

CHURCH AND YOUTH

Lisbon hosts WYD without Christ. And Aguiar is made cardinal

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“We don’t want to convert the young people to Christ or to the Catholic Church or anything like that at all.” This is how, Américo Aguiar, auxiliary bishop of Lisbon, explained the meaning of the next World Youth Day (WYD) to take place in Lisbon from

1 to 6 August, during an interview with *Portuguese Radio Television (RTP)* on July 6, causing quite a stir and rightly provoking astonished and indignant reactions. Moreover, not only is Monsignor Aguiar in charge of WYD in Lisbon but is one of the 21 new cardinals announced on July 9 by Pope Francis who will receive the red hat in the consistory on September 30.

As often happens in these situations, faced with the reaction of Catholic public opinion and seeing that in the meantime he has been nominated cardinal, Monsignor Aguiar tried to make amends giving another interview - this time with *ACI Digital* - to clarify better what he meant, complaining about the exploitation of his words, taken out of context: "WYD - he said - is an invitation to all the young people of the world to experience God" along the path traced out by the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*.

Frankly, he didn't need to specify what he meant, because the context of his words was very clear, as was the underlying concept, and the added comments, if possible, have actually served only to make things worse.

So what is the gist of his speech? That with *Fratelli tutti* the mission of the Church has changed: no longer to proclaim Christ, but to have a beautiful experience of many different people appreciating the richness of diversity; and this would be experiencing God. "WYD is a cry of this universal Fraternity - he told RTP -, it wants to be a pedagogical school to see and taste the joy of difference. Difference must be understood as a richness. Catholics, non-Catholics, religious, with faith, without faith: the first thing is to understand that diversity is a richness". And again, after the firm resolution of not wanting to convert anyone: "We want it to be normal for a young Muslim, a Jew or of another religion to have no problem deciding who you are, and that we all understand that diversity is an asset. In this way the world will be objectively better".

There is very little to misunderstand: the new Portuguese cardinal simply does not believe that Jesus Christ is the true and definitive answer to the deepest questions of every human being, which in a particular way, are so alive in young people. Otherwise, he would experience a mission fever, he would create opportunities to communicate to the world that he has found the answer to the fundamental questions everyone has. Exactly what prompted St. John Paul II to institute the WYD, an event that has been absolutely Christocentric from its outset. In order to understand, let us recall what John Paul II said during the prayer vigil at the WYD in 2000 in Rome, in front of two million young people: "It is Jesus in fact that you seek when you dream of happiness; he is waiting for you when nothing else you find satisfies you; he is the beauty to which you

are so attracted; it is he who provokes you with that thirst for fullness that will not let you settle for compromise; it is he who urges you to shed the masks of a false life; it is he who reads in your hearts your most genuine choices, the choices that others try to stifle. It is Jesus who stirs in you the desire to do something great with your lives, the will to follow an ideal, the refusal to allow yourselves to be grounded down by mediocrity, the courage to commit yourselves humbly and patiently to improving yourselves and society, making the world more human and more fraternal”.

St. John Paul II was very clear that a more human and fraternal society can only be born from an encounter with Christ. This is what is denied today by the new Cardinal Aguiar, who draws his inspiration from the vision expressed in Fratelli tutti. A fraternity without a recognised common father, a WYD without Christ (or in any case with an irrelevant Christ, on a par with Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius and whoever else). It is the affirmation of the uselessness of the Church, reduced to a social agent, a copy of the UN with a splash of spirituality.

Aguiar's words make the judgment of Benedict XVI who attributed the crisis of the Church to the crisis of faith, especially of priests, even more true and concrete. It is simply no longer believed that Christ is the Saviour, at best He's the inspirer of good feelings to set things right in the world.

Yet, in all of this, a small sign of hope lies in knowing that a good part of the clergy and many faithful in Portugal were scandalised by the cardinal appointment of Monsignor Aguiar, well known above all for his eagerness to show off and who used the opportunity of the WYD to build his career. It is well known that in these years of preparation he went very often to Rome to meet the Pope, with whom he also made videos to show on his return to Portugal. He has bad relations with the vast majority of the clergy of Lisbon, of which he is auxiliary bishop, and who he now fears could become the new Patriarch of Lisbon, given that Cardinal Manuel José Macario do Nascimento Clemente will turn 75 on Sunday 16 July and has already announced that he will retire immediately.

It means that there is still a faithful Catholic base in the Church in Portugal. One has only to pray that the Lord will keep it that way despite the misdeeds of its shepherds.