to a new World Youth Day. It seems to me, in this sense, that World Youth Day should be seen as a sign, as part of a great journey; it creates friendships, opens frontiers and makes visible the beauty of our being with God and of God’s being with us. In this regard, let us continue to implement Bl. Pope John Paul II’s important idea”.

⁵⁷ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Message for World Youth Day 2005 in Cologne “*We have come to worship him*” (Mt 2:2); BENEDICT XVI, Message for World Youth Day 2008 in Sydney “*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses*” (Acts 1:8); BENEDICT XVI, Message for World Youth Day 2011 in Madrid “*Planted and built up in Jesus Christ, firm in the faith*” (cf Col 2:7).

⁵⁸ Cf. JOSEPH RATZINGER, *Eucharistie Mitte der Kirche*, in: *Theologie der Liturgie. Die sakramentale Begründung christlicher Existenz*, in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, Ed. Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau 2008, part. 342-358; cf. also 473-497.

⁵⁹ JOSEPH RATZINGER, *Der Heilige Geist als Communio. Zum Verhältnis von Pneumatologie und Spiritualität bei Augustinus*, in: Id., *Weggemeinschaft des Glaubens. Kirche als Communio*. Festgabe zum 75. Geburtstag, hrsg. vom Schülerkreis, Redaktion Stephan Otto Horn und Vincenz Pfnür, Editrice Sankt Ulrich, Augsburg 2002, 34-52; JOSEPH RATZINGER/BENEDIKT XVI., *Über den Heiligen Geist*, Ed. Sankt Ulrich, Augsburg 2012.

⁶⁰ JOSEPH RATZINGER/BENEDIKT XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*.

⁶¹ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Welcome ceremony at the International Airport of Cologne, 18 July 2005; cf. BENEDICT XVI, Papal Welcome Ceremony on the Poller Rheinwiesen bank in Cologne.

⁶² BENEDICT XVI, Meeting with the German bishops, Cologne, 21 August 2005.

and young people through their questions, their hope, their joy in the faith, and their enthusiasm. World Youth Day is a “provocation” against the widespread cowardice and fatigue of many believers.⁶³ It provides new impetus for youth ministry, not only in the host country, but also in the other participating countries.⁶⁴

Like his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI took advantage of the meeting at the end of 2008 with the Roman Curia to communicate his assessment of WYD in Sydney. He said that even those who had been doubtful about it beforehand had found it to be a “celebration of joy”, joy that is fruit of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁵ According to Pope Benedict, WYD is a long and systematic path with a “pre” and a “post”.⁶⁶ The WYD pilgrimage is a true spiritual pilgrimage that follows behind the Cross of Christ and the Icon of Mary: “In Australia it was not by chance that the Way of the Cross, winding through the city, became the high point of those days. Once again, it summed up everything that had occurred in previous years, while pointing to the One who gathers us together: to that God who loves us all the way to the Cross. Thus, the Pope himself is not the star around which everything revolves. He is completely and solely a Vicar. He points beyond himself to the Other who is in our midst”.⁶⁷

Pope Benedict XVI, in his Christmas speech in 2011, described World Youth Day in Madrid as being “a remedy against faith fatigue”, and as “evangelisation put into practice”.⁶⁸ He gave five points to illustrate the renewal of Christian identity through these large gatherings of young people.⁶⁹

In the first place, Pope Benedict XVI places the experience of catholicity or the universality of the Church that has filled many young people with deep joy. Those present were touched by the one Lord Jesus Christ, “in whom true humanity and at the same time the face of God himself is revealed to us”.⁷⁰ A new way of living and of being a Christian comes from this experience.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.: “It seems to me that at the end of this event, the young people's request to us might be summed up as: ‘Yes, we came to worship him. We met him. Now help us to become his disciples and witnesses’.”

