

Where's the love?

Could we find it at World Youth Day in Poland this year?

Daan van Schalkwijk | Feb 10 2016 | 



Millions of young people are looking forward to the 2016 World Youth Day in Poland in July to celebrate their relationship with God, with the Church, and with each other. The popularity of these days shows how important these relationships are to many. Still, Western academia and society show that not everyone agrees. Is it possible to share the truth and beauty of what young people experience at WYD with academia and society at large? If you are excited about this challenge, you are invited to a [congress organized for just after WYD](#).

The Second International Congress of the International Association of Philosophical Anthropology: Transcendence and Love for a New Global Society will take place in English, and seeks to gather English speaking scholars from throughout the world to explore the implications of Philosophical Anthropology and Ethics in the varied fields of Human Action, Culture, and History. Among many philosophers who have approached the problem of Love and Transcendence such as Plato, Augustine, Aquinas, Scheler, Mauss, von Hildebrand, Arendt, Derrida, Ricoeur, etc., we propose to focus on the anthropological discoveries of John Paul II and Leonardo Polo which are very relevant to the challenge of proposing a 'logic of gift' and building a 'culture of love' open to Transcendence.

Singing in the Rain

If you were with me in 2011 for World Youth Day Madrid, I'm sure you'll never forget: at the time of the vigil, 2 million participants had found their place on an airfield after a long day of walking and queuing in the scorching heat. Just as Pope Benedict arrived, a big storm came on: huge black clouds threatening to envelop the whole event. There was rain and heavy wind, and the prospect of having to camp out in the open all night without tents. Still, people were singing in the rain and the Pope stayed on the stage. He wouldn't move.

After 15 minutes of storm, someone from the organization came up and asked the participants to pray for the rain to stop. So they prayed. And it stopped. The clouds lifted; the vigil could continue. For the rest of the night, nothing more than very light rain fell. It was a beautiful experience. As the spokesman for the Pope said later: "Benedict XVI had decided, solidly decided, to stay there... The storm is a parable of Christian life in which, in the most difficult moments, things are overcome by the strength of faith."

The Importance of Relationships

This storm could take on an additional meaning and stand for the status of the relationship with God, the church, and Christian love of neighbor in contemporary society and academia. Many people just don't see the importance of these relationships, or don't even admit that they are possible. Why is this the case?

One key reason why academics don't understand the importance of these relationships, is the high importance they give to science. Science values experimentation: repeatedly measuring things. But God cannot be measured; the strength of a loving relationship cannot be measured: one can at most measure some hormones, but that's not a relationship. So many academics say: if these things cannot be measured, how can we investigate them? And if we cannot investigate them, why take them seriously in science or society?

Thinking about Love

A biologist like me would never deny the importance of experimentation, but only attaching importance to measurable things is a big mistake. Not all realities in our lives can be quantified. For instance, the love between our parents is very important to us, among other things, because it brought us into existence and was an important factor in making us who

we are. We cannot measure their love; should we then not think about it? Should we not rather face the challenge of finding other ways to understand this important reality? To retreat from understanding the reality of love would contradict the purpose of being an academic.

Academics are called to search for the truth in all things, and not just in those things that are easily accessible.

Young people love World Youth Day so much because they experience their relationships with God, the Church and other people as true, good and beautiful. Are there ways to spread this love to academia, in an academically rigorous way? Yes there are, and great thinkers before us have taken up the challenge: Pope John Paul II, who started World Youth Day, and whose thought highlights the importance of relationships; the philosopher Leonardo Polo, who developed his own methodology to reach insights into the relationships of persons; just after WYD in Poland, [a congress about these two thinkers](#) will be held for those who want to help academia engage with their WYD experience. Anyone who wants to tackle this challenge is welcome to join.

Whether you attend the congress or not, we should ask ourselves: what can I learn from the WYD experience? Should I not think carefully about my key relationships? Should I not be singing in the rain?

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