

Anna Sugier-Szerega

John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland

World Youth Day – a contemporary response to the need of celebration

“Man deprived of higher values cannot celebrate,
but on holiday he only rests and plays.”

Leon Dyczewski¹

In the current culture there is less celebration and more play. Carnival extends to the periods of the year which used to be excluded from it, commercializes the ways and styles of celebration, depriving them of their central element: *sacrum*. The methods of transmitting knowledge of cultural heritage, including celebrations, are also undergoing transformation. In the accounts of travellers and anthropologists of the early twentieth century, for example Arnold van Gennep, one may still encounter descriptions of celebrations full of magical rituals, rites, symbols that order and unite tribal communities. Celebrations, myths and rituals sustained their existence, emphasized their coherence and responded to the needs of people operating in small, isolated communities.² Knowledge and patterns

¹ L. Dyczewski, *Rodzina twórcą i przekazicielem kultury*, Lublin 2003, p. 86.

² A. van Gennep, *Obrzędy przejścia*, przekł. B. Biały, Warszawa 2006.

of celebration were most often associated with the participation in rites of passage, acquainting the young with the religion of their ancestors and teaching them respect for its rites. Ceremonies were prepared in advance, and celebrations were attended by all members of the community. It was impossible to opt out of the participation.

The situation of modern man has changed dramatically. In the current globalized world, subject to the culture of choice and at the same time of excess,³ people can decide what and how they want to celebrate, they can choose a place which even in case of a wedding ceremony does not need to be associated with “sacred space,” e.g. a church. Travelling around the world makes people realize the differences in the ways of celebration arising not only from different religions and cultures, but also from the geographical and historical context. Marvelling at the patterns of celebration in other cultures, the young absorb their content; experience their emotions, realizing their own cultural difference, while simultaneously looking for ways “to join or to become a member,” as Roger Scruton defines this feature of modern youth.⁴ He says that “there is a rooted need in us to connect things, to be a part of a larger project which would justify us, ennoble our humble efforts and protect us from the feeling that in the end we are alone.”⁵ This article puts forward a thesis that during World Youth Day, young people are looking for relationship – first of all with God and then with others who believe in Him: with the pope of whom they often have only a vague image, with priests and with youth from other parts of the world. By building these relationships at various levels they score victories they want to celebrate.

1. The idea of World Youth Day

World Youth Day, initiated by Pope John Paul II dates back to Palm Sunday of 1984 – the year in which the Extraordinary Jubilee of Redemption took

3 T. Szlendak, *Kultura nadmiaru w czasach niedomiaru*, “Kultura Współczesna” 2013 nr 1, p. 7.

4 R. Scruton, *Przewodnik po kulturze nowoczesnej dla inteligentnych*, Łódź–Wrocław 2006, p. 153.

5 R. Scruton, *Przewodnik po kulturze...*, p. 153.

place. A week later the pope gave the young the Cross of the Holy Year, which today is a symbol of WYD.⁶ The subsequent Easter in Rome (29–31 March 1985), during the International Year of Youth, was also held in the company of young people. The young came from different corners of the world in the number of about 350,000. A Christmas meeting of December 20, 1985 is considered to be the formal beginning of World Youth Days. Then, Pope John Paul II expressed his wish that the meetings should be held regularly on an annual basis as diocesan days, and every 2 or 3 years as an international event, in a place specified by the head of the Church. Already 12 of them have taken place and Kraków is preparing for the next one.