⁶⁵ BENEDICT XVI, Address to the members of the Roman Curia for an exchange of Christmas greetings, 22 December 2008: “In the end, the solemn liturgy is the centre of the whole event, because in it there takes place something that we ourselves cannot bring about, yet something for which we are always awaiting. Christ is present. He comes into our midst. The heavens are rent and the earth filled with light. This is what makes life joyful and free, uniting people with one another in a joy that cannot be compared to the ecstasy of a rock festival. Friedrich Nietzsche once said: ‘The important thing is not to be able to organize a party but to find people who can enjoy it’. According to Scripture, joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Gal* 5:22). This fruit was abundantly visible during those days in Sydney”.

⁶⁶ Ibid.; see also: BENEDICT XVI, Interview during the flight to Australia, 12 July 2008: “A World Youth Day is not merely a passing event: it is prepared for in advance by a long journey with the Cross and the Icon of Our Lady Consequently, these days are the culmination of a long previous process. Everything is the fruit of a journey, of being together on a journey leading to Christ. Moreover, World Youth Day creates a history, that is, friendships are formed, new inspirations are born: thus World Youth Day continues. I think this is very important: not only to see these three or four days, but to see the entire journey that precedes them, as well as the subsequent journey. In this sense, it seems to me that World Youth Day – at least for us in the near future – is a valid formula which prepares us to understand that in different perspectives and from different parts of the earth we are moving on towards Christ and towards communion. This is how we learn a new way of journeying on together. In this sense, I hope that it will also be a formula for the future”.

⁶⁷ BENEDICT XVI, Address to the members of the Roman Curia for an exchange of Christmas greetings, 2008. *cit.*

⁶⁸ BENEDICT XVI, Address to the members of the Roman Curia for an exchange of Christmas greetings, 22 December 2011.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

The second point concerns the experience of profound happiness felt by twenty thousand volunteers present in Madrid. They were an example of how freely given dedication to others can give “tangible” happiness. “These young people did good, even at a cost, even if it demanded sacrifice, simply because it is a wonderful thing to do good, to be there for others. All it needs is the courage to make the leap. Prior to all of this is the encounter with Jesus Christ, inflaming us with love for God and for others, and freeing us from seeking our own ego.”⁷¹

In his third point, Pope Benedict spoke of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament as the core of true catholicity and the source of happiness. This was introduced to the vigil of World Youth Day in Cologne 2005. Adoration is an act of faith before the real presence of God, the Risen One who comes among us.⁷² In the fourth point, he stressed the importance of the sacrament of reconciliation which we need as a “counter weight” to the force of gravity of evil.⁷³ The sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist are the two pillars of a true education in the faith. The past few World Youth Days showed us that young people are not afraid of silence during liturgical celebrations and are not ashamed to admit that they are sinners in need of God's forgiveness and that of others.

As the fifth and final point, Pope Benedict spoke again of joy as the result of “many factors at work... the crucial one is this certainty, based on faith: I am wanted; I have a task in history; I am accepted, I am loved. ... Only from the You can the I come into itself. Only if it is accepted, can it accept itself. Those who are unloved cannot even love themselves. This sense of being accepted comes in the first instance from other human beings. But all human acceptance is fragile. Ultimately we need a sense of being accepted unconditionally. Only if God accepts me, and I become convinced of this, do I know definitively: it is good that I exist. It is good to be a human being... Faith makes one happy from deep within. That is one of the wonderful experiences of World Youth Day”.⁷⁴

3. POPE FRANCIS: YOUTHFUL ENTHUSIASM

a. Young people spread joy and hope

The celebration of the 28th World Youth Day on Palm Sunday, 24 March 2013, five days after Pope Francis had begun his pontificate, gave him a good opportunity to address young people.⁷⁵ He noted their joy with satisfaction and exclaimed: “You have an important part in the celebration of faith! You bring us the joy of faith and you tell us that we must live the faith with a young heart, always: a young heart, even at the age of seventy or eighty. Dear young people! With Christ, the heart never grows old!”⁷⁶

After commenting on the enthusiasm of youth, the Pope refers to the procession of Palms and goes to the core of Holy Week: “Yet all of us, all of you know very well that the King whom we follow and who accompanies us is very special: he is a King who loves even to the Cross and

