

World Youth Day

Religious Interaction at a Catholic Festival





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World Youth Day

Religious Interaction at a Catholic Festival

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To my parents Johanne and Normann

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List of abbreviations

AAD	Archdiocese of Denver Archives – World Youth Day Collection
AGW	Archives of <i>Gazeta Wyborcza</i> (Archiwum <i>Gazeta Wyborcza</i>)
APC	The National Archive in Częstochowa (Archiwum Państwowe w Częstochowie)
APW	The National Archive in Warszawa (Archiwum Państwowe w Warszawie)
CCL1917	Code of Canon Law, 1917
CCL1983	Code of Canon Law, 1983
CCC1908	Catechism of Saint Pope Pius X, 1908
CCC1992	Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1992
CMJPIIB	Center of John Paul II’s Ideas Library (Centrum Myśli Jana Pawła II Biblioteka)
CDF	Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith
DCRA	<i>The Denver Catholic Register</i> Archives
HCC	History Colorado Center
JP2	John Paul II (popular abbreviation)
JP2C	John Paul II Center (Archdiocese of Denver)
NABRE	New American Bible (Revised Edition)
NCCB	National Conference of Catholic Bishops (United States)
PCL	Pontifical Council for the Laity
RUA	Regis University Archives
UJPIIB	University of John Paul II Library in Kraków (Uniwersytet Jana Pawła II Biblioteka)
UNDA	University of Notre Dame Archives
USCC	United States Catholic Conference
USCCB	United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
WYD	World Youth Day

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There were many chinks or chasms between worlds in old times, but they have grown rarer. This was one of the last: I do not say *the* last. And so they fell, or rose, or blundered, or dropped right through, and found themselves in this world.

C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian*.

To think that once I could not see beyond the veil of our reality, to see those who dwell behind.

Silicon Knights and Nintendo, *Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem*.

20 years ago today a world that I had lived in alone was suddenly open to others. It's been wonderful. Thank you.

J. K. Rowling, *Twitter*, June 26, 2017.

We have our victim in heaven, our priest in heaven, our sacrifice in heaven... When you see the Lord sacrificed and lying as an oblation, and the priest standing by the sacrifice and praying, and all things reddened with that precious blood, do you think that you are still among men and standing on earth?

Saint John Chrysostom (quoted in Nichols, 1991: 50)

1. What is World Youth Day?

1.1 The biggest papal gathering on record?

How many people attended the largest papal gathering on record? Where was it, when was it, and what was the occasion? According to church historian Eamon Duffy and political analyst George Weigel, the answers would be—in turn: roughly 5 million people; Manila, the Philippines; World Youth Day 1995 and the Papal Mass on January 15, the feast day of Saint Paul the Hermit, celebrated by—now Saint—Pope John Paul II (e.g. Duffy, 2014: 375; Weigel, 2005 [2001]: 750). Another papal event at Manila saw that change in 2015, but WYD 1995 held its ground for two decades (Pullella and Francisco, 2015). What, then, is World Youth Day? When and how did it begin? Did it stay much the same, or did it evolve? How has World Youth Day affected Catholicism at large? These are the questions I aim to answer with this book, and while the book in its entirety is the answer I propose, a short description of the phenomenon will help readers situate themselves. Let us begin at the top, then: What is World Youth Day?

World Youth Day (WYD) is the name of a series of gatherings for Catholic youth and young adults held by the Catholic Church. From this point on, the picture gets complicated. WYD takes two main forms. The first is a globally distributed but locally enacted small-scale variety, celebrated annually on Palm Sunday in many dioceses around the world. The second form is of a globally concentrated variety, held every two to three years in a specified location. This latter type gathers hundreds of thousands to millions of participants in one place, making them centralized transnational events. Moreover, the pope is always present to lead a few ceremonies. It is the ambition of the hierarchically topmost WYD organizers at the Vatican (previously the “Pontifical Council for the Laity,” redubbed and reorganized in 2016 into the “Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life”) that all WYDs—distributed and centralized—involve the Catholic Church in its universal entirety. To answer that demand, viewing parties enabled by digital technology connect people around the world to the Vatican’s Palm Sunday celebrations by live streaming. Similarly, diocesan viewing parties are organized during the large-scale centralized events for those unable to travel to attend in person. Barring a few exceptions, like the WYD of 1995 in Manila, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, centralized events typically take place in July–August. The hundreds of