After more than thirty years, one can speak about the institutionalization of this event. It gathers the young generation from different continents together with their priests, catechists, and hundreds of thousands of volunteers, including families of lay Catholics who, during the week preceding the meeting of the pope with young people, offer help in the form of accommodation, food and exchange of intercultural experiences. The culminating point is always the meeting with the pope. Previously the Days were presided by Pope John Paul II in Rome (1984, 1985, 2000), Buenos Aires (1987), Santiago de Compostela (1989), Częstochowa (1991), Denver (1993), Manila (1995), Paris (1997) and Toronto (2002). Pope Benedict XVI welcomed young people in Cologne (2005), Sydney (2008) and Madrid (2011) and finally Pope Francis met with youth in Rio de Janeiro (2013).⁷ Meetings are attended in huge numbers – it is estimated that most young people gathered in Manila in the number of 4 million, and Rio de Janeiro – 3.7 million. WYDs are a challenge for the organizing committees, municipalities and states which receive pilgrims from around the world. Preparation and mutual cooperation, exchanging experiences with the organizers of the project in previous locations are all important because of the momentum and the need to ensure safety of millions of young joyful people. Each time World Youth Day is closely watched by foreign media and journalists. Many months in advance organisers must perfect the scenarios of consecutive

⁶ <http://sdm.lublin.pl/historia-swiatowych-dni-mlodziezy/> (20.06.2016).

⁷ <http://www.sdm.org.pl/sdm> (20.06.2016).

points of the programme, estimate the number of pilgrims to take care of the availability of accommodation, make information channels available (e.g. smartphone applications, websites, profiles, and social media), develop strategies for emergency situations, etc. The information on the subsequent editions of World Youth Days and the host countries will depend on what foreign journalists from around the world see and experience.

2. Is World Youth Day a celebration?

In many critical opinions of journalists one reads that WYD is a religious festival, a celebration of joy but also a gathering in which one can come across young people who behave in a way unsuitable to the nature of this meeting – abusing alcohol, treating the event like Woodstock, and transforming it into a carnival. Regardless of situations that happen during most mass events, one should ask the question what the difference between World Youth Days and other similar events is. Can they be treated as a celebration or are they a mere media spectacle, constructed according to the rules of the latter? What elements constitute it? What are its functions and, finally, what is so exceptional about the event that it is going to take place for the thirteenth time and the interest in participation is still unabated? What do WYDs offer to young people who, often choosing once again to travel to the other end of the world with certain expectations, await these trips with enthusiasm?

To seek answers to these questions, the author will use the concept of the culture-forming role of a celebration, developed by the late sociologist of culture Leon Dyczewski. The author of many books and articles emphasized the uniqueness of the festive time and pointed out to its functions for different groups, including families as well as national and religious ones. He repeatedly specifies key elements that constitute a celebration. These are:

1. common goal, occasion, idea,
2. specified time,
3. specific space,
4. rituals,

5. ceremonial dress,
6. animator, organizer,
7. preparation and active participation, and
8. gift or offering.⁸

If one looks closely at the structure of the World Youth Day preparations and celebrations, he/she can easily see the presence of most of the elements mentioned by Dyczewski. The idea of World Youth Day originated from noticing the presence of young people in the Church and providing them with the role of new evangelizers in the contemporary world.

It was them to whom Pope John Paul II a few hours before his death directed the words, “I looked for you and now you have come to me.” In them, Karol Wojtyła saw a great unrealized potential and placed his confidence while they were his partners in an authentic, joyful dialogue. He knew that he needed to speak to them directly and make them aware of the importance of the relationship with Christ. The pope constantly encouraged youth to enter into a dialogue with Christ by giving the example of young men’s meetings with Jesus.⁹ This idea of an encounter with the Redeemer became the impulse to invite youth for successive international meetings.

This unusual relationship of John Paul II with young people is neatly summarised by Zbigniew Nosowski, the editor-in-chief of “Więź”: “John Paul II was the first person to treat young people subjectively – this was a revolution in the Church! He recognized youth not so much as the time of growing up, but as a period of special responsibility for their own lives, the time of asking most important questions and searching for signposts for the rest of one’s life.”¹⁰

Young people understood the pope’s message calling for asking important questions. A twenty-five year old participant of World Youth Days in Madrid and Rio de Janeiro recalls:

⁸ L. Dyczewski, *Święto i jego kulturotwórcza rola*, “Kultura i Społeczeństwo” 2012 nr 4, pp. 9–11.