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ POPE FRANCIS, Homily on Palm Sunday, 24 March 2013.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

who teaches us to serve and to love. And you are not ashamed of his Cross! On the contrary, you embrace it, because you have understood that it is in giving ourselves, in giving ourselves, in emerging from ourselves that we have true joy and that, with his love, God conquered evil”.⁷⁷

It's amazing how we can see in this first speech and in subsequent positions taken by Pope Francis that it all fits in perfectly with the thought and intentions of his predecessors. Sometimes you can see how the concepts and formulations closely coincide. In the aforementioned homily of Palm Sunday 2013, Pope Francis urged young people to participate, but he also urged them to prepare themselves spiritually for WYD. He gave them a very specific message: “Young people must say to the world: to follow Christ is good; to go with Christ is good; the message of Christ is good; emerging from ourselves, to the ends of the earth and of existence, to take Jesus there, is good! Three points, then: joy, Cross, young people”.⁷⁸

I would like to briefly mention the most important issues addressed by the Pope in reference to youth ministry in this first year of his pontificate: (1) revival of the gifts received in the sacraments, (2) necessity of spiritual preparation (3) the role of Christian hope, (4) a response to the emergency in education, and (5) overcoming the “throwaway” culture that affects the role of young people and older people in society.

A conferral of the sacrament of Confirmation on 28 April 2013 gave the Pope an opportunity to urge the candidates for Confirmation to give life to the gifts received from the Holy Spirit and to make them active in everyday life. He strongly encouraged them to go against the tide with the strength of the Lord and not to be intimidated by anything or anyone. He invited them to stake their lives on great ideals, on the things that count.⁷⁹

In a speech prepared for the meeting with the students and teachers of the schools run by the Jesuits (7 June 2013), Pope Francis stressed the importance of spiritual preparation. The main element to learn in school is – according to St. Ignatius of Loyola – magnanimity with inner freedom and a spirit of service. This goal requires spiritual preparation. The Pope urges young people to love Jesus Christ more and more as a response to his love and to his call.⁸⁰

In words spoken off-the-cuff, he referred to St. Ignatius’ teaching on the importance of magnanimity, to have a big heart and to be without fear: “it is important to find this magnanimity with Jesus, in contemplating Jesus. Jesus is the One who opens windows for us on the horizon. Magnanimity means walking with Jesus, with a heart attentive to what Jesus tells us”.⁸¹

A girl asked for a comforting word for young people affected by the current crisis. The Pope sees this crisis to be an opportunity, and he interprets it primarily as a human crisis. The value of human beings is in crisis, and this is something that we are called to defend. Human beings must free themselves from the economic and social structures that enslave them.⁸²

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, Holy Mass with the Rite of Confirmation, St Peter’s Square, 28 April 2013; see also: POPE FRANCIS, To the pilgrimage of young people from the Diocese of Piacenza-Bobbio, 28 August 2013: “Please go against the current. Be courageous boys and girls: go against the current. ... and this means making noise, go ahead but with the values of beauty, goodness and truth”; POPE FRANCIS, Vespers with university students of the Roman atheneums, 30 November 2013.

⁸⁰ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, To students in Jesuit schools in Italy and Albania, 7 June 2013.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

A student asked the Pope for a word of hope in the face of so much misery in the world. The Pope replied: “First of all I would like to say one thing to all you young people: do not let yourselves be robbed of hope! Please, do not let yourselves be robbed of it! And who robs you of hope? The spirit of the world, wealth, the spirit of vanity, arrogance, pride... Where do I find hope? In the poor Jesus, Jesus who made himself poor for us... Poverty demands that we sow hope. It requires me to have greater hope, too... It is impossible to talk about poverty, about abstract poverty. That does not exist! Poverty is the flesh of the poor Jesus in this hungry child, in the sick person, in these unjust social structures... The young must stake themselves on high ideals: this is my advice. But where do I find hope? In the flesh of the suffering Jesus and in true poverty”.⁸³

