

World Youth Day 2008 Outcomes for Pilgrims

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ABSTRACT

This second paper on World Youth Day Sydney 2008 presents preliminary findings on the pilgrims' spirituality, their experiences at WYD08, and the diverse outcomes for different types of pilgrims. Over strong Durkheimian undertones, and within the framework of Victor Turner's 'ritual process' theory, a variety of outcomes were hypothesised for Devoted, Involved, Open and Social pilgrims. This extraordinary occasion generated potent 'collective effervescence' sufficient to give rise to a stronger than expected *general* effect of revivifying the sacred in the consciousness of the pilgrims, and at least for a time, strengthening the bond of the 'moral community / church'. Clear evidence of the specifically liminal phenomenon of *communitas*, as distinct from high group cohesion and solidarity, was observed. Our hypotheses concerning the more specific outcomes for different categories of pilgrims were generally confirmed.

This second paper on World Youth Day Sydney 2008 presents preliminary findings on

I Pilgrim types and levels of commitment

II Pilgrims' experiences at WYD08, and the diverse outcomes for different types of pilgrims

III The underlying dynamics of World Youth Day

I The Spirituality of the pilgrims described by level of commitment, country of residence, age, sex

Both Emile Durkheim and Randall Collins would have greatly enjoyed observing the phenomena of World Youth Day 2008 in Sydney, for obvious reasons. More of this anon.

Cluster analysis produced four clusters among the English-speaking pilgrims by level of religious commitment: the Devoted, the Involved, the Open and the Social as already described in the paper by Andrew Singleton.

The 'target age range' for World Youth Day was 15-35. Nearly all pilgrims were Catholic, and most were within this age range, so our analysis in these papers is confined to this group. It is useful to divide by age into 15-18 (school age), 19-24 (emerging adults in tertiary education or employment) and 25-35 (adults in longer-term partnerships and employment).

Commitment level varies somewhat by age and country of residence.

Table 1. Catholics aged 15-35: Commitment level by Age group (% of age group)

Agegrp	15-18	19-24	25-35	All
Level	%	%	%	%
Devoted	25%	42%	57%	40%
Involved	26%	27%	22%	25%
Open	26%	21%	16%	22%
Social	23%	10%	5%	13%

The school age group are divided evenly across all four levels of spirituality, whereas nearly 80% of the oldest group are either Devoted or Involved.

Countries of residence sufficiently numerous in the sample to be separately listed were: Australia, the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, USA, Canada, New Zealand, Britain, Ireland and Germany.

The level of religious commitment among pilgrims was compared across countries while controlling for age, by calculating the proportion of pilgrims from each country, and within the country, from each age group, who were classified as Devoted or Involved, (these two categories were combined and labelled Hi), then comparing this proportion within each age group across countries. Table 1 shows this kind of comparison, using a more limited list of countries.

Table 2. Catholics aged 15-25: Level of commitment by country of residence by age group (row percent: % of country within age group who are in commitment group)

Age Group / Country		Level of commitment	
		Hi	Lo
15-18	0 Aust	38.4%	61.6%
	1 USA	76.8%	23.2%
	2 NZ	56.5%	43.5%
	3 Canada	65.9%	34.1%
	4 Philippines	89.5%	10.5%
	5 UK/Ireland	42.1%	57.9%
	11 Other	68.0%	32.0%
	Total	51.1%	48.9%
19-24	0 Aust	61.0%	39.0%
	1 USA	80.7%	19.3%
	2 NZ	69.5%	30.5%
	3 Canada	71.3%	28.7%
	4 Philippines	85.5%	14.5%
	5 UK/Ireland	55.2%	44.8%
	11 Other	75.3%	24.7%
	Total	68.7%	31.3%
25-35	0 Aust	70.9%	29.1%
	1 USA	84.3%	15.7%
	2 NZ	80.6%	19.4%
	3 Canada	84.0%	16.0%
	4 Philippines	89.7%	10.3%
	5 UK/Ireland	73.5%	26.5%
	11 Other	84.1%	15.9%
	Total	78.9%	21.1%

NB the figures in this table are row percents: percent of those from a country within an age group who are in Hi or Lo spirituality level. E.g. 38.4% of Australians aged 15-18 are Hi in spirituality.

Differences by country of residence

Within all three age-groups, pilgrims from third-world countries showed the highest level of religious commitment across a wide range of indicators. Those from the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia were the most numerous of this type, but those who came in smaller numbers from Africa, the Middle East, and from the Caribbean, Central and South America were similar. The next highest group consisted of the USA, then Canada, then New Zealand; some distance behind them were Britain and Australia (in the 25-35 agegroup Britain was well ahead); Ireland was distinctly lower than the UK in all age-groups (we had not anticipated that!); last in all age-groups was Germany, far below the rest.

A primary difference to notice is that between the host country and visitors – perhaps more marked on this occasion because the visitors (except for those from New Zealand) had to travel much further than usual. For pilgrims from the host country, WYD is close and travel least expensive; so a larger number of younger pilgrims can always be expected, and a larger proportion of the less committed. Australia sent by far the highest proportion of school-age pilgrims to WYD, and had a considerable proportion of pilgrims with low commitment, but was exceeded in this by Ireland and Germany. At the other extreme, those for whom access is most costly and difficult are likely to be more highly motivated.

Further, third-world countries were the least affluent, so although they were granted some subsidies, their local churches, which also assisted with costs, could afford to send fewer pilgrims, so most likely selected them with great care, favouring those who were more committed and, perhaps, those who were judged more likely to share what they had gained with their churches on their return.

These differences reflect the Catholic culture of the countries from which the pilgrims came, and the pattern of global secularisation as it affects Catholics.¹ Although the pilgrims are in all cases a highly elite group, not at all representative of the general level of religious commitment among Catholics in their home countries, they show the same pattern of declining commitment as is evident in their countries as a whole. Germany is the only continental European country represented (because catechesis in German was not provided, and German pilgrims registered for catechesis in English); but of course there were also large groups from France, Italy and Spain who were not included in the research. The German group was the only one displaying the more radical Continental style of low commitment.

Differences by age

Among pilgrims from both the most and least committed groups, there was little difference across age categories. For example, among pilgrims from the Philippines aged 15-18, and those aged 19-24 and 25-35, 90% of each group belonged to the Devoted or Involved groups. And at the other extreme, only about 28% of German pilgrims in each age group belonged to these high-commitment groups. However, in all other (non-Continental) Western countries, older pilgrims were more highly committed than younger. The 25-35 group were leaving homes, and more likely, partners and families, and more settled employment; the 19-24 group were more likely to be sacrificing a week of tertiary study or work; the youngest group were more likely to be given financial assistance by parents, schools, parishes or dioceses, and may have been on school holidays, or were missing a week of school (significant for those in their final year of high school).

