

Fr. Perozich comments —

As a priest I have the grace of sacred orders which prompted me to respond to the [dangers](#) (included in this link and following Dr. Grondelski's article) in the statement of a bishop, a man who shares sacred orders with me and even a higher rank of such orders. A fullness of the order does not presume the fullness of the expression of that order in fidelity to Jesus' commission to baptize and teach ALL THAT JESUS TAUGHT, rather than the opinions of fellow bishops in the church and of leaders in the world.

John Grondelski, Ph.D. was a former dean of theology at Seton Hall. While he may not share in sacred orders, he shares in the grace of Catholic knowledge beyond mine both by his advanced studies and his faithful expression of the truth of the Catholic Church.

He presents many good points and theological teachings in the article below which I have highlighted for my edification and for those who read this.

The links to bishop Aguiar's statement, to Jack Chick, to vocabulary definitions are also included in boxes like this _____ for those who wish to go click on them in order to go beyond the article for more information

Basta! Suficiente! Enough! A Response to Cardinal- Designate Aguiar

If World Youth Day does not exist to “convert” youth to Jesus Christ—in all the meanings of the word “conversion”—it is a gigantic waste of time.

[July 11, 2023 John M. Grondelski, Ph.D.](#)

Print



Bishop Américo Aguiar. (Credit: Patriarchate of Lisbon)

Cardinal-Designate Americo Aguiar—one of the cardinals Pope Francis intends to create in his September consistory—is head of World Youth Day (WYD) Lisbon 2023 and an auxiliary bishop of the Portuguese capital. In a July 6 interview on Portuguese State Television, he **said the following** about WYD:

We don't want to convert the young people to Christ or to the Catholic Church or anything like that at all. ... We want it to be normal for a young Catholic Christian to say and bear witness to who [sic] he is or for a young Muslim, Jew, or of another religion to also have no problem saying who he is and bearing witness to it, and for a young person who has no religion to feel welcome and to perhaps not feel strange for thinking in a different way.

The prelate went on to stress the importance “that we all understand that differences are a richness and the world will be objectively better if we are capable of placing in the hearts of all young people this certainty of [Pope Francis’s encyclical] *Fratelli Tutti*, brothers all, that the Pope has made an enormous effort so that this enters the hearts of all.”

This Catholic father, who has raised youth, would like to say to the Cardinal-Designate: *Basta! Suficiente! Enough!*

His statement is confusing. It is open to two possible interpretations, neither of which reflects well on the Cardinal-Designate.

First: Does he *really* believe that WYD is not about converting youth firmly to Christ? Conversion is the core message of Christianity!

Catholicism takes the human person as he is: broken by sin and in need in redemption. The Church truly welcomes him by calling him to healing, which demands conversion. Conversion first of all involves repentance, because people's fundamental problem is their enslavement to sin and evil. The word used in the New Testament for "conversion" and "repentance" is *metanoiete* (from which comes the Anglicized "**metanoia**"). *Metanoiete* literally means "to change one's mind," "to change one's way of thinking."

The biblical call to conversion is not, therefore, a celebration of "thinking in a different way." St. Paul didn't call on the first Christians in Philippi to be "thinking in a different way." He called on them to **put on the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5). That is the way of thinking to which we are to be "converted."** As St. Paul told the Christians in Rome: **"Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:2).**

Conversion is a perennial feature of Catholic life. The German Redemptorist Bernard Häring made a useful distinction between what he called "first conversion" and "second conversion." "First conversion" is an absolute prerequisite, without which there is no second conversion. For Häring, **"first conversion" meant rejection of sin (mortal sin) and turning to Christ. In a sense, it's reversing what St. Thomas Aquinas defined as sin: *aversio a Deo, conversio ad creaturam* (aversion from God, conversion to a creature). In sin we turn from God and turn to a creature. To be healed from our fundamental wound, then, is to converted from creatures and to God.**

That "first conversion" has to be followed throughout life by second conversions. Mortal sin and spiritual life are simply incompatible because mortal sin and charity (i.e., love) cannot coexist: it's either one or the other. Once that conversion occurs (and it can be reneged), we are called constantly to ever deeper rooting in love, to ever deeper conversion to God and from things, a conversion that is the process of a lifetime.

