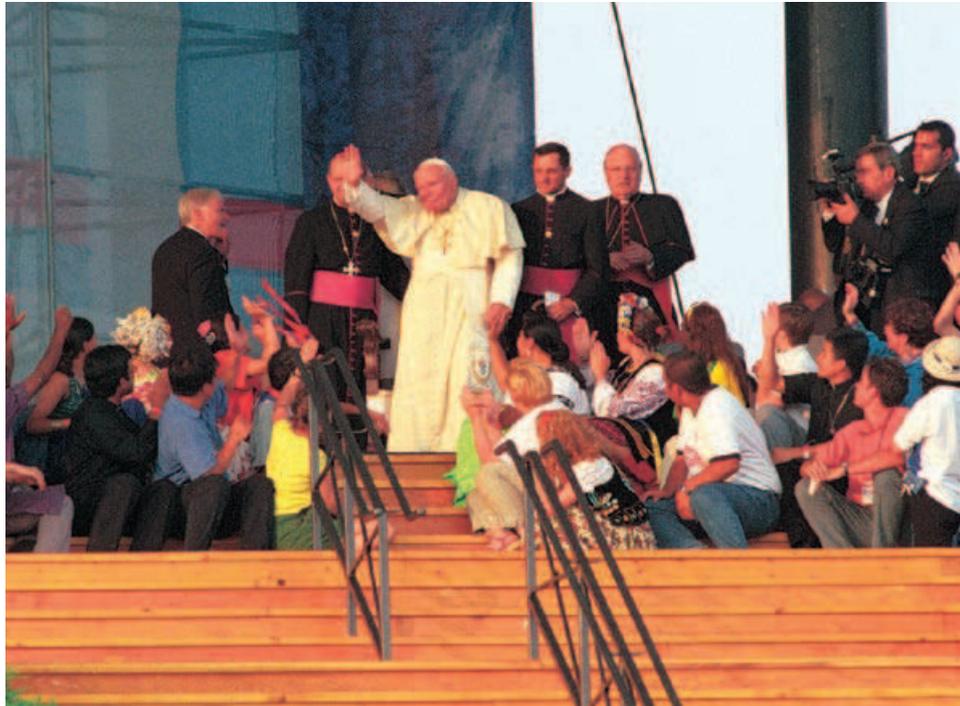


Toronto 2002

17th WORLD YOUTH DAY



Only after John Paul's arrival in this country, and the streets of Toronto were filled with hundreds of thousands of young people from 170 countries, giving joyful witness to their faith, did the Canadian mass media begin to reverse their negative view of World Youth Day.

Journalist Michael Coren observed that, even though he was not a Catholic himself, he joined with the Catholic community in welcoming the Holy Father on Canadian soil. He did so not only because John Paul II was the greatest leader of the world but also because the Holy Father was "a pure and cleansing wind in an often stale and smoggy world". A descendant of Jewish emigrants from Poland, Coren claimed that John Paul II redefined the notion of what it means to be an orthodox, faithful Catholic, and that the Pope was in our time "one of the greatest rays of light reflected by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ". To Coren, the Pope "like all genuine Christian leaders, cannot be defined, and limited, by political labels." John Paul II "may be the greatest bridge-builder of modern times" the journalist adds, stressing that the Holy Father "has reached out to Jews, Muslims and Hindus, has extended friendship to all races and nations".

Coren went on to say that logic itself enjoined us to follow the Pope's teachings when he refused to ordain women or to approve of homosexuality. "Nobody is forced to be a Catholic", he concluded. "If you want women priests and gay marriage, join another church". And He gave the critics



of the Pope a piece of advice: “Criticize the Pope if you like, but don’t criticize him for being a Roman Catholic. Like hissing at the sky because it is blue.” It is no wonder that in summarizing his attitude towards the Pope and the Church, Coren wrote: “The world is a better place for having John Paul in it, more joyful and graceful for having him as the leader of Roman Catholicism” (*The Saturday Sun*, 27 July, 2002).

What most impressed Connie Woodstock, a reporter for the popular daily *The Sun* and a member of the Anglican Church, was the sight of groups of young people, singing and praying on the streets of Toronto, on the subway and buses – groups of people behaving “like angels”. Confessing that the sight of this extraordinary festival “knocked her out”, she added that it felt as if she had been “run down by a huge truck, full of enthusiasm, with a face beaming with joy painted on the front, but a truck nevertheless, full of enthusiasm, with a face beaming with joy painted at the front, but still a truck”. Delighted with the Holy Father’s manner, she conceded that no other church apart from the Catholic Church could have organized such a festival of love. Watching the young people’s behavior made her feel the presence of a living God in millions of hearts. “Better a crowd shouting for joy than a mob screaming in hate”, she concluded, (...) “Better the sunshine of faith than the darkness of ignorance and fear” (*The Sunday Sun*, 28 July 2002).

Another reporter, Christina Blizzard, observed that the sight of hundreds of



thousands of young people, filled with idealistic fervor, happily celebrating their faith, should give us all cause to rejoice. An Anglican herself, she confessed she envied the Catholic Church for having a leader with such charisma and ability to radiate spiritual power. The presence of John Paul II caused people’s hearts to change, evoked tears of deep emotion and joy. “It was so moving all week to watch thousands of young people making an unabashed public demonstration of their faith”, she told her readers. And she also told them why they did so. “Because the Pope calls them to do so. It’s why the Catholic Church has the future.”

No one attending the Holy Father’s welcoming ceremony at Toronto’s Pearson International Airport could have missed seeing the tears of great joy in the eyes of 10-year-old Georgia Rae as the Pope kissed her on the cheek. Later, she told journalists that as she approached the Holy Father, her heart was filled with so much love that it seemed it would “burst out”. To Georgia it was clear that of all people the Holy Father was closest to God. That is why he radiated God’s love. Like several other journalists, Christina Blizzard expressed her admiration at the deep humanism, courage, goodness and love radiated by the Pope (see *The Sunday Sun*, 28 July 2002).

Editor Ted Byfield posed the question why John Paul II, an 82-year-old man, bent with disease, barely able to talk, moving with great difficulty, his hands trembling, showing symptoms of Parkinson’s disease, should be the world’s Superstar. It was undeniable that the Holy Father’s manner and teaching had stirred up and infused a whole generation of young Catholics with joyous faith. Although not a Catholic himself, Ted Byfield attributed this phenomenon to an astonishing process taking place within the Church—a process which began with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Its essence was the “invincible permanence of Christ in the Church”. John Paul II represented this permanence through his papal service. He and all those living now would eventually die, but the Church would live on. The Holy Father was so deeply loved and welcomed by hundreds of thousands of young people, precisely because he was a sign of this “invincible permanence of Christ in the Church”. That is why people with faith, did not despair over sins and scandals in the Church – they saw her holiness (*The Sunday Sun*, 28 July, 2002).

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