¹ See our discussion of these patterns in Mason, M., Singleton, A., and Webber, R. 2007 *The Spirit of Generation Y*. Melbourne: John Garratt Publishing, pp. 316-327.

Differences by gender

Table 3. Catholics aged 15-35: Gender by level of commitment by age group
(Row % of gender within agegroup)

Age group / Gender		Level of commitment		
		Hi	Lo	Total
15-18	Male	49.1%	50.9%	100.0%
	Female	51.9%	48.1%	100.0%
	Total	51.1%	48.9%	100.0%
19-24	Male	73.6%	26.4%	100.0%
	Female	66.3%	33.7%	100.0%
	Total	68.7%	31.3%	100.0%
25-35	Male	81.7%	18.3%	100.0%
	Female	76.8%	23.2%	100.0%
	Total	78.9%	21.1%	100.0%

(49.1% of males in the 15-18 age group were in the Hi commitment group.)

In Australia, Britain and Ireland, the youngest men and women were equally unlikely to be in the high commitment group, while in the US, NZ, Canada and the Philippines, women tended to be more committed than men in the youngest group (the traditional pattern). But in nearly all countries, in both older groups, the trend was opposite: men were more likely to be highly committed than women. The table shows a condensed version, omitting differences by country.

II. Hypotheses and preliminary findings on the pilgrims' experiences and the outcomes of WYD

H1) WYD as a strongly positive experience, strengthening denominational identity through solidarity and 'collective effervescence' and engendering 'communitas'

a) Experiencing community, solidarity

On the basis of our pre-WYD interviews and survey, which found that most of the pilgrims were highly religious, we expected, first, that virtually all pilgrims would find the experience enjoyable and encouraging, and would be strengthened in their identity as Catholics by experiencing the solidarity of a huge, highly cohesive group as they celebrated with a large number of other youthful Catholics from all over the world. It is worth noting that major youth events involving large numbers and especially those lasting several days are uncommon in Australia compared with Europe.

The expectation that pilgrims would experience and enjoy a very high level of solidarity was strongly verified.

We observed that:

- body-language and movement of individuals and groups in relation to others not of their group signified hospitality, openness, friendliness, interest readiness to interact;
- there was strong unity in the physical and emotional responses of different groups to the same events – every appearance of 'one mind and heart';
- always behaving as if in a good mood, pilgrims manifested, strongly together, peaks of excitement and delight at special moments.

Interviews during and after WYD showed that

- this was the most universal and strongest effect of the experience for pilgrims;
- they had anticipated it, and it was one of their strongest motives for attending, but their hope was realised far beyond what they had thought possible;
- it was particularly inspiring and encouraging to youth who experience themselves as in cognitive minorities at home, and generated a high degree of mutual trust, openness and cohesion, with a sense of freedom, delight, joy, exultation.

Returned pilgrims told us:

- ‘people took religion seriously, not as something to be laughed at’
- ‘it was an eye-opener, going; I felt: “Wow, there are other youth that are still religious and still go to church”’;
- ‘and after returning, if others rubbish WYD or religion, I feel stronger to say “I do go to Mass, I do, and that’s good”’ .

I: And the fact that they were there identifying as Catholic, did that help you?

S: Absolutely because it meant everybody had a common ground.

I: You’ve talked about it being one of the most significant experiences of your life, do you feel any different than before you went to WYD?

S: Well yeah and especially after just coming back, it was the majority of what most of the people who came back talked about and it was very enriching and it pulled out the spiritual side in everybody even the people who wouldn’t have necessarily considered themselves spiritual beforehand, I think everybody came back feeling enlightened.

I: So what did you think about kind of belonging as a Catholic to this huge kind of world group of people? Did that kind of have any impact on you?

S: It did, especially sitting at the racecourse and looking over the whole crowd and thinking, wow, you know, most of these people are part of the same religion and because these days you don’t really see that many young people that are religious. And it was just amazing to sort of just look over the crowd and just think wow, there are lots of other people that do believe ...

I: And there’s people who believe the same thing you do.

S: It doesn’t matter if you can’t speak the same language, if you touch someone’s hand you know you’re saying the same things. It’s all love there, it’s a way of really confirming your faith and it’s a way to feel that you’re not alone as Catholic, there are other people out there as a Catholic, and you really need to sort of experience it.

b) Experiencing the sacred

WYD was a week of living an intense form of Catholic life, with regular prayers, daily mass, and daily large religious events.

A particularly strong sense of the sacred was generated by the presence of the Pope, a figure endowed with potent ‘charisma of office’ (Weber), and by the extreme solemnity, elaborate formality and splendour of surroundings and music of the grand ceremonies at Barangaroo and Randwick;

Sacredness was attached to persons, to rituals (familiar rituals of prayer and Mass acquired a re-infusion of sacrality), to the words of instruction spoken to the pilgrims in the catecheses, even to the way people related to each other. Anything gross or lustful would have seemed sacrilegious.

Things noted as ‘most powerful, most moving’

I wouldn’t have said I was like jumping around and stuff like that. But it’s just you feel like you’re a bit sort of, I don’t know, you feel like you are closer, you feel like you’re sort of helping your relationship with your god in a way.

I guess it was the powerful and moving was probably the night that we were at Randwick with the candles.

Probably at the Vigil on the Saturday night when the Pope called for silence and it just amazed me that you could have 500,000 people there and everyone was quiet, we were all in that religious mode and we were all silent and that really, yes I thought that was quite moving.

As soon as the Pope got up there, everyone had their candles and everyone was standing up and it was beautiful and it was dead silent, I mean to get four hundred thousand people silent is unbelievable.

The Stations of the Cross; I felt that I was there when Jesus was dying and that moved me in a way that I never felt before

Oh, I had tears the moment when he was lifted onto the cross and it rose up out of the ground.

“Most felt presence of God in”

I: Was there any moment during the week where you were strongly aware of the presence of God?

S: Watching the Pope, absolutely. As the head figure of the Church you can't help but feel some sort of light shining down when he's up there speaking as he was but even moments like sitting at dinner and somebody doesn't get some dinner and someone else leans across and says here have mine, it's just something like that and it just became second nature on the trip, everybody just became everybody's mate and that was a really enlightening thing to see and it was something that wouldn't necessarily happen anywhere else so that was a really big indication of the presence of something bigger.