That process of conversion begins with and in Christ, with and through the grace of the Spirit of Christ that is the Holy Spirit. It is, therefore, inextricably inseparable from Christ, “the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”

That Jews and Muslims and even nonbelievers might go to WYD is a nice thing, but that is *not* the *raison d’être* of WYD. **The event is a celebration for Catholic youth to “bear witness to who he is” as a *disciple of Christ*. This is not about the youth’s self-chosen “identity.” It is about the radical “identity” he acquired in baptism and through the other sacraments of initiation as a member of Christ.**

So, with all due lack of respect, Bishop, how can you utter nonsense about “we don’t want to convert the young people to Christ”? **If the purpose of WYD is *not* to convert young people to Christ—either initially, by welcoming them to Catholicism, or in terms of deciding to whom their lives are committed (first conversion) or how to deepen their incorporation into Christ (second conversion)—then please give those 400,000 young people you expect to attend their money back. They’re coming on false pretenses.**

WYD is not a Catholic Woodstock and Pope Francis is not a rock star. WYD does not exist to boost Portuguese tourism or just to steer a few more bodies to Fatima. **If it does not exist to “convert” youth to Christ—in all the meanings of the word “conversion”—it is a gigantic waste of time.**

Do I hope that any young Jews or Muslims or nonbelievers feels “welcome” at WYD? Yes. I also hope the Church welcomes them with a confident faith in what she is and believes that she wants to share with them. If that leads to “conversion,” that’s called a moment of grace, a *Kairos*.

Do I really have to write this to a Cardinal-Designate?

No doubt, we will most likely soon hear claims that the poor bishop was misquoted, misunderstood, mistranslated, read out-of-context, or some other spin to explain a frankly scandalous statement. If he’s been mistranslated, clarify it: Portuguese is not a *lingua franca*.

If by “conversion,” the bishop means the dread “**proselytizing,**” well, two comments. **First, while I don’t expect anybody at WYD to demonstrate the narrow mindedness of a Catholic [Jack Chick](#), threatening any non-Catholic with hellfire and damnation, that doesn’t mean we don’t want you to see, think about, and consider joining**

the faith hopefully on display in Lisbon. Second, if Mormons can routinely engage their youth in missionary work—not just “doing anonymously Christian nice things on the peripheries” but knocking on my door to share with me their “good news” of Joseph Smith—**why are we so allergic about sharing our faith?**

Second, assuming that the preceding is not new theology to Bishop Aguiar, then **why the effort to put the explicit Catholic message under a bushel basket?** I am confident it would be highly unlikely to find many contemporary Catholic bishops—at least in the West—with the vehemence of a [Jack Chick](#) in terms of proclaiming the faith. My bigger question is **why bishops seem to lack such confidence in robustly proclaiming that faith?**

If it's not a lack of confidence, I must ask—drawing on Aguiar's reference to “fraternity”—whether **his shift of WYD emphasis has anything to do with “pleasing the boss” by diligently quoting *Fratelli Tutti*. Francis's perennial complaints about “clerical ambition” notwithstanding, it's pretty clear that the upward path in Francis's dispensation is not necessarily citing theological tradition as much as his keywords.**

The “certainly of ... brothers all ... that the Pope has made an enormous effort to [promote]” cannot start on the human level, because human beings are fallen. **Fraternity has to begin in the realm of grace—in the spiritual *conversion* that enables a person to be animated by charity and not just by convenient friendship or even some purely natural sense of “we're in this together.” But if we start in the realm of grace, the first direction we want to go is *up*, vertically, towards the explicit message of the Good News—not *sideways*, horizontally, attempting to ground some brotherhood on purely human bases or strengths.** Ask Abel how that kind of “fraternity” went.

And if the fundamental message of WYD is “fraternity” rather than Jesus Christ, who is Lord and Savior, I wish the bishop would have told us beforehand. I would have used to money to send the kid to Paris for Bastille Day, where he would have gotten a three-fer, throwing in “liberty and equality” along with the “fraternity.” At least *la République* does not deny its secular “fraternity.”

Having just put two of my three children through college, I've gone on enough college tours at Catholic colleges to hear “student ambassadors” make the obligatory detour to the chapel, only to assure prospective freshmen that “they don't force religion on you or make you go to church.”

And with all the institutions of American life corralled to its promotion, I really don't think WYD participants are as endangered by a lack of exposure to "differences" as the lack of explicit witness to Christ. **The "joy of the Gospel" presupposes speaking the Gospel explicitly, unabashedly, pro-actively, inviting others to join in it, and not just "think in a different way."**

Pope St. John Paul II launched World Youth Day to bring to a global stage what he did as a young professor in Poland: to gather young people and share an explicitly Catholic vision of reality with them in a state whose institutions were universally, vociferously, and ideologically committed to its denial. Getting back to basics would be a good thing.