In a meeting with the youth of the Diocese of Piacenza-Bobbio, the Pope called on young people to be bearers of hope, just as John Paul II had done before him. “It is true that you live in the present but you are looking towards the future... you are architects of the future, artisans of the future... Why? Firstly because inside you, you have three desires: the desire for beauty... Now secondly: you are prophets of goodness. You like goodness and being good. And this goodness is contagious, it helps everyone else. And now third: you thirst for the truth. Seek the truth. But... you cannot possess truth, we cannot carry it, we must encounter it. It is an encounter with the truth that is God, that we must search for... Think about this carefully: putting your stakes on the great ideals, the ideal of making a world of goodness, beauty and truth”.⁸⁴

In a recent audience with the members of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America (28 February 2014), Pope Francis addressed an issue that was very dear to Benedict XVI, the transmission of faith during an educational emergency.⁸⁵ The Pope placed strong emphasis on the anthropological presuppositions and he highlighted three criteria for education in the faith: to educate does not only mean to transmit knowledge and facts, but also to convey a sense of values and behaviour. In order to transmit the faith we need to form “habits of behaviour”, we must create the proper conditions for young people to acquire values, and we must provide basic content. “Transmission of faith must be about content and values, together with a sense of values and habits, habits of behaviour. ...Three pillars”.⁸⁶

The Pope added a second element which is “knowing how to guide and enable a young person in their idea of utopia”. John Paul II used to speak of “idealism” as being typical of youth and that can lead them to an encounter with Jesus Christ. The utopia of the young must be accompanied by memory and discernment. “Young people need to receive memories and in those memories plant their utopia. They discern this utopia in the present – in the signs of the times – and this allows their utopia to grow ...”.⁸⁷

Pope Francis pointed to an element of great importance in education today, and that is exchange between young people and the elderly. This is where they receive the memories of their people and learn to discern the present. “Remembrance of the past, discernment of the present, and a

⁸³ Ibid.; see also: POPE FRANCIS, Meeting with young people in Cagliari, 22 September 2013.

⁸⁴ POPE FRANCIS, To the pilgrimage of young people from the Diocese of Piacenza-Bobbio, *cit.*

⁸⁵ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, To the members of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, 28 February 2014.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

utopia for the future: this is the path along which a young person's faith grows".⁸⁸

A third element of education that the Pope has spoken of is a decisive rejection of a "throwaway culture".⁸⁹ As already mentioned, the focus of the modern economy is not the human person. It is money, and as a result, there is rejection of everything that does not fit into this category (children, the elderly, the poor).⁹⁰

The Pope, in his conversation with young people from Umbria in Italy, touched on a similar phenomenon – the difficulty in making a firm commitment in marriage. Pope Francis pointed to two causes. The first of these is the tendency towards selfishness in every person, and the second is to be found in today's culture of the temporary. "It seems as though nothing is definitive. Everything is provisional... . This is the culture of the temporary, and Jesus did not save us temporarily: he saved us definitively!"⁹¹ In these reflections we notice a strong similarity with the thought of Benedict XVI regarding the widespread cultural and ethical relativism.⁹²

On the question of what to do the Pope said to the members of the Commission for Latin America: "Where does our future lie? In duty: the *traditio fidei* is also a *traditio spei*, and we must give it! The final question I wish to leave you with is: when dreams or ideals fall into disenchantment, what can we do? The utopia of an enthusiastic young person slips into disenchantment. Disenchanted youth need faith and hope".⁹³

In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), Pope Francis urges those involved in youth ministry to give answers to the concerns, problems and hurt of young people. The Pope takes up Pope John Paul II's request to enter into dialogue with them, to listen to them and to speak in a language they can understand, as he did a few days ago with a group of Flemish youth.⁹⁴ The spread and growth of youth associations and movements are an action of the Holy Spirit, but there should be more stable participation by new organisations in the ministry of the Church.⁹⁵

⁸⁸ Ibid.; see also: POPE FRANCIS, Meeting with the youth from Argentina gathered in the Cathedral of San Sebastián, 25 July 2013; and Meeting with the Bishops of Brazil in the Archbishop's House of Rio de Janeiro, 27 July 2013.