S: I think it's because you can't see Jesus, you can't see God here on earth, but the Pope's, like he's the leader of the church, he is the closest you're going to get to seeing Jesus or God and the Holy Trinity and all that type of stuff. And it was, yeah, I think it, yeah, the Pope was something really special.

And I think for me, a most memorable thing is that feeling of the Holy Spirit really coming down and I can remember thinking oh, I'm not sure that "Receive the power" is a really truthful motto, but in reflection I think it was the most appropriate because I personally felt the Holy Spirit's presence.

c) Experiencing *communitas*

There was a further dimension to the experience to which Victor Turner's theory of ritual process alerts us: WYD is a kind of pilgrimage, not to a fixed shrine, but to a periodic sacred event presided over by the supreme religious leader of a large denomination. All rituals, but especially pilgrimage journeys, place the pilgrims into 'liminal' status ('in-between' – meaning out of ordinary time and place, or between social statuses – e.g. between child and adult, in initiation rituals). In the liminal interval, ordinary statuses, roles and norms are temporarily suspended (even reversed, as in Carnival). Stripped of their social 'clothes', set free from the confinement of their usual status and role, and from the barriers that separate them from many others, structurally 'naked' co-sojourners experience a unique form of social cohesion which Turner christened '*communitas*'. This is not the place for a full description, but one of its effects is to facilitate an intense openness and intimacy between individuals, an ease of communication, trust, sense of common humanity.

We expected that virtually all pilgrims would experience a moderate degree of '*communitas*' both within their own group and with other individuals and groups with whom they interacted, and in a sense with the whole group. People were there willingly, by choice, often at great trouble and expense, and therefore could be presumed and trusted to share the same faith and a good deal of commitment.

We observed that pilgrims interacted with those from other groups in a very free and unconstrained way. There was a great deal of kissing. People kissed strangers very freely, often playfully, with some affection, but in a markedly 'innocent' manner.

In interviews, pilgrims mentioned experiencing more acceptance in their own group,
 [Best part of the experience?]
 "Being a part of my group, feeling like I fit without reservation."

and also coming closer to those in their own group whom they previously did not know so well.

Pilgrims stressed how they were amazed and impressed with the 'special' atmosphere in which it was permissible and safe to do things which in normal life they (especially young women) would, quoting one of them: 'never, never do' – like walking up to completely unknown young people (of the opposite sex) and starting a conversation (or kissing).

"Yeah. And everyone was open about it, like you love Jesus, you love Jesus, you start dancing, give hugs, free kisses too, but like yeah, was all just good."

I could see this Spaniard ahead of me waving his flag and trying to get his group together and it was such a beautiful feeling to be amongst all of that and it was just something that you thought, I remember thinking that day, I want to package this moment up and tuck it aside and keep it, just bottle it, but then it happened the next day and that afternoon, it was something that I never thought that I'd be so lucky to experience, that many times but to experience this, I just felt, you didn't have to say anything to the person you were walking beside, you didn't have to know who they were but you just felt you were walking the same journey as them and it's such a powerful thing to be surrounded by people and know that there was this unconditional love around you because you were all part of the same thing, all part of the one church and that was powerful.

I went and spoke to a cop and it's like how has it been for you? He goes, "This has been amazing. It's the first time we've been to a big event like this and no one spat at us, no one's intoxicated, no one's high on drugs, no one ... there's no fights. It's ... it's amazing for us to be at such a big event and see how everyone can be like this".

And it's the way that we all should live. Like just getting on a bus and being able to say hi to a bus driver and hi to people sitting down and just talk to ... random like ... and exchanges, but just people you've never met before, but you can easily ... you don't feel like you can't talk, *like the social norms had gone*, like the way that they are here in ... how they way they are at the moment, you could just talk to anyone about their experience. [Budding sociologist here!]

There was no awkwardness that you feel when you go up to a stranger here, there it was just great atmosphere so it was good.

S: Normally if you bump into somebody in a normal situation they give you a greeting and hip and shoulder you back but if you accidentally bump, you say sorry mate, he says no worries, how are you going, where are you from, it was inspirational to see that many people just on a completely, just focused on being friendly and there for that event rather than a gang mentality.

H2) The morning 'catecheses' would be found unappealing

We expected that the pilgrims would find unappealing the three morning 'catecheses' – expositions of church teaching by Bishops. Would they not seem like very long Sunday sermons, of which youth are usually highly critical? We continued to think so even after making our own observations of these events – there were 'animating groups' present – teams of young people trained in youth ministry who engaged the group in 'icebreaking' games and songs; but the talks still seemed to our observers earnest and friendly, but in content dull and abstract. We found, however, in interviews with returned pilgrims, that the catecheses were

universally praised, and amazingly, often selected as the feature of the week that pilgrims “got the most out of”.

I: I know you went to the Catechesis and the Mass and other things, was there any moment when you felt especially close to God or a spiritual type experience.

S: The first Catechesis was something that ... the Bishop we had on the first day was really good, he was all his speeches made sense and related to us these days and at the point, because the whole thing with the week was the Holy Spirit and he was speaking about that and that was Wednesday and we got there on Monday I think, yeah and on Wednesday was the point, where you really listened and understood what he was saying.

And I suppose listening to that and to them as they inspired us about the Holy Spirit and everything like that, when I went up to Communion it was this real, usually I just feel really cleansed, I tend to feel that whole absolving of your sins, you feel more at peace afterwards, after I went to Reconciliation I came back and I was listening to the Catechesis I just felt on fire, I just felt like I had this spirit with me and I just felt I was, it was just a beautiful, beautiful feeling and I sat there and was taking it all in and I wanted all my senses to experience it and so I sat there for a while and had my eyes closed and just tried to listen and just to be and not think about, just to distract myself from my surroundings.

S: I must admit when we were in Catechesis, in the mornings when the Bishops were speaking, they were just so down to earth and that got me as well, they're real people too, they're not some just really holy figure, they're real down to earth people.

I: It's a lot more up close than you normally see Bishops, they're in a procession with their big hats on, wow, but this was a guy down the front and he had to relate to young people.

S: And I think when they spoke they touched every single person in that room, no jokes, when they spoke everyone went silent and they were so respectful and the way they spoke they got to everyone, you could feel, it was eerie, everyone went silent and listened and then afterwards we always had this little moment before we started clapping and it was like when everyone was trying to pull it all in, hold it in.