⁹ Apostolic Letter *Dilecti Amici* of Pope John Paul II to the Youth of the World on the Occasion of International Youth Year, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1985/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_31031985_dilecti-amici.html (20.06.2016).

¹⁰ Z. Nosowski, *Pokolenie JP2 – pobożna iluzja czy szansa na lepszy świat*, in: *Pokolenie JP2. Przyszłość i przyszłość zjawiska religijnego*, red. T. Szawiel, Warszawa 2008, p. 130.

I remember the moment of Saturday vigil with the pope (during both meetings). In the course of the vigil there comes a moment of personal prayer in silence – a priceless moment for me, almost an indescribable one. For those few minutes a crowd of several million simply falls silent. It is unbelievable that in such conditions this is possible! Then one truly feels the divine dimension of this meeting.¹¹

A thirty-six year old female recalls the meeting in Rome in 2000 in a similar vein: “The meeting left me refreshed and my faith strengthened and gave me feeling of unity of the Church.” A man participating in a meeting in Paris: “What I found most important was the encounter with God, the experience of the community of faith.” External conditions, which are sometimes not very favourable, do not interfere in the meeting with sacrum. A student speaks about WYD in Madrid:

What was unforgettable was an all-night vigil with the pope, during which there was a huge storm and a torrential rain. You could feel the immense power of prayer and closeness of God. All the adversity and the objectively awful weather did not matter. It was an unforgettable spiritual experience, which filled me with power and taught us how to worship God – in concentration and silence. A true school of prayer.

Another statement related to the meeting in Madrid:

Equally important for me is a personal encounter with Christ through a miracle, which World Youth Day undoubtedly is in many ways. It is such a great project that without God’s help it would be impossible to prepare and carry it out. I deeply experienced the vocational meeting, as well as the moment of prayer with the Scripture, when in the community of the Church I received the Word prophetic for my life.

11 For the needs of this article, sociological interviews were conducted, consisting in completing the questionnaire with open questions by several participants of previous international editions of WYD. The quotations retain the original spelling.

It turns out that the aspect of communing with God, worship, prayer and reflection is important, an experienced and remembered meeting point, the real purpose of the undertaken journey. It gives young people this special, holy time, as Mircea Eliade points out: “The religious experience of the festival – that is, participation in *the sacred* – enables man periodically to live in the presence of the gods.”¹² Maybe this “presence” is realized on the spot when young people experience the spirit of a supranational community. But surely prayer meetings, adoration, conferences are important, planned and systematically conducted key points of the whole meeting. The meaning of the term *celebration* (*święta*) proposed in the Polish language by Aleksander Brückner may be recalled in this context.¹³ The author connects this term with Poland’s adoption of Christianity and the word *sanctus* derived from the Latin *sacer* – holy, sacred. Semantically, then, the word may be associated with religious cult, the sphere of *sacrum*, whose presence stimulates reflection on the meaning of existence, one’s own spiritual condition and identity – what participants experience to a greater or lesser degree. It is important to emphasize this aspect of celebration also in connection with the 1050th anniversary of the baptism of Poland, celebrated this year. This is an interesting coincidence – young people from all over the world come to Poland in the year it celebrates the beginnings of its statehood built on the basis of Christian values.

International youth meetings take place regularly every two or three years, giving the organizers (the Church authorities in cooperation with the laity) time to prepare spiritually and logistically. This element of Dyczewski’s list – preparation stretched in time – is extremely important, as the course of a celebration has to be planned, although in practice, this plan does not always work out. The specially appointed World Youth Day Organizing Committee consists of thousands of volunteers – lay people from different dioceses. It provides extensive support for parishes receiving pilgrims, arranges their stay in local communities, and enables

12 M. Eliade, *Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, transl. W. R. Trask, New York s.a., p. 105.

13 A. Brückner, *Słownik etymologiczny języka polskiego*, Warszawa 1996, p. 536.

them to participate in vigils, lectures and briefings about Polish culture and tradition. Young people prepare for the meeting with the pope in predefined locations. The logistic efficiency of dioceses, the cooperation between different entities as well as simple kindness are recognized by participants who can see that even in such mass gatherings one can still maintain order and demonstrate good organization.