thousands to millions of participants come from 160–185 countries worldwide (Jackowski et al., 2016: 136; Polish Press Agency and Catholic News Agency Poland, 2016). Centralized WYDs involve encounters between people from around the world, making the events *transnational* with global reach and relevance. Both varieties of WYDs connect Catholic youth and young adults from around the world, but it is the large-scale centralized events that draw media attention, and so it is these events that typically are referred to when WYD is mentioned. This tendency stretches into research on WYD, this book included. Unless otherwise specified, I use “WYD” to refer to the centralized transnational events.

Speaking of WYD locations, main parts of the event take place in or in the vicinity of a city, and no city aside from Rome has hosted WYD more than once. The Eternal City has hosted four large-scale events and remains the center of small-scale WYDs. It is a poetic illustration of the negotiations of power between the administrative center at the Vatican and the Catholic Church’s many other centers—centers of tradition, of pilgrimage, of piety and power. Viewed as a single phenomenon, WYD has become a mobile shapeshifter clothed in the religious and cultural characteristics of each location, but with similar event designs, structures, and ambitions. Centralized WYDs draw on saints, stories, and symbols of special prominence to the host locations and communities.

Changing host locations from city to city around the world ensures a freshness that may well be key to securing WYDs’ continued appeal. Design and duration are other ways in which WYDs have changed. In its first manifestations, centralized WYDs lasted two days—Palm Saturday and Palm Sunday—and Palm Sunday remains the normative time for diocesan celebrations, although there are exceptions (Rymarz, 2007: 387).¹ Today, the centralized events continue for a full week, sporting several main gatherings and some smaller events like concerts and other artistic performances—all of which contribute to an elaborate event design. Despite its plasticity, the event design also has fixed features that carry over into each individual WYD. The most prominent of these is a regular set of rituals that include an Opening Mass, a Welcoming Ceremony for the pope (who always participates), language-specific catechesis sessions, the Way of the Cross, a communal Pilgrimage Walk followed by a night Vigil, and a Closing Mass. Most of these regular rituals have a fixed week schedule. For example, the Way of the Cross always takes place on Friday, the Pilgrimage Walk and Vigil on Saturday, and the Closing Mass on Sunday morning. This pattern of events largely replicates the ritual pattern in the last days of Holy Week in Rome. Papal participation constitutes another consistent component and connection to Holy Week. Just

1 In the United States, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) celebrate “National Youth Day” on the “Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, which is typically in late October” (USCCB, 2016).

as the pope leads the Way of the Cross on Good Friday, the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday, and celebrates Mass on Easter Sunday in Rome, he also leads the Vigil and Closing Mass at WYD. Beyond that, papal ceremonial leadership is fluid. For example, Pope Francis led the Way of the Cross at WYD 2016, but John Paul II did not at WYD 1993. The WYD Closing Mass is open to the general public and does not require WYD participant credentials. This papal Mass thus tends to draw the largest number of people, as exemplified initially in this chapter by WYD 1995 in Manila.²

The subtitle of this book reveals that I consider WYD to be a *festival*. Analyzing the Olympic Games in the 1980s, ritual studies scholar John J. MacAloon identified four “genres of performance”: spectacle, festival, ritual, and games (MacAloon, 1984). *Spectacle* implies “large and dramatic public displays”; *festival* conveys “celebration and joyousness”; *ritual* is taken to indicate the invocation of “religious or sacred forces”; and *games* communicates a combination of playfulness and socio-political significance (Getz, 1989: 128, cf. MacAloon, 1984). WYD combines all four genres, but I have chosen to accentuate *festival* partly due to its celebratory atmosphere, and partly because it indicates a level of complexity that I think the reader will find useful to keep in mind.