Reasons for this discrepant finding:

Positive features of catechesis

1. Showed that church was concerned for youth, and was reaching out to them
2. experienced as talking to, not at
3. experienced as 'not heavy religion' (PPCgroup) or even “not religious” in their terms with obviously a different and negative idea of religion;
4. animation group lightened atmosphere (MM notes n.13)
5. group approached event with high cohesion and positive affect; it was in context of pilgrimage, groups had stayed previous night together,
6. for those with low expectations (e.g. MG grp ldr from ACU) it was a pleasant surprise
7. 600-800 people their own age present
8. possible to ask questions
9. preceded and followed by common meals
10. some went to Reconciliation at catechesis and found it a good experience
11. theme of Holy Spirit was well adapted to a highly personal message re young people's inner lives, striking a popular note; catechesis topics were assigned (?); avoiding controversial issues (e.g. re moral teachings on premarital sex, homosexuality, euthanasia, clerical celibacy) – although some of these issues arose in questions;
12. though few remembered specific content, only general impressions, effects were more symbolic and strong
13. relatively more youth attended catecheses at this WYD – organisation improved, distances smaller, crowds smaller, public transport worked;

Negative features of catechesis

1. animating group too juvenile?

2. some reports of bishops who were dull, poor presenters, or ‘fire and brimstone’ conservatives who strongly emphasised sin, or who stressed controversial moral teachings;
3. material was in a 30 min lengthy input, quite abstract and intellectual
4. group process was poor but hampered by large numbers and limited space; 30 min or more talk and then loosely structured hour of discussion / questions
5. catechesis for the unevangelised, or was it gentle pre-evangelisation, or fulfilling both tasks?
6. some speakers preached, appealed to the heart, but only a minority?

H3) The major events

Assuming that youth would not appreciate formal liturgies in which the symbolic idiom was far from their culture, we expected that they would find the large-scale worship events distant, high-culture, alien and uninspiring. We continued to think so even after making our own observations of these events – the level of active participation among the youth appeared to be quite low. We found, however, in interviews with returned pilgrims, that the large-scale events were apparently engaging and full of power for them, as so many of the earlier quotes illustrate.

Reasons for this discrepant finding:

- a) as observers, team members were differently focussed in our consciousness than the participants; as sociologists of religion, distanced from reality by our supposed theoretical knowledge and insight, we were not immersed in the experience of the events as the young participants were;
- b) as older, more secure in our worldviews and commitments and plausibility structures (i.e. with stronger social support structures for our religious worldviews), we experienced less of a contrast to our everyday life when surrounded by believers; we were probably also less open to experience, more guarded in our responses in large-group settings.
- c) The low level of participation was interpreted as disengagement and lack of interest, so it was concluded that the events would have had low impact. It seems that

H4) No major changes among the Devoted

We expected that those pilgrims who were highly committed and involved beforehand would have experienced further encouragement, and strengthening of their commitment; for many it is a once-in-a-lifetime experience of strong Catholic solidarity;

I: Do you think it's going to make a lasting difference to say your relationship with God?

S: Yes, definitely. Yeah, it just makes you look at God in a different way. He's not ... I mean we're always told that God's you know, your friend and that He's loving and caring, but you know, you always look at God as powerful and a man that's always there for you. But after World Youth Day and after the priest had that conversation with us about God always being there with us in your suffering and that we suffer to bring ... God gives us sufferings to bring Himself closer to us, it's really changed my relationship with God. I feel like God's a close friend rather than just someone I just pray to 'cause ... for the sake of praying. It's someone you can tell your feelings to, have a conversation with, get help from. That's what God is to me now. It's definitely changed my perspective of God.

S: Reconnecting with God on a deeper level, feeling him close in my heart and wrapping me in his warmth and love

S: Oh definitely, actually I think it was probably the whole week where every night when I went to bed I would reflect on the day and how much I did feel enclosed by his love and his presence and I suppose the "I love Jesus" T-shirt that I saw, they were something that, I'm so upset with myself now that I didn't get one now but every time I looked at one I thought it made me think they're a child of God, it brought it back to that, the basic, that we're just the children, we're the child of this great, great Father and it brought us all back to the same level

...

S: Because I already had a huge passion for social justice and I already had a huge, a very strong, well I feel it's a very strong relationship with God so because I had those foundations I think maybe for me it lit a flame that sometimes tends to go out and it reminded me about how important my faith was to me and I think more than anything else it's just inspired my passion and faith just that little bit more, just given it a bit more of a kick .

WYD as a 'rite of passage' to adult religious status: from familial to personal religiousness

Amongst younger pilgrims from religious families there were examples of movement from a high level of familial religion to a personally appropriated faith. This kind of development fits in with one of the movement's goals for WYD: that it should function as a rite of passage from the familial faith of the child and younger adolescent to the personally appropriated faith of the older adolescent / emerging adult: "I previously went along with my family; now it's something I want for myself."

I: Do you feel like you're changing behaviours or anything like that as a consequence of World Youth Day?

S: You know, actually I want to go to church now. I want to go celebrate mass. Before, like, although I did kind of want to, it was more of a like, ah it's Sunday, we have to do it. And now you actually want to go. And I spoke to my friend who went as well, and she's like, you know what? I actually feel like I want to go to church now. I'm like, same here, it's really weird, you want to go to mass. And I don't think it's changed any other sort of behaviours, no, not really any other behaviours, nothing like moral or anything, but you just want to be there close to God now, just celebrate mass, yeah.

Otherwise, we expected that the most highly committed would not show very much longer-term change post WYD. Their already high levels of orthodoxy and involvement did not leave much room for an increase.

I: When you were interviewed before you indicated that you were quite connected to your Church already, have you had any kind of change about the way you see your Church?

S: Not really, sorry.

However this very large group contained some diversity: a small proportion of those who were highly involved in religious activities still had significant disagreements with the Church. The church laws or moral issues with which the most highly committed (Devoted) find it hardest to agree are: the law on priesthood as male and celibate, (only 79% agree or agree strongly), moral teaching on workers' rights to unionise and strike (79%) and the opposition to same-sex marriage (86%). On all other issues, agreement is in the 90%+ range.

S: I don't agree with some of the things the Church says.

I: Like what for instance.

S: I know this is a very touchy issue but with things like AIDS and stuff and how they don't condone the use of condoms, I think for something like that, that is going to affect so many lives, I think it's something you need to make an exception on.

And a different pilgrim, highly committed and articulate:

I: A lot of people your age have issues with the Church, sometimes disagreements with some of the moral teachings ... are there issues there that you're still working at?