World Youth Day, like any holiday, has also certain rituals and symbols, of which the most significant are the Holy Year Cross and the Icon of Our Lady the Saviour of the Roman People. During international celebrations they are present in a prominent place, reminding everyone of the purpose of the meeting: getting to know the Risen Jesus and entrusting one's life to Christ. Since 1984 these symbols have been travelling around the world, being solemnly transferred from the old to the new host country.¹⁴ Each meeting has also its evangelical motto which carries an important message to participants, an anthem written in multiple languages and a logo referring to the country and the city that hosts World Youth Day.

The highlight of the celebration is a get-together with the pope, who acts as the host and leader of the prayer meeting. The vigil has many forms, some people want to focus on the spiritual message and go deeper into the meaning of papal teaching, others approach it more sceptically, seeing the pope merely as the head of the Church. There are also opinions about the pope being treated as a pop star wearing white robes. The approach depends largely on one's degree of religious consciousness and spiritual development. Undoubtedly, that moment is remembered and accompanied by emotions. Young people recognize that this Shepherd is the head of the Church and that he leads it. In the case of meetings with John Paul II, they led to a deep personal experience. Young people remember this moment with particular emotions:

I remember the look that John Paul II gave in my direction as he drove along St. Peter's Square. It was a look I will never forget until the end

¹⁴ Since 14.04.2014 the Cross and the icon of Mary have been passed between Polish dioceses, preparing Poland for World Youth Day, <http://www.krakow2016.com/symbole> (04.04.2016).

of my life, a look full of love, peace, and prayer. After that, I wanted to be like the pope, to be such a good and loving person.

This is how the meeting in Rome is recalled by a thirty-three year old woman, although it is difficult to believe that she remembers the meeting so well after 16 years. Another, three years older participant has similar memories:

The evening vigil at Tor Vergata, presided over by the Holy Father John Paul II, was a very special experience. He told us then that we should be like watchmen of the morning, vigilant at the beginning of the new millennium [...]. The pope spoke, taught, but also listened to and entered into a verbal and non-verbal dialogue with the participants. He was a youth among the young.

The emotional tone of the quoted statements is understandable, as for the generation of people born in the 70s and 80s John Paul II was a close and unique Polish pope, and every meeting with him provoked strong emotions, reinforced by his attitude focused on the other person.

To a large extent, World Youth Day is based on volunteer work, so in the context of Leon Dyczewski's ideas one could see this logic as a part of the concept of a gift or offering which is usually given during a celebration. The meetings could not be held without help given to pilgrims by private individuals acting in parishes, offering assistance with regards to accommodation, food, and free time spent with those arriving from all over the world. Their great kindness is remembered by participants, recalling "hospitality, conversations with the hosts and tears of children, when we were leaving the host family," one participant recalls her stay in Australia.

The constituting parts of a celebration specified by Dyczewski are present in regular international events known as World Youth Days. It is also important to observe the functions performed by World Youth Days and see how they correspond to the functions of a celebration, specified by anthropologists and sociologists.

3. Functions of World Youth Days

Celebrations revolve around the key values for the group, important events or characters, which in the past played a significant part in building the identity of an individual or a group. In the opinion of Jan Assman, people sharing values and beliefs and cyclically repeating a series of behaviours referring to some kind of *sacrum*, create the institution of a celebration, wanting to keep it in common cultural memory.¹⁵ The researcher, analysing preliterate societies, notes that participation in festivals is important from the point of view of the continuity of the group. With celebration, the knowledge of its history, fate and heroes, saved in symbolic and repetitive rituals, is promoted and perpetuated. Celebration becomes a tool of communication between the old and the young, ensuring the continuity of tradition and building community, as opposed to what is ordinary, everyday and monotonous. In ancient times, a feast was understood directly as a deliverance from everyday life,¹⁶ and dance, fun, masquerades, banquets and meetings were used to emphasize the uniqueness of this period. Celebration requires even a minimal emotional involvement of participants, which provides the basis for establishing specific social bonds which may be called “the community of celebration.”¹⁷ Two inseparable elements: knowledge of celebration (its causes and message), and emotional involvement determine the degree of integration and identification with the community. To sum up the above considerations, it is easy to see that celebration performs completely different functions in relation to its individual participants and groups who celebrate to maintain their own identity. Thus, one can specify the following functions of celebration: cognitive, communicative, integrative, commemorative or ludic.

