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Introduction

World Youth Day in Kraków is an event of great, multidimensional potential. This is an international meeting of youth from all over the world. They will gather in one place together with their catechists, teachers, pastors, bishops and Pope Francis to celebrate and experience the joy of community and profess faith in Jesus Christ. The present scientific monograph by multiple authors, entitled *World Youth Days. A Testimony to the Hope of Young People*, fits perfectly into the current preparations for this great event and serves as a focal point for scientists, bishops, representatives of religious organizations, organizers of some of the previous World Youth Days, as well as people involved in the preparation of WYD 2016 in Kraków. The monograph promotes the idea of World Youth Days not only in the historical, social and cultural dimension but also from the religious, spiritual, integration, pedagogical and scientific perspective. Moreover, this monograph is an attempt to make the readers aware of the Christian identity and tradition of Poland, its contribution to European culture and Western civilization, as well as the 1050th anniversary of the Baptism of Poland, celebrated in 2016. Furthermore, this publication may

facilitate understanding of the Polish social and religious experiences from the turn of 20th and 21st centuries, which are closely associated with the work and teachings of St. John Paul II and which may influence the future of Poland, Europe and the entire world.

The present publication – *World Youth Days. A Testimony to the Hope of Young People*, is worth recommending for a number of reasons.

Firstly, it treats of extraordinary, unprecedented events – World Youth Days. The idea of Pope John Paul II to invite youth from all over the world to one place has met with some resistance since the beginning. The individuals who witnessed the first WYD (Rome 1985) all agree that if it had not been for the pope's personal determination and far-sightedness, the first Day would not have taken place. Even though, judging by today's standards, the first WYD in Rome does not impress with the number of participants (which was estimated at around 300 thousand), it was still much higher than it had been expected. One more time, and by no means the last, it turned out that Kraków's bishop Karol Wojtyła who later became Pope John Paul II, proved there was a special bond between him and youth, which included trust as well as the gift of inspiration and leadership. The subsequent World Youth Days, with their number currently standing at 30 (including thirteen global gatherings and seventeen meetings held at the diocesan level), attracted an ever-increasing number of attendants. It is estimated that during John Paul II's pontificate, 11.5 million young people from all continents took part in the events. In WYD 1995 in Manila, Philippines, over 4 million people assembled, which had been the largest gathering of people in history. John Paul II's successors – Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis have continued his tradition and met nearly seven million young people. Still, even if these estimates do not fill anyone with admiration, it is not the numbers that matter in the papal context. What was the essence of the idea? We hope that the readers will find an answer to this question in this book.

Secondly, the editors of the present volume managed to convince a large group of diverse, but highly competent authors to cooperate. The first part includes accounts by the closest associates of John Paul II, who witnessed the idea of gatherings of young Catholics being born and later, implemented: Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz, Cardinal Stanisław Ryłko,

Archbishop Celestino Migliore, Marcello Bedeschi. Alongside them, people of the so-called “JP2 generation” will have their say, those who embraced the legacy of the first WYD and actively participated in organizing subsequent events in their own countries (Danny Casey, Thomas Rosica, Nathalie Becquart, and Paul Metzloff), as well as distinguished specialists observing WYDs from the perspective of their corresponding disciplines – social communication, law, ethics, geography and journalism. The second part contains accounts of authors dealing with issues of contemporary youth but from very different points of view – educators, psychologists, culture experts, anthropologists and theologians. Thanks to these insights, we will gain a better understanding of how the subsequent WYDs were becoming increasingly more multidimensional, developing in its main – spiritual sphere. We may now risk a statement that WYDs undoubtedly have given millions of young people an opportunity to experience the great gathering of faith and values, while discovering a variety of forms of expression of this community. The third part will enable readers to discern and explore the spiritual dimension of WYDs, to discover that they have become a chance for re-evangelisation and revival of faith among the young. They have also made us reflect on ourselves, search for answers to fundamental questions and make a systematic effort of personal and religious formation.

Thirdly, the publication is an attempt to continue the calls and teachings of Pope John Paul II, who really cared for youth and frequently and earnestly appealed to them to get involved in everyday activities and not to be afraid to follow the path of Jesus Christ. The Holy Father was convinced that all Christians are called for sharing the radical novelty of life given to us by the Lord. For contemporary Christians living in the culture of post-modernity, the evangelical values of truth, justice, love and peace cannot remain just words but rather tasks to be carried out in both personal and social life.

Moreover, in the context of the crisis of values, feeling of danger, disorientation, in some cases even a total loss of hope that Europe will survive, the present scientific collaborative monograph conveys the message of coming back to principal values, the practice of which changes the character of human life. Experiences and testimonies of

numerous young people attending WYDs confirm that they regard them as intense moments of community in two distinct ways: community with one another and community with God, while also bringing back trust, openness, love, a feeling of solidarity, faith and hope. WYDs are not only a time for prayer, meeting the pope and celebrations for youth. They are also a confirmation of the wealth of youth and a testimony to faith and hope that love, which brings good, is stronger than all the hardships, threats, anxieties and problems.

Finally, the present scientific monograph – *World Youth Days. A Testimony to the Hope of Young People* may be regarded as a response to Pope Francis's call for proclaiming the joy of Gospel everywhere and to everyone. Both the scientific articles collected in this book as well as testimonies of attendants and participants of previous WYDs convey the message that a personal meeting with another person and God not only strengthens one's faith but also leads to the sources of joy.