Despite many disruptions within its durable design, one of WYD’s most stable and conspicuous features is references to the events as *pilgrimage* and participants as *pilgrims*. Scholars of religion Alex Norman and Mark Johnson have noted that WYD differs from other, older Catholic pilgrimage traditions (Norman and Johnson, 2011: 371). In their view, the differences between WYD and other pilgrimages consist in WYD “lacking the historical authority of longer established pilgrimages” and “not taking place at a noted sacred site” (Norman and Johnson, 2011: 371). While Norman and Johnson’s observations ring true for some WYD locations like Denver, Sydney, or Toronto, the same can hardly be said for Rome, Buenos Aires, Santiago de Compostela, and Częstochowa. These latter host cities boast old and vivid pilgrimage traditions. Unlike pilgrimages to those places, however, or to other major Catholic shrines like Lourdes, Fátima, or Guadalupe, WYD is only available for a very short time. WYD’s time-limited availability places it in a class of recurrent pilgrimage events with Jubilee Years, Holy Week, and other Catholic feasts and festivals. We might also note that WYD thus bears some resemblance to the Muslim *Hajj* and the Hindu *Kumbh Mela* on the one hand, and rock festivals and cultural fairs on the other. In fact, the inclusion of music events along with the sheer number of participants gathered under the open air earned WYD the nickname

2 By comparison, John Julius Norwich suggests that the Requiem Mass at John Paul II’s funeral in 2005 was “attended by well over four million people, almost certainly the largest single Christian pilgrimage in history” (Norwich, 2011: 466). John Paul II’s visit to Nowy Targ, Poland, in June 1979 is often ignored in this connection. According to the *New York Post* on June 8, 1979, over five million people gathered (UNDA1).

“Catholic Woodstock” (DCRA4). Unlike the *Hajj* or *Kumbh Mela*, however, WYD revolves around practices that are enacted locally and are always available on the parish level, like the Way of the Cross, Confession, and Communion. What sets centralized WYDs apart from local enactments of these rituals is the media attention they attract due to the sheer number of participants gathered in one place, their multicultural and multinational diversity, and the administrative, logistical, and financial demands involved.

The conundrum of WYD—promoted as a pilgrimage while diverging from some central connotations to pilgrimage as conceived conventionally—led me to select *pilgrim(s)* and *pilgrimage* as keywords for this study. Until now, no study has asked whether participants themselves agree to self-describe as pilgrims, or how they interpret the term *pilgrimage* in the context of WYD. Consequently, I chose these topics to limit the scope of my study. This had consequences for how I collected material during my stay at the Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism at the University of Notre Dame in the spring of 2015, and in various archives in Poland from August to early December that same year. *Pilgrim(s)* and *pilgrimage* were also important for designing the interview guide for fieldwork at WYD 2016. This process is explored in the Appendix.³

Research on WYD by scholars of religion is scarce and historical and qualitative studies even more so. This is surprising because WYD is the one large-scale, thematic, youth-oriented, and recurring global mega-event undertaken by the world’s largest religious organization. If that is not enough to inspire interest, WYD is also the greatest singular event undertaken by that organization to accommodate, recruit, engage, and influence youth as a distinct social segment. I hope this short introductory description is sufficient to spark curiosity.

It is time to present my study’s guiding research questions and the structure of this book. This first chapter starts with the three main contributions I aim to make with this book, leading to the question of when WYD began, a discussion of previous research on WYD followed by a section that presents research questions, contextualizes the book, and positions it in relation to the two fields of study I engage the most: pilgrimage studies and—less conventionally—digital game studies. First, however, let me present the book’s three main contributions:

- 1) A better understanding of the origins and early history of WYD and, by extension, a better understanding of Catholicism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This contribution pertains mainly to the history of Catholicism in this period.

3 Some readers may interpret placing the discussion of research methods and methodology in the Appendix as a sign of irreverence. That is not my intention. Instead, the decision resulted from a wish to treat the section with the reverence and dedication due to the topic while retaining the flow of the argument that would otherwise have been obstructed.

- 2) A new approach to studying pilgrimage by showing that another framework, here inspired by digital game studies, can enrich and extend the considerable insights already obtained in that field. This is done by providing some new language for interpreting the source material, especially the personal experiences of travelers, what that entails for them, and their judgments about themselves and other participants.
- 3) Exploring what theoretical perspectives from digital game studies, especially conversations about *interaction*, *interface*, and *immersion*, not only to Catholic pilgrimage and rituals, but also of phenomena in other religious traditions, such as Hindu *darshan*, visionary dreams in Muslim spirituality, and embodied manifestations of the Holy Spirit among Charismatic Christians.