What function can World Youth Day play for its participants? The most important one seems to be the integrative and bonding function as the young usually seek acceptance and confirmation that they are not

15 J. Assmann, *Pamięć kulturowa. Pismo, zapamiętywanie i polityczna tożsamość w cywilizacjach starożytnych*, przekł. A. Kryczyńska-Pham, Warszawa 2008, p. 72.

16 J. Assmann, *Pamięć kulturowa...*, p. 73.

17 H. Mielicka, *Antropologia świąt i świętowania*, Kielce 2006, p. 25.

alone in their own choices, beliefs and views. In the current secularized, pop-culture environment, young people do not appreciate religious values and distance themselves from the Catholic Church, seeing it as primarily a hierarchical institution while at the same time condemning their peers who claim adherence to Christianity, work in parish communities, etc. For the latter, World Youth Day is an opportunity to confirm the validity of their convictions, to strengthen their faith against the opinion of their peer group and to give a sense to their lives based on values derived from the Gospel. One of the participants of WYDs in Madrid and Rio de Janeiro proves this statement with her words:

You have a feeling that all the young people that you meet there have the same aspirations and are guided by similar values in life. Whether or not we are strangers to each other does not matter. The obvious reason for our presence at this meeting is Christ.

And that frees them from the fear of rejection by other young people, breaks down communication and cultural barriers and helps get away from all stereotypes. Hence the ubiquitous ease of entering into relationships, characteristic of these meetings, a sense that being a Catholic you are not alienated, that there are millions of people in the world who live in a similar way – this gives you strength to persevere with your values, to fight for them, which is so difficult in today's world. Integration with a group of people having the same religious beliefs, checking your experience of faith against testimonies of people living in other countries and contexts, the desire to demonstrate your beliefs are the blocks that build a dynamic relationships between WYD participants. It seems that spending a few days in each-other's company and articulating similar problems and emotions gives each other strength to return and deal with rejection and a lack of understanding from their colleagues. "Young people can listen to testimonies and draw from their peers a little courage to defend their religious beliefs," argues a participant of the meeting in Madrid. "This is an opportunity for apostolate and showing people who do not take part in World Youth Day that there are many people who believe, not only the elderly saying their rosary in churches... I think a lot of young Poles want

to prove that the Church is alive...” To say that after returning to their countries, the young will take on a kind of the evangelizing mission that is risky, but perhaps the strength acquired during WYD is a good starting point. The above statements show that the desire to manifest belonging to a religious group, in this case to the living and united Church, is a dire need of the young.

The function of strengthening of an individual and of the social identity of a group to which he/she belongs is also worth mentioning. By celebrating, the young answer the questions: who am I, where do I come from? Who is God for me and who am I for Him? They see that in asking these difficult questions they are not alone, that these questions are important for young people, regardless of their skin colour, ethnicity or cultural affiliation. These meetings provide an opportunity to deepen and demonstrate their faith in God, discover their vocation and a sense of unity among believers of a similar age, with similar dilemmas, but coming from different corners of the world. “They feel hunger of faith, they want to change something in their lives, they seek support,” says one of the participants of WYD in Madrid. Apparently this support, unity, and the attitude of curiosity towards experiences of believers living by our side are missing in everyday family, peer and parish relations. An interesting voice is a statement of a man who attended the meeting in Paris:

World Youth Day responds to the need to observe how people believe in another country, that is, whether there is living faith, or rather a tradition and nothing more, or in other words – does this faith “work” or is it something artificial that does not apply to life and consists of only beautiful words. They respond to the need to review their vision of Christianity.