S: Certainly and it's probably the biggest difficulty in saying I'm a Catholic because there are definitely certain views that I cannot reconcile and one of them, is the position of women in the Church, I think it's inconceivable that you can have an organisation that preaches social justice and equality but you're kidding yourself if you think any woman has a real legitimate chance of assuming any leadership position and that certainly is something, the Catholic Church needs to be open to lay leaders, not even particularly women priests or anything like that, I just think it needs to be a bit more accessible. At WYD when we had our Catechesis I stood up and asked the Bishop, "There's young Catholics challenged quite a bit in today's secular society and one of the challenges that's presented by non-Catholics is the

Church's view on homosexuality and contraception in third world countries" and he couldn't quite give me a good answer.

The level of social compassion and civic engagement among pilgrims who were high in religious commitment will be treated in the following paper by Ruth Webber.

H5) Little change amongst the Social

On the basis of our understanding of the Social pilgrim type gained from the pre-WYD interviews and survey, we expected that the minority of pilgrims who were low in commitment would feel more positive about their (nominal) level of identification as Catholics but would not have been moved by the experience to become committed Catholics or regular attenders at worship, nor even to increase significantly in religious commitment; we found that this generally seemed to be the case, with some reservations.

I: Can you see it making a difference to your relationship with God, like whether you feel differently about whether God is real or God loves you or whether you felt God at a moment, any of that sort of stuff there for you?

S: Not really, that's because I've been brought up in that type of environment, that's why I think I've pulled back so much, I want to experience it for myself.

S: It hasn't really changed to be honest. Before I went I knew what I believed and what I didn't and going there, it's not like I've agreed any more with the Catholic's viewpoints on certain issues but I do appreciate more the fact that they are trying to get the youth involved. I just think some things, they just don't appeal to me, it doesn't make me any less of a Catholic I hope but that wasn't something that changed in Sydney, my views are still the same.

I: Religious activities like Mass or Prayer or Reconciliation, do you plan to do anything differently in that area as a result of being at WYD?

S: I'm not really sure that I'll do anything differently.

However, some of them showed more effects from their attendance than either we or they expected.

I: What about the whole other side of church and Catholic, do you think WYD made any difference to how you feel about God, your relationship with God, whether you feel that God is real?

S: I have this view from the start which I didn't know if it was going to change but it hasn't changed, it's just developed more, my view is that I like to take in the teachings from the Bible and the Church and from the priest and adapt it to what suits me and what I think would really just help me develop so my teachings and learning about God and Jesus, I take in what I believe is really effective and.....

I: And what do you believe about God?

S: I love the parables from Jesus in the Bible and helping out and the loving neighbours and stuff, that really hits with me.

I: And do you think when Jesus talks about God or his Father or whoever, do you think there's anybody actually there that knows about you, that loves you.

S: I guess if you want to believe, you want to believe. I actually starting praying when I was up in Sydney and I actually thought I was praying to somebody so that was a development, I've never really taken that on board but if it gets you through the hard times and stuff, then I'm all for it.

I: Do you think it will make any difference to activities like Masses on weekends?

S: I never go to Sunday Mass really except for the events like [First] Reconciliation because my family aren't really Catholic so I've been too scared to go by myself but I'm going to go to church on Sunday with one of my friends so that's a big change for me.

I: That is a big change. Did you go to Reconciliation up there at WYD?

S: No I didn't go because I was too scared but I did have a few moments where I prayed to do with Reconciliation towards other people and for stuff I've done in the past so there's that step.

Further, quite a number stated that their attitude to the church was more positive:

S: Maybe and in that way I think it was awesome for me to have those Bishops because sometimes I tend to get a little bit, you tend to get a little bit cynical about the Church going they don't know how to get through to us as youth, they're losing us as youth because they get up there on a Sunday and their sermons are all about, they're too theological, they're too scriptural, they're not getting through to us, they've got to find a way to draw on the youth and it's all that that we tend to get carried away with but then.....But the way they got through to us, I went "Ah, the Church is doing something right!"; I just turned off my cynicism.

S: It was nice to actually see why people believe in it and I suppose I don't disapprove of religion so much anymore and, before I went I did, I was very indecisive about religion, I was willing to try it out if there was something that could actually meet my concerns, what I believe in because actually having to change what I believe in to fit someone else's religion, it doesn't seem like a good choice so I suppose I can be less critical of it now.

S: Gave me a better appreciation of that because beforehand it was just they're going to enforce all these and when the new deadly sins came out and things like that, I thought they're pushing us away. They're going to make rules like that, no one is going to church, no one is going to want to be a part of this but then after going to Sydney you saw how much effort they made and how much they wanted the youth to accept the responsibility that we are going to be taking over.

I: Do you think it will have any impact on you, what you do, what you think, how you practice your Catholicism?

S: I had previously before Sydney said a few things about the Catholic church, they're doing it wrong, but after this I just think, I've given them a bit of leeway after going to Sydney but going to Church and things like that, I don't think I'll be going more so than before.

Some showed interest in being part of a continuing group, and a heightened awareness of social-ethical issues.

S: I look to the church more as a way of reaching out to the community and going to Sydney made me more sure that's the right thing to do so I'm actually looking next year when I go to Uni to join a youth Christian group through a church or the university to get involved in a youth group that would encourage more youth being involved in the church.

H6) Significant steps forward by the Open

We expected that a significant minority group – predominantly among the younger pilgrims, whose level of commitment and involvement ranged from quite low to moderate, would show various kinds of 'steps forward' of positive change, depending on where they were previously, but that major changes (e.g. "conversions" from a low level of religiosity to high devotion) would be uncommon. This hypothesis was confirmed, on the basis of the limited data available (already illustrated in the quotations from interviews above). The 'steps forward' were most often in the realms of

- a moderate or strong experience of the sacred
- increased confidence in belief
- a more positive attitude to the Church.

Occasionally we heard from previously non-practising pilgrims who were going to make a connection with their parish for Sunday worship, or make a new move to get involved with a group engaged in welfare or social justice work.

III The underlying dynamics of World Youth Day

Drawing on resources from philosophy (epistemology) and from History of Religions

Whatever happened to the pilgrims, we expect that it will (also) have a human dimension, and can be understood, at least partly, in the light of human reason, under the limitations of the 'methodological atheism' within which social science must function, given that it cannot either affirm or deny the existence

or operation of supernatural beings or influences, and must seek to explain the phenomena it observes in terms of natural, observable causes and conditions.