⁸⁹ POPE FRANCIS, Visit to the Community of Varginha [Manguinhos], Rio de Janeiro, 25 July 2013.

⁹⁰ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, To the members of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, *cit.*: "First, regarding the educational framework, to transmit content, behaviour and a sense of values. Second, concerning the utopia of the young, to place them in relation and harmonize them with memory and discernment. Third, the throw-away culture as one of the most serious phenomena that our youth are undergoing, especially through drug use, which can and is destroying these young people. We are throwing away our young people!"

⁹¹ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, Meeting with the young people of Umbria in the square in front of the Basilica of Saint Mary of the Angels, 4 October 2013.

⁹² Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Address to the participants in the Ecclesial Diocesan Convention of Rome, 2007, *cit.*

⁹³ POPE FRANCIS, To the members of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, *cit.*

⁹⁴ cf. POPE FRANCIS, Interview with a group of Belgian young people, 31 March 2014; see also POPE FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 108: "As I mentioned above, I have not sought to offer a complete diagnosis, but I invite communities to complete and enrich these perspectives on the basis of their awareness of the challenges facing them and their neighbours. It is my hope that, in doing so, they will realize that whenever we attempt to read the signs of the times it is helpful to listen to young people and the elderly. Both represent a source of hope for every people. The elderly bring with them memory and the wisdom of experience, which warns us not to foolishly repeat our past mistakes. Young people call us to renewed and expansive hope, for they represent new directions for humanity and open us up to the future, lest we cling to a nostalgia for structures and customs which are no longer life-giving in today's world".

⁹⁵ Cf. EG, 105.

b. Missionary youth

In the first contact Pope Francis had with young people (24 March 2013), the missionary mandate was at the centre of his reflections: “You carry the pilgrim Cross through all the continents, along the highways of the world! You carry it in response to Jesus’ call: ‘Go, make disciples of all nations’ (Mt 28:19), which is the theme of World Youth Day this year. You carry it so as to tell everyone that on the Cross Jesus knocked down the wall of enmity that divides people and nations, and he brought reconciliation and peace. Dear friends, I too am setting out on a journey with you, starting today, in the footsteps of Blessed John Paul II and Benedict XVI”.⁹⁶

World Youth Day in Rio was for Pope Francis what WYD in Cologne was for Benedict XVI – an entry into his pontificate. The new Pope addressed this challenge with courage and determination before hundreds of thousands of young people from almost two hundred countries.⁹⁷ The highlight of the Pope's message to young people is undoubtedly in his homily during the closing ceremony on Copacabana beach (28 July 2013).⁹⁸ The Pope formulated his talk according to three imperatives: (1) Go, (2) without fear, (3) to serve.

(1) Go! The joy of faith which young people experienced when they gathered for an encounter with Jesus Christ must not be kept within each individual or within the group (parish, movement, community). It must be shared.⁹⁹ The Pope pointed out that Jesus' words in the theme for WYD Rio have the form of an imperative that the Lord addresses to every believer. This missionary mandate stems from the strength of Jesus' love. He came to us and gave himself totally. He gave his life for our salvation and for us to see the merciful love of God. He accompanies us in this mission of love for everyone everywhere, right out to the peripheries of life.¹⁰⁰

The Pope told young Latin Americans that Jesus is addressing the missionary mandate especially to them as they take part in the ongoing “Continental Mission”.¹⁰¹ He added a thought that was dear to Pope John Paul II by asking: “Do you know what the best tool is for evangelizing the young? Another young person”. *Evangelii Gaudium* says: “How beautiful it is to see that young people are “street preachers” (*callejeros de la fe*), joyfully bringing Jesus to every street, every town square and every corner of the earth!”.¹⁰² In a similar vein, he told university students in Rome (30 November 2013): “Please do not watch life go by from the balcony!”.¹⁰³

(2) Without fear! The Lord's presence close to us takes away any fear of facing the task of evangelising. The whole Church in the communion of saints accompanies every missionary effort. (3) To serve! With the responsorial psalm “Sing to the Lord a new song” (*Ps 95:1*), the

⁹⁶ POPE FRANCIS, Homily on Palm Sunday, 24 March 2013.