In other words, this is the need to check whether this belief is functional only in their own case or also in the case of others.

The bonding and identity-forming function does not stem solely from testimonies or the experience of a community during these meetings. It is equally important that young people learn about and start to establish

relations with representatives of different cultures; they experience their cultural and religious heritage, which is often exotic in relation to their everyday life. In this case, World Youth Day has a cognitive and communicative function. Young people learn to respect diversity, which enriches, delights, but also raises barriers in communication and adaptation, disturbing contemplation and prayer. One of the participants of the meeting in Madrid remembers the atmosphere which she defines as “inappropriate, which was probably a result of fatigue, but also of cultural differences.” For many young people World Youth Day is the first intercultural contact, difficult because of language barriers, tiredness or difficulty in finding their place in a new situation.

What is visible and all too often stressed in the media is the enthusiasm and joy of the young, staying together, participating in performances, prayer groups and conferences. There are various emblems that help to express joy: colourful flags, scarves, hats and other gadgets, which, along the lines of the contemporary popular culture, are more and more abundant. They are often called religious kitsch and criticised along with ostentatious behaviour and play, claiming that this manifestation of joy, this spectacle is not always appropriate. However, what is visible here is the ludic nature of celebration, which is, almost by its very nature, an opportunity for excess, madness and ostentatious consumption. A French anthropologist Jean Duvignaud writes about this very aspect:

Celebration is first and foremost about spectacle and staging [...]. It is something to be viewed, listened to, touched, where it is appropriate to dance and feast. It is a great opportunity to have fun: a common occasion to absorb the food for collective life, something that reminds of a dream world.¹⁸

The enthusiasm of the crowds seen during consecutive WYDs in dancing, singing, shouting, and a common *agape* is the most characteristic and media-friendly face of World Youth Day. While watching movies documenting the atmosphere, let us say, based on the vigil on Copacabana

18 J. Duvignaud, *Dar z niczego. O antropologii święta*, Warszawa 2011, p. 204.

Beach, that we not only see but almost feel the overwhelming joy which is not in contradiction with periods of silence and contemplation in prayer.

Another fundamental problem is the issue of the functions that World Youth Day can play for bishops, pastors, priests or lay leaders, responsible for various forms of evangelization undertaken in local communities. Crowds of young people gathered for World Youth Day give a clear message to the diocesan and parish Church about the needs of young people who want to be its part: "I arrived at the decision that I believe in God and I want to be a part of the Church," recalls a participant of the meeting in Rome. "I experienced the young and universal Church. I experienced the Church which is cheerful, smiling, singing and dancing, unlike my own parish." These words may be painful to priests who on a daily basis teach religion, preach in parishes or speak in academic communities. However, they express a desire to experience joy not only on holidays and among an enthusiastic and colourful crowd, but also in times of struggle and tests of their faith, which take place every day.

In the Church, young people want to be themselves, share joy with other believers, and experience a direct relationship with them. They want less hierarchical and more direct contacts with their priests. The words of a participant of the meeting in Cologne reveal her surprise with the attitude of a Polish bishop who addressed the young in a kind way, without keeping distance arising from his function: "It was my first direct meeting with a Church official. I saw not a high-ranking priest but a person like all of us." Thus, expectations are also connected with providing pastoral care in an appropriate form suited to young people, using communicative language and referring to the real context of their lives.

These considerations encourage a more general reflection. In a sociological sense, World Youth Day is a celebration of the community of young people who believe in Christ. Participants find their place in it in different ways: some seek primarily *sacrum*, testimony to Him, and reflection in silence and prayer. Others, more communally-oriented, wait for an exchange of intercultural experiences, making friends and having fun. They feel the need to confirm that the choice of their faith was right, and to demonstrate it in many ways which are sometimes incomprehensible to adults. They search for the meaning of individual

choices, often difficult to be accepted by their peers. During World Youth Day they gain confidence that they are not alone, that they have friends who speak different languages but worship God in a similarly diligent and cheerful way.