It was difficult to impossible to do formal interviews at WYD or even to get casual conversations going with pilgrims – they were in long sessions, or were rushing to another event, or were tired out; so we were eager, after WYD, to meet groups of pilgrims and interview individuals, **to find out how we should interpret our observations**. We are in the position of saying: “Here’s what I think I saw going on; what was going on for you? How should I interpret what I saw?”

Phenomenology of intuition, symbols in Husserl and Schutz

We need to be aware of the possibility that what the pilgrims experienced may not be either immediately intelligible to the observer, or able to be expressed clearly in an interview. Not because it took place in some transcendental realm accessible only to religious faith (the paragraph above excludes that), but because so many of our tools of inquiry make use of ‘discursive rationality’, and an experience like this flies so close to the ground where we live that it is below the radar of abstractive reason – belongs to the realm of the basic or primordial level of religious experiences, consisting of ‘affective intuitions’ which have not been reflected on so as to give rise to conceptual, discursive knowledge.

This kind of knowledge – affective intuition – is not rare or uncommon – in fact it’s the commonest way we know things; it’s common experience that ‘there are no words to express the things that matter most’. We conduct our most important relationships, and make our most important decisions, on the basis of these powerful affective intuitions, which grasp, in huge unified *gestalts*, single, synthetic acts of knowledge, a great deal more of complex realities than our analytic, discursive reason can formulate in concepts and propositions.

In Schutz’s theory of symbols,² the symbol is a ‘bridge’ between an everyday-life reality (e.g. a man in a white cassock and red cape) and a referent (that to which the symbol refers) – a reality existing in a special “finite province of meaning” (FPM)³ distinct from the everyday-life world (e.g. ‘Vicar of Christ’, Head of the Church). The sensory element of the symbol is *perceived* and in that very act, without any intervening process of reasoning, the referent is “*apperceived*”.⁴

Experiences of the Numinous (Rudolf Otto)

The huge crowds, the presence of the Pope, the constant reiteration in words and music of formulas of faith, are **symbols** whose referent is God and all that lies within the world of faith. This is the realm of the ‘numinous’ – the ‘*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*’ of Rudolf Otto’s phenomenology of religion.⁵ ‘Numinous’ means ‘divine’ or ‘surrounded with the majesty of divinity’ (from the Latin *numen* which means divinity, deity, divine command). Otto’s Latin phrase quoted above means “that which is ungraspable, awesome and strangely attracting”. The WYD forms of these numinous symbols are exceptionally strong compared with those encountered in ordinary school and parish life – powerful enough to endow the spiritual finite province of meaning with the ‘accent of reality’. This is another useful Schutzian⁶ phenomenological notion: we endow certain things with this ‘accent of reality’ – we treat them as real. In this special case, the numinous has the ‘accent of *ultimate* reality’ – that relativises all other realities: it is seen as the ‘really real’ compared with the ‘merely real’ realm of everyday life! Entry into the spiritual /

² Schutz, A. (1967). “Symbol, reality and society,” *Collected Papers. Vol.1. The Problem of Social Reality*. Part III. The Hague, Nijhoff.

³ In Schutz’s social phenomenology, a ‘finite province of meaning’ is a kind of zone of reality, or a mental ‘gear’ of attention, which in phenomenological terms amount to the same thing, since ‘reality’ in phenomenological terms is a phenomenon in consciousness.

⁴ ‘Apperception’ is Husserlian phenomenological terminology, but the process is closely parallel to the Aristotelian and mediaeval theory of analogy.

⁵ Otto, R. (1959). *The idea of the holy*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Penguin.

⁶ Alfred Schutz, whom Husserl chose as his successor at the University of Vienna, but who emigrated to America before the Nazis arrived in Austria, was not interested in religion, and his theory of symbols was not elaborated with any special reference to religion (personal communication from Peter L. Berger, one of Schutz’s students at the New School for Social Research in New York).

religious FPM is still many steps short of 'having a personal relationship with God', but it's a decisive step beyond 'what you see is all there is'.

Whether they know what they are doing or not, religions that emphasise symbol, image, music & spectacle communicate faith more effectively than those which do not.

Victor Turner's anthropological approach: liminality

The impression grew stronger throughout the week, that every individual thing that happened was not reacted to in itself, but that the context gave it a special meaning. ***There was a kind of aura around nearly everything, that affected how pilgrims responded to it.*** An otherwise quite ordinary talk (e.g. the lectures at catechesis) in such a context gets described by pilgrims as 'sensational' and 'mind-blowing'. This seems to have almost nothing to do with the actual content of what is said, which was usually fairly complex and not easily understood or remembered. This ***special atmosphere*** seems to be the most important feature of the entire week; it permeated everything, so that when you look at any event without taking it into account, you wonder what there was to fuss about; but within this golden glow, the ordinary is transformed. It's a kind of ***enchantment of the world***; a period of special time in a special place with special people that won't be repeated; this is what Turner calls ***liminality***.⁷ The pilgrims entered into this liminal consciousness via an *ordeal*: the long and arduous bus trip, the trials of perhaps losing luggage and not getting to their planned destination for the night, sleeping in a strange and uncomfortable place. Ordeals are an important part of pilgrimages and initiation processes. They are a way of putting off those who will never be sufficiently motivated, and of intensifying the striving of the suitable candidates by making them push harder against an obstacle. Groups who endure ordeals together are fused together by the intense *communitas* generated through these experiences.

Yet all that could happen on a football team's trip away without this aura developing. What made this occasion different? The difference was that the pilgrims had entered into the religious / spiritual FPM. They showed heightened awareness of the religious region of meaning, and heightened positive affect towards persons and things connected with it. At what point did they enter this FPM (or start dipping into it)? Gradually through the whole period of anticipation – hearing about WYD, wanting to go, deciding to go, raising the funds, hearing talks, becoming enthusiastic, attending DID preparatory events etc. – so quite a long process packed with symbols pointing into this FPM.

For completely independent testimony that points strongly to the mysteriousness, the ungraspable quality, of the underlying dynamism of WYD, consider the internet blog about WYD in Appendix A from the CEO of Vibewire, a not-particularly-WYD-friendly blogsite advertising itself as giving the 'real' youth view of WYD. It is all the more convincing because the author, probably not Christian, is so obviously struggling with an admitted reluctance and cynicism, and keeps referring to a kind of mysterious energy animating WYD: "an electricity, a power that I can't explain and maybe only religious descriptions can... There's a sense of belonging that makes no logical sense". The author appears to be in the throes of a 'primordial' religious experience.

Durkheim and Collins: WYD as large-scale collective effervescence and nothing more?