What will be truly worth observing is whether, in his addresses in Lisbon, Pope Francis offers a richer repast or hews to Aguiar's at least semi-anonymous Catholicism.

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"DANGER, WILL ROBINSON, DANGER!" is the iconic line from the TV show Lost In Space, where Robot alerted the boy under his protection to the threats on the boy.

DANGER, PASTORS AND PARENTS OF CHILDREN AT WORLD YOUTH DAY, DANGER!

Pope Francis' cardinals are spinning John Paul II's WYD from an encounter for Catholic youth around the Savior Jesus Christ and a unity around Jesus into a masonic brotherhood of unity around the human beings in a nebulous concept of "brotherhood" with an invitation to come as you are and embrace everything that everyone else there believes.

WYD has departed from its mission, just as has the Pontifical Academy for Human Life, and now the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

They incorporate worldly language, structures, beliefs, indoctrination and omit the centrality of Jesus for salvation and His command to teach the whole world all that Jesus has taught.

Be careful of the souls on whom you are spending \$\$\$\$ with the hope of their encountering Jesus and returning to you with a deeper Catholic faith.

Those to whom you are entrusting your youth may not share your hope for the faith of your youth at WYD.

Jesus is not the goal of the leaders of WYD anymore.

WYD is an invitation to young people to experience God, explains future Portuguese cardinal



Bishop Américo Aguiar. | Credit: Patriarchate of Lisbon

By Walter Sanchez Silva

ACI Prensa Staff, Jul 10, 2023 / 16:00 pm

"World Youth Day is an invitation to all the young people of the world to experience God," Bishop Américo Aguiar told **ACI** Digital, clarifying comments he made in a July 6 interview.

The auxiliary bishop of Lisbon and new president of the WYD Lisbon 2023 Foundation, who Pope Francis recently recently named a cardinal, told ACI Digital that his comments were made in the context of a longer interview in which he was quoted as saying, **“We don’t want to convert the young people to Christ or to the Catholic Church or anything like that at all.”**

In the interview, the bishop said that in his opinion the intention of World Youth Day is to have young people journey together, respecting their diversity.

World Youth Day will be held in Lisbon, Portugal, Aug. 1–6.

Aguiar took part in an interview with RTP Notícias, three days before Pope Francis announced the creation of 21 new cardinals.

For the cardinal-designate, the goal is to enable each young person to say: **“I think differently, I feel differently, I organize my life in a different way, but we are brothers and we go together to build the future.”** This is the main message of this encounter with the living Christ that the pope wants to provide to young people.”

“We don’t want to convert the young people to Christ or to the Catholic Church or anything like

that at all,” Aguiar continued. “We want it to be normal for a young Catholic Christian to say and bear witness to who he is or for a young Muslim, Jew, or of another religion to also have no problem saying who he is and bearing witness to it, and for a young person who has no religion to feel welcome and to perhaps not feel strange for thinking in a different way.”

The prelate stressed that it’s important “that we all understand that differences are a richness and the world will be objectively better if we are capable of placing in the hearts of all young people this certainty of **Fratelli Tutti, brothers all**, that the pope has made a enormous effort so that this enters the hearts of all.”

Pope Francis’ encyclical Fratelli Tutti was published Oct. 4, 2020. It is the third of his pontificate and is dedicated to “fraternity and social friendship.”

World Youth Day was instituted by Pope John Paul II in 1985. It has always been an opportunity for young people from all over the world to personally encounter Christ and choose to give themselves completely to his service in the priesthood or in consecrated life.

On Aug. 19, 2000, at WYD in Rome in the year of the Great Jubilee, Pope John Paul II called young people the “morning watchmen” and reminded them that by **“saying ‘yes’ to Christ, you say ‘yes’ to all your noblest ideals. I pray that he will reign in your hearts and in all of humanity in the new century and the new**

millennium. Have no fear of entrusting yourselves to him! He will guide you, he will grant you the strength to follow him every day and in every situation.”

This story was first published by ACI Prensa, CNA’s Spanish-language news partner. It has been translated and adapted by CNA. The article was updated on July 11, 2023.



Walter Sánchez Silva is a senior writer for ACI Prensa (<https://www.aciprensa.com>). With more than 15 years of experience, he has reported from important ecclesial events in Europe, Asia and Latin America during the pontificates of Benedict XVI and Pope Francis. E-mail: walter@aciprensa.com