⁹⁷ Cf. PAPA FRANCESCO, *È bello per noi essere qui*. Rio de Janeiro 22-29 luglio 2013, Le parole di Papa Francesco, XXVIII Giornata Mondiale della Gioventù, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2013

⁹⁸ POPE FRANCIS, Concluding Mass at World Youth Day, Rio de Janeiro, 28 July 2013.

⁹⁹ POPE FRANCIS, Concluding Mass at World Youth Day, Rio de Janeiro: “Faith is a flame that grows stronger the more it is shared and passed on, so that everyone may know, love and confess Jesus Christ, the Lord of life and history (cf. *Rom 10:9*)”.

¹⁰⁰ POPE FRANCIS, Concluding Mass at World Youth Day, Rio de Janeiro.

¹⁰¹ POPE FRANCIS, Concluding Mass at World Youth Day, Rio de Janeiro: “The Church needs you, your enthusiasm, your creativity and the joy that is so characteristic of you”; cf. Concluding Document of the Fifth General Conference of Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, Aparecida, Brazil, 13-29 May 2007, “*Disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ so that they may have life in him*” (www.celam.org).

¹⁰² EG 106.

¹⁰³ POPE FRANCIS, Vespers with the university students of the Roman atheneums, 30 November 2013.

Pope identifies this “new song” with the “song of your life” that should aim to be like the feelings, thoughts and actions of Jesus.¹⁰⁴ It seems to me that we can find in these three imperatives a synthesis of WYD in Rio. Furthermore, they reveal the main message that Pope Francis has been tirelessly addressing to the whole Church up to the present day.¹⁰⁵

I would like to conclude my presentation by attempting to summarise the three pontificates with three emphases: for Pope John Paul II, it was central to awaken youth to be the hope of the Church. Pope Benedict XVI highlighted the current challenges facing education in the faith (to see its beauty and reasonableness). Pope Francis emphasises the missionary call to all believers and, in particular, the younger generation in our day. I believe that the many contributions made by the three popes to youth ministry have similar threads. These are sometimes stronger and sometimes more subtle, with bolder colours and also more pastel colours, but all are clear and firm. They intertwine and weave a wonderful tapestry that helps us to discover the face of Jesus Christ.

During WYD in Toronto in 2002, Pope John Paul II called on young people to be the “people of the beatitudes”.¹⁰⁶ The “people of the beatitudes” today are journeying towards WYD in Krakow in 2016 with one of the beatitudes from Matthew’s gospel for each of those three years.¹⁰⁷

It seems to me that the best way to express our love and gratitude to the blessed and soon to be canonised pontiff is to become more and more a true “people of the Beatitudes” of our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹⁰⁴ POPE FRANCIS, Concluding Mass at World Youth Day, Rio de Janeiro: “Evangelizing means bearing personal witness to the love of God, it is overcoming our selfishness, it is serving by bending down to wash the feet of our brethren, as Jesus did”.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. POPE FRANCIS, To members of the Organizing Committee of the World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro, 7 April 2014: “Thus it is necessary to recall those three ideas that, in a certain sense, summarize the entire message of World Youth Day: to go, without fear, to serve”; cf. EG 111: “Evangelization is the task of the Church. The Church, as the agent of evangelization, is more than an organic and hierarchical institution; it is first and foremost a people advancing on its pilgrim way towards God”.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Welcome ceremony, WYD Toronto, 25 July 2002; see also: JOHN PAUL II, Homily at the concluding Mass at WYD Toronto, 29 July 2002.

¹⁰⁷ The themes for WYD: 2014 - “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*” (Mt 5:3); 2015 - “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*” (Mt 5:8); 2016 - “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy*” (Mt 5:7).