Durkheim's theory of religion proposes that when a large group come together to manifest their religious commitment by their presence and their behaviour, and engage together in religious activities focussed on 'sacred' concerns, a strong 'collective effervescence' is generated – potent feelings and sentiments aroused

⁷ Turner, V. (1972). "Passages, margins and poverty: religious symbols of communitas." *Worship* 46 (7 (September) and 8 (October)): 390-412, 483-494.

Turner, V. (1974). *Dramas, fields and metaphors: symbolic action in human society*. Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press.

Turner, V. (1974). *The Ritual Process*. Ringwood, Penguin.

Turner, V. (1976). "Ritual: tribal and Catholic." *Worship* 50(6 (November)): 504-526.

Turner, V. (1986). *The Anthropology of performance*. New York, PAJ Publications.

Turner, V. and T. Edith (1978). *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives*. New York, Columbia Univ. Press.

by the presence of the sacred, and also a ‘collective consciousness’ of shared beliefs regarding sacred things, which unite the adherents into a strong moral community.⁸

Consideration should be given to the pure classical Durkheimian reductionist interpretation, exemplified in so many functionalist explanations in anthropology, and most recently in Randall Collins’s “Interaction ritual chain” theory.⁹ This would see all the phenomena we have described as explicable in terms of well-understood non-religious social and psychological phenomena, without any need to treat anything in the phenomena or their explanation as distinctively religious.

Collins warns against ‘going native’ – taking at face value the participants’ religious claims. We should at least begin by taking the Durkheimian interpretation seriously, as it seems to capture important aspects of the process:

-very marked and intense collective effervescence in ritual and other communal performances / experiences,
 -creating a sacred aura around certain objects and group norms and practices in regard to them,
 -uniting adherents into a moral community;

A case could be made that this was the main effect described by participants, with only incidental appeal to religious entities. The pilgrims were exposed in a very powerful way to the power, objectivity, otherness and enduring character -- in other words, to the *transcendence*, in a basic sense – of a large social entity – the worldwide Catholic church, vis-à-vis the individuals of which it is composed. The sacred, Durkheim argued, is nothing else than society writ large.

Further, is such a reductionist explanation even inherent in the method of social science as the principle of methodological atheism, and hence unavoidable – true by definition? Social science makes no affirmations concerning the reality or truth of religious phenomena.

On the other hand, complete reductionism of the ‘nothing but’ variety was memorably refuted by Robert Bellah as inadequate precisely on social scientific grounds.¹⁰ Religion, he maintains, is a reality *sui generis*, not simply reducible to social or psychological phenomena. It is a zone of culture which, while having its concomitants in psychological and sociological phenomena, is not explained by them with no residue. Bellah’s key argument is that both Durkheim and Weber cannot explain phenomena like ‘collective effervescence’ and ‘charisma’, which are at the centre of their notions of religion, without recourse to non-rational, *sui generis* religious elements which are not explicable in social or psychological terms, and indeed cannot be adequately accounted for in the terms of post-Enlightenment discursive rationality.

Religious and drug-induced ‘ecstasies’ are often contrasted to make the same point: they may display similar sensory phenomena, but the intentionality of the religious experience is very different, and not explicable in pharmacological terms.

Theoretical frameworks & hypotheses

Here we situate the event within various possible interpretive frameworks and propose some further research hypotheses.

1. WYD can be interpreted within various theoretical frameworks: Victor Turner’s ‘ritual process’ seems particularly applicable: In the WYD context, we see the elements of *liminality as an interval between times & roles*:

- a) suspension of secular time: an interval of time out of time
- b) suspension of ordinary life’s role structure: in this interval I am not school student, office worker etc.

⁸ ‘A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things – i.e. things set apart and forbidden, which unite into a single moral community or church all those that adhere to them’. Emile Durkheim, 1976. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. London, George Allen & Unwin, p. 62.

⁹ Collins, Randall 2004. *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

¹⁰ Durkheim, E. and R. N. Bellah (1973). *Emile Durkheim on morality and society: selected writings*. Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press.

Bellah, R. N. (1970). “Religion and belief” in *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World*. San Francisco, Harper and Row.

- c) suspension of ordinary norms: some exceptionally permitted behaviours;
 - d) development of *communitas* between fellow-pilgrims; lowering of ordinary barriers; sharing intimately with strangers;
 - e) daily routines with a new focus: total immersion in religious / spiritual world
 - f) pilgrimage to sacred place / to hear, see, pray with, be blessed by, sacred person
 - g) elements of hardship, trial, ordeal (financial cost, loss of work / study time, discomfort, fatigue, sleep deprivation, cold weather, hard beds, tiring travel, unappetising food etc.)
 - h) in the more intense moments, elements of the type of experience called *flow* (cf. Csikszentmihalyi¹¹)
 - i) At least four types of liminal event can be distinguished within WYD, which compete with, contrast against, contradict and at times reinforce each other:
 - i) Sacred celebrity cult gathering: to see / hear a sacred persona (the Pope) – (similarities to large gatherings around Dalai Lama, Sun Myung Moon, Padre Pio); modern pilgrimage to traditional sites like Compostela, Lourdes
 - ii) Youth Liturgy – gathering of the Christian community to share faith in worship
 - iii) Initiation of Catholic youth into adult status / status passage (analogy with tribal initiation of adolescents)
 - iv) Rock Concert: late modern form emerging in 60s, with echoes of Carnival; elements of liminality similar to Carnival in European tradition -- expressing the theme of death and rebirth in the form of parody, inversion of order; the Sacred, Sex and Death as the fundamental chthonic forces energising all culture. Strong pagan resonances; orgiastic overtones in use of alcohol & drugs, sexual indulgence. Strong sense of youth defined as over against the old, the Establishment; festival as *our* time, *our* thing, *our* culture;
2. Interaction ritual as defined by Collins (following Durkheim and Goffman) or in Jeffrey Alexander's 'Cultural pragmatics';
 3. 'Spiritual tourism' in postmodern style: not necessarily to sacred places or persons; e.g. tour of ashrams; aimed at achieving a particular experience; even devout religious types may engage in this; Gallipoli; Kokoda; Uluru;¹²

2. Hypotheses arising from theory and previous research:

1. Turner's theory implies that we have four partly incompatible types of liminality in tension in WYD, and which is supported by Gebhardt's research on the Cologne WYD, the strong hypothesis leaps out at us that ***this will inevitably be a mixed event, in which elements of Youth Festival will be blended with those of liturgical celebration, religious status passage, celebrity cult and tourist event.*** Put differently, there are four possible alternative 'definitions of the situation', from which all kinds of blends can arise. The religious aspects of the event take their place within the larger framework of youth culture events; the latter are culturally well defined and publicised and familiar to these participants, and the 'spirit' of them is carried in the kind of music they listen to; whereas the religious elements of pilgrimage to a gathering focussed on a sacred person are far less well understood, probably never before experienced by the younger pilgrims – i.e. are less salient culturally and therefore likely to be less powerful on that account; but have their own unique reservoirs of power on which to draw.