The above considerations are not synonymous with the belief that all young people who come to World Youth Day see the unfolding events in a similarly reflective and spiritual way. Certainly, there are also incidental participants or those looking for entertainment or visiting the place for other reasons than spiritual. They are perhaps driven by the desire to spend a cheap holiday, visit tourist attractions, get to know a new country and people, try their abilities in a new situation of intercultural contact, or even to free themselves from the tutelage of their parents. The reasons may be non-religious and perhaps even anti-religious or anti-clerical, but one can never be sure that once they come across such a rich variety of spiritual meetings, they will not experience a spiritual transformation difficult to forget.

4. Conclusion

Leon Dyczewski claims that participants of celebrations “are aware of why to celebrate,”¹⁹ although the degrees of this awareness may vary and depend on many factors. Usually the deeper one’s commitment to faith, knowledge of the celebration, its symbols and customs, the greater their involvement in the preparation and the higher satisfaction with the experience of the event.²⁰ This conclusion also reflects the spirit of World Youth Day, on which particular groups, priests or local communities hosting pilgrims have been working for years. How the day is prepared, lived and remembered depends on individual commitment, spiritual preparation and the strength of one’s faith. Faith and tradition that used to be passed down from generation to generation orally, today reach

19 L. Dyczewski, *Święto i jego kulturotwórcza rola*, “Kultura i Społeczeństwo” 2012 nr 4, p. 9.

20 L. Dyczewski, D. Wadowski, *Kultura dnia codziennego i świątecznego w rodzinie*, Lublin 1998.

the young in many ways, however often fragmented. Pastoral activities, retreats, teachings, conferences are there, but more and more evident is the need to bear witness, the desire to share the common faith and be strengthened by a group of the like-minded.

Currently, young people do not have the “tribal, or even a modern urban experience of membership,” says Roger Scruton. “They have rudimentary or no religious beliefs, and the religion that they have is detached from the customs and rituals that make up the community.”²¹ In other words, they lack close relationships which would give them a sense of belonging and security, the certainty of being on the right track. While living in a hurry, under the pressure of being *on-line* in each situation, it is increasingly difficult for them to experience the closeness of God and other people, including their families. The issue of the search for authentic relationships seems to be the key to the question why World Youth Days are a contemporary answer to the need for celebration. Young people are looking for a relationship with God and with each other – priests, carers and other young people from other parts of the world. When they find it, they want to rejoice – after all, finding a lost one is something to celebrate. WYDs are therefore a form of a response to the need to live common Christian values. One needs to break the daily routine, experience emotions so strong and distinctive to become, upon return to their family environment, an important reference point on the way to Christian maturity. To many, the form of the WYD celebration seems to be spectacular and similar to pop culture, which makes it unacceptable. But we must remember that every celebration needs a framework, and in this case the “product” of the living Gospel is combined with the “packaging” that is attractive to young people.

World Youth Day 2016 in Kraków, like previous meetings, will be described and documented in many ways – as a spectacle or a religious festival, or even as something unnecessary or shocking. There are as many ways of interpreting the event as there are observers. The most beautiful, most vital part of the celebration is not always apparent, as it often happens

²¹ R. Scruton, *Przewodnik po kulturze nowoczesnej dla inteligentnych*, przekł. J. Prokopiuk, J. Przybył, Łódź–Wrocław 2006, p. 151.

in the human heart. As Jan Assmann says: “Celebration sheds light on the background of our existence which is invisible on ordinary days, and the gods themselves refresh laws and orders that have been forgotten, because they have become too obvious,”²² which is why young people desire such a celebration and an opportunity to do it together.

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²² J. Assmann, *Pamięć kulturowa*, przekł. A. Kryczyńska-Pham, Warszawa 2008, p. 73.