The central question that guides these contributions is: What is World Youth Day? I have already used the terms *event* and *festival* interchangeably with WYD, which reveals the primary outlook: Whatever else they are, WYDs are complex, celebratory public events—mass gatherings organized by the Catholic Church in cooperation with the festivals' host cities. In order to explore the central question of what WYDs are, asking when they began is a fitting first step.

1.2 When did World Youth Days begin?

It would be misleading to say scholars disagree on when the first WYD took place, for the matter is not discussed but rather unceremoniously asserted in most studies' introductory sections. Even so, they tend to refer to three different years: 1984, 1985, or 1986. The 1986 event was the first to be officially named "World Youth Day," but the documents of WYD 1986 display continuity with gatherings in 1984 and 1985. 1985 is the year most scholars name the first year WYD was celebrated, probably because John Paul II officially instituted the gatherings as an annual celebration on December 20 that year (Perreault, 2005: 305; Pfadenhauer, 2010: 383, 392; Pontifical Council for the Laity, 2014). December 20 was half a year after the WYD of 1985, however, and scholars also refer to a large-scale meeting between the pope and a transnational group of young people in 1984—in the same place and at the same time of year (Cleary, 2011: 19; Faggioli, 2014 [2008]: Chapter 9, section 1, para. 2, Kindle edition; Rymarz, 2007: 387; Weigel, 2005 [2001]: 493). 1984 is the first year on the list of WYDs found on the Vatican's official website (Pontifical Council for the Laity, 2014; Vatican.va, 2016). The history of WYD's material culture also suggests we place its beginning in 1984. On Easter Sunday that year, John Paul II oversaw the presentation of a large wooden cross to a multinational group of young Catholics gathered in Saint Peter's Square

(Pontifical Council for the Laity, 2014). One week earlier, however, during the Palm Weekend, the Youth Jubilee (also called the Festival of Hope) was held in connection with the conclusion of the Holy Year of the Redemption (1983–1984). Throughout subsequent transnational gatherings, the “WYD Cross,” and an icon that often accompanies it, have been and continue to be central material objects at the main events. Within the festival’s timeframe, one could even make the case that the main events are those where the WYD Cross is on display.

There are good reasons for selecting any one of the three years as the first WYD, although 1984 and 1985 might best be dubbed “proto-WYDs” because the gatherings had not yet been named. In light of these observations, it makes sense in retrospect to conceptualize the festivals of 1984, 1985, as well as WYD 1986 as sequences in a formative period. As time went on, the event design was continuously elaborated, as we will see in Chapters 3 and 4.

From Table 1.1, it is possible to discern certain trends in the three pontificates during which WYD has been celebrated. In John Paul II’s pontificate, event intervals were biennial with the exceptions of the three-year pauses between 1997 in Paris and 2000 in Rome, and between 2002 in Toronto and 2005 in Cologne.⁴ Out of the ten centralized WYDs John Paul II attended, four of them coincided with the Assumption of Mary (August 15). Themes focused on the incarnation, evangelization, various aspects of believers’ identities as well as their relationships with the persons of the Trinity and Mary. Benedict XVI’s pontificate saw a decrease in frequency of transnational events to triennial intervals. Timing remained in summer but was otherwise less consistent, and themes focused on various aspects of believers’ relationships to Jesus and one another. So far, the WYDs of Francis’ pontificate have maintained a triennial interval, and varying celebration dates in summer. Themes have focused on evangelization, the beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount, and the Annunciation. A consistent feature in all three pontificates are WYD themes, which have been quotes or paraphrased excerpts from the New Testament.

The number of WYDs presided over by each pope is one important difference between the three pontificates. Including the proto-festivals of 1984 and 1985, 21 WYDs were celebrated under John Paul II—ten of them centralized. By comparison, Benedict XVI presided over eight in total, three of which were centralized, while Francis had by 2020 presided over seven in total, three of which were centralized. The difference in numbers is easily explained by the extraordinary longevity of John Paul II’s pontificate—26 and a half years. The events have since continued and been replicated with minor changes. Most of them were afforded by what had become an established event

4 It should be noted that WYD 2013 in Rio de Janeiro was to a large extent already planned when Francis was elected pope. The same goes for WYD 2005 in Cologne, which was Benedict XVI’s first WYD.