¹¹ Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1975). *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. and I. S. Csikszentmihalyi, Eds. (1988). *Optimal Experience*. Cambridge, Univ. of Cambridge Press.

¹² See historical work on post-Reformation revivalism, the U.S. 'Great Awakenings', the rise of Methodism in the U.K., Counter-Reformation Catholic revivalism – e.g. 'parish missions'; Thomas & Znaniecki on competing 'definitions of the situation'; Schutz on symbols and meaning; Anthropology of religion: Geertz on ritual as fusing cognitive and conative, belief and commitment; Turner on ritual process, passages, pilgrimage, 'liminality', 'communitas' etc. Bakhtin on Carnival; Hardy, Hay, Mason on primordial religious experience; Csikszentmihalyi on flow, autotelic experiences, Maslow on peak experiences; previous research on evangelistic rallies in the 1950s; studies of post-1960 Rock culture and Festivals.

2. Furthermore, within each pilgrim group (the set of members who are in regular interaction with each other during the event) there will be one or more *group* definitions / interpretations / responses which may be in some tension with an individual's definition. The *meaning* of an experience or sequence of experiences is its location within a frame of reference. For different groups, one of the four types of liminality may be dominant in the expectations with which they approach the event, and may remain dominant throughout the event, or be displaced by one of the others. It's an empirical question whether there will be a dominant mode of response within each small group which generally pervades the group, or individuals' interpretations flourish independently. ***There is certain to be some interaction between group and individual definitions of the situation. In the younger, school-age groups, partly because of the stronger cohesion of the group and partly because of less maturity and independence of judgment, one would expect a stronger group response to which individuals tend to conform; whereas in looser groups of older pilgrims, we would expect a more individual approach.***

3. It is important to acknowledge that our early hypothesis – that a very high proportion of pilgrims would be what we now call Social, was convincingly disconfirmed by the pre-survey. Actually, the (earlier) interview data had not borne it out either, but we brought it with us to this project from the study of Generation Y, which found only small proportions of Committed and Regular Catholics and large groups of Marginals and Nominals. We failed to appreciate the difference between the WYD attenders and the bulk of Catholics. The pilgrims are nothing like a typical sample of the population of 15-35 Australian Catholics. Instead, from the pre-WYD survey and interviews, ***we expect that the largest category of pilgrims will be the Devoted*** type; it's plausible that they, more than others, ***will define the occasion as a Sacred Celebrity Cult Event. We expect that the Involved will be a smaller proportion***, and responding differently; how do they define the situation? The older young adults making up most of both the Involved and Devoted categories have been through the status passage from adolescent to young adult, so this will not be salient for them. ***The Involved*** are characterised by a much less intense style: it is plausible that they ***will see the event less as Sacred Celebrity Cult and more as Liturgy.***

4. From the pre-WYD survey, we expected 4 different pilgrim types: Devoted, Involved, Open and Social. ***The Open and Social pilgrim types are expected to respond primarily to the Youth Festival*** definition of the situation. The Open may be as numerous as the Involved. We expect that the Social will be significantly fewer than any other group, and will also be attracted to the (quite compatible) Tourist event mode; but the ***Open will be drawn in the opposite direction by the Youth Liturgy, Status passage and Sacred Celebrity Cult dimensions*** of the occasion, all of which move in different directions away from the secular and pagan elements of the Youth Festival. The outcome(s) of this conflict of definitions and its effects on behaviour (“if situations are defined as real, they are real in their consequences”) will be one of the most interesting processes under way at WYD, and important out of proportion to the (smaller) numbers of the Open category. First impressions will be important: group responses to events early in the week may be expected to adopt a smaller number of favoured definitions of the event which will set the tone for large groups within pilgrim types (e.g. the Pope, on arrival, could speak or act in such a manner as to make the Sacred Celebrity Cult definition either strongly persuasive, or perhaps totally implausible).

Findings are all preliminary at this stage, pending the post-World Youth Day internet survey. This will provide generalisable quantitative conclusions from what is hoped to be a large sample of returned pilgrims, and allow the testing of a variety of competing hypotheses.

Appendix A

Nathan Frick, 23, is the CEO of Vibewire Inc. and Project Manager for PROJECTeye.



Friday 18th July: Something is in the air, and maybe it is love...

Last night I went and sat in the park at Darling Harbour where a concert was playing and just sat and watched and listened. The atmosphere was amazing and not one easily described. It encompassed so many warm and fuzzy words – hope, happiness, unity, love and warmth. But there was more to it, an air of anticipation that is unlike any sporting event or government ceremony.

Walking through the streets yesterday, I felt this same energy. And again, watching the Pope travel through the city in his motorcade, the same feeling was there. It's an electricity, a power that I can't explain, and maybe only religious descriptions can.

I was simply amazed by the sheer volume of people who lined the streets of Sydney to catch a glimpse of the Pope as he travelled past (I think the new Pope-mobile has been supercharged by the way). As a person, I find it hard to fully comprehend the adoration for the man among the masses of people of this country and indeed all over the world.

A friend, very rightly, pointed out that 'Everyone needs a hero, and that's who the Pope is to Catholics.' While that makes sense to me, I still can't fully grasp the enormity of the affect that this one man, a somewhat frail 81 year old, has on the people of the world.

Sydney is infectious at the moment, there's a sense of belonging that makes no logical sense. As we move towards the closing stages of this event, I have to admit that my cynicism of all things WYD are dissipating. Only the most hardened of critics can truly not be affected by the almost overwhelming outpouring of goodness emanating from dozens of locations around Sydney, shown simply through the eyes of those attending.

As up to 100,000 Pilgrims take to the road tomorrow to make the coveted pilgrimage walk to Randwick Racecourse, there is an acknowledgement that the next 2 days will be the most 'annoying' for Sydney residents. But as I watch the tens of thousands of smiling, hopeful faces walking toward their idol, it is going to be really hard for me to get frustrated.

And if nothing else, that feeling is something to have faith in.

Until tomorrow,

Nathan