

Editorial

From August 21-24, 1997, the world witnessed another papal success. Paris was teeming with young people who responded to the challenge of the Gospel to “Come and See.”

The predictions for the celebration were ominous. The organizers feared the worst. According to French President, Jacques Chirac, youth today are overwhelmed with personal and social problems. Many are unemployed, given or subject to violence and suicide; others try to find refuge from the void in their life by succumbing to drugs.

Cynics said that young people, disenchanted with organized religions, would not come. Furthermore, Paris the secular, de-christianized city, par excellence, was not a good venue for young people to “Come and See.”

Yet at the final Eucharistic celebration, nearly one million of these young people, so often accused of lacking moral standards, of being self-centered, interested only in personal satisfaction and money, filled the Longchamp Race Course and the Bois de Boulogne. They came from 160 countries and represented just about every nationality on the face of the earth.

Of course, we cannot deduce from this burst of enthusiasm that young people will now fill the churches to overflowing every Sunday. What it does tell us is that young people are searching for something and someone that will give meaning to their lives. So obvious is this yearning in the hearts of the young that the Paris advertising agency, Publicis, that provided media advertising free for the Paris meeting, devised the slogan, “a gift for the world’s youth in search of the meaning of life.”

In this issue of Tripod, Shi Xintian, explores the manifestations of this yearning in the hearts of young people in his article, “Chinese Students and their Universities”. His contact with young people has brought him to the realization that young people sense an emptiness in their lives. They seek for ideals that will give life meaning and fill the void.

The Chinese government presents Marxism and Patriotism as ideals. China’s rapid economic development offers youth the

prospect of wealth and material comforts. These, however, do not satisfy their deepest aspirations. They long for something more.

Sergio Ticozzi in his article, "Evangelization in the Chinese World," stresses that the Church should present the world with an alternate way of living, of being in the world. This is what the Holy Father was offering young people in Paris and to which they responded with such enthusiasm.

The Tablet described the Pope's success with the youth at the 12th World Youth Day as "A love affair in Paris." The Holy Father had equal success in Denver (1993) and Manila (1995). Never on any of these occasions did the Holy Father water down the message of the Gospel to appeal to youth. Neither did he preach to them of a rigid moral teaching to which they do not resound. Instead, the "old actor" with his characteristic charisma and sincerity spoke to them of love, peace and loving service. "Those who love are not calculating; they do not seek their own gain....Service of others transforms life it shows that hope and living in fraternal union are stronger than any temptation to despair. Love can triumph in every circumstance." There is something in the Holy Father's courage and consistency that inspires youth, that strikes the right chord in their hearts. He is not afraid to challenge them, "Be true witnesses of faith and charity, ready to give your lives for the glory of God and the salvation of the world...."

There was no official delegation from mainland China to the Youth Day celebrations, as there was in Manila in 1995, but the Chinese were not absent from the gathering. It is estimated that they numbered about 1000. The main groups came from Hong Kong and Taiwan. Those from mainland China were mostly students studying in Europe. The Pope acknowledged their presence, addressing them in Mandarin. One of the ten persons baptized at Longchamp was a young Chinese who had lived in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The fears of the 12th Youth Day organizers never materialized. Young people responded to the Pope's message with, "Each of us is responsible for working to build up the Kingdom of God in every human situation....We have come and we have seen, now it is time to go and proclaim." Actually, this World Youth Day turned out to be the largest religious gathering in France since World War II. (BAM)