When did World Youth Days begin?

Table 1.1: Full overview of World Youth Days (Adapted from Vatican.va, 2016).

Pope	Year	Host city	Level	Status	Date(s)	Occasion	Theme
JP2	1984	Rome	Transnational	Proto-WYD	April 11–15, 22	Youth Jubilee, Palm Weekend, Easter Sunday	No theme. Presentation of WYD Cross.
JP2	1985	Rome	Transnational	Proto-WYD	March 30– 31	Palm Weekend	No theme. Apostolic Letter <i>Dilecti Amici</i> is released.
JP2	1986	Rome	Diocesan	WYD I	March 23	Palm Sunday	“Always be prepared to make a defence to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you” (1Pt 3:15)
JP2	1987	Buenos Aires	Transnational	WYD II	April 11–12	Palm Weekend	“We ourselves have known and put our faith in God’s love towards ourselves” (1Jn 4:16)
JP2	1988	– (Rome)	Diocesan	WYD III	March 27	Palm Sunday	“Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5)
JP2	1989	Santiago de Compostela	Transnational	WYD IV	August 15– 20	Assumption of Mary	“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” (Jn 14:6)
JP2	1990	– (Rome)	Diocesan	WYD V	April 8	Palm Sunday	“I am the vine, you are the branches” (Jn 15:5)
JP2	1991	Częstochowa	Transnational	WYD VI	August 10– 15	Assumption of Mary	You have received a spirit of sonship” (Rom 8:15)

(Continued)

Pope	Year	Host city	Level	Status	Date(s)	Occasion	Theme
JP2	1992	- (Rome)	Diocesan	WYD VII	April 12	Palm Sunday	“Go into all the world and preach the Gospel” (Mk 16:15)
JP2	1993	Denver	Transnational	WYD VIII	August 10– 15	Assumption of Mary	“I came that they might have life, and have it to the full” (Jn 10:10)
JP2	1994	- (Rome)	Diocesan	WYD IX	March 27	Palm Sunday	“As the Father sent me, so am I sending you” (Jn 20: 21)
JP2	1995	Manila	Transnational	WYD X	January 10– 15	Various saints’ feast days	“As the Father sent me, so am I sending you” (Jn 20: 21; same as previous year)
JP2	1996	- (Rome)	Diocesan	WYD XI	March 31	Palm Sunday	“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (Jn 6:68)
JP2	1997	Paris	Transnational	WYD XII	August 19– 24	Various saints’ feast days	“Teacher, where are you staying? Come and see” (cf. Jn 1:38–39)
JP2	1998	- (Rome)	Diocesan	WYD XIII	April 5	Palm Sunday	“The Holy Spirit will teach you all things” (cf. Jn 14:26)
JP2	1999	- (Rome)	Diocesan	WYD XIV	March 28	Palm Sunday	“The Father loves you” (cf. Jn 16:27)

When did World Youth Days begin?

(Continued)

Pope	Year	Host city	Level	Status	Date(s)	Occasion	Theme
JP2	2000	Rome	Transnational	WYD XV	August 15–20	Assumption of Mary	“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14)
JP2	2001	- (Rome)	Diocesan	WYD XVI	April 8	Palm Sunday	“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9:23)
JP2	2002	Toronto	Transnational	WYD XVII	July 23–28	Various saints’ feast days	”You are the salt of the earth ... you are the light of the world” (Mt 5: 13,14)
JP2	2003	- (Rome)	Diocesan	WYD XVIII	April 13	Palm Sunday	”Behold, your mother!” (Jn 19,27)
JP2	2004	- (Rome)	Diocesan	WYD XIX	April 4	Palm Sunday	”We wish to see Jesus” (Jn 12,21)
B16	2005	Cologne	Transnational	WYD XX	August 16–21	Various saints’ feast days	”We have come to worship Him” (Mt 2,2)
B16	2006	- (Rome)	Diocesan	WYD XXI	April 9	Palm Sunday	”Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps 119, 105)
B16	2007	- (Rome)	Diocesan	WYD XXII	April 8	Palm Sunday	”Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (Jn 13, 34)