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“There is a hunger for a higher dimension to life”

Many young Europeans will head south to Australia for World Youth Day, a newly ordained Australian priest with many years experience as a business manager, has predicted.

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Fr Andrew Paris was speaking after completing his studies for the priesthood in Rome. “I am sure that

they will make the trip to Australia in large numbers,” he said in an interview before being ordained on Pentecost Sunday as a priest of the Church’s Personal Prelature Opus Dei.

“I have met French persons discussing its rationale, Spanish arguing about it, Italians dreaming about it and Germans planning their trip”.

“Importantly, World Youth Day is not seen as a sort of ecstatic experience like a rock concert. Young people attend because they are attracted by the ideals of the faith...”

“The same thing happens in Australia. The people who went from Melbourne to Cologne in 2005 went off on a couple of days' retreat after the encounters with the Pope. Later I met some of them who had made important changes in their Christian lives. They were becoming prayerful

and they were helping their friends to make conversions”.

Fr Paris said in Europe, at the moment, World Youth Day in Australia was still below the planning radar screen for many young people. But “Europeans were used to making the decision one day of hopping onto a bus to leave the next day for somewhere like World Youth Day in Cologne”.

He said one of the most exciting things about being in Rome in recent times was seeing how people were flocking to hear and see the Pope. “On Easter Sunday morning this year Saint Peter's Square was full for the Urbi et Orbi blessing. Every Sunday of the year at the Angelus address there is a crowd the size of a large football stadium. Incredibly, there have been even more people than ever came to hear Pope John Paul II on a regular basis”.

“It is clear that they are searching, that there is a hunger for a higher dimension to life that people think they can find in the Catholic Church and live out in their ordinary lives. I hope and pray that ordination may be a service to help many of these people, who are also found in Australia, to discover this dimension in the knowledge of Jesus Christ”.

Fr Paris was born in Argentina, graduated in Economics and worked professionally for a few years before moving to Australia. In Australia he worked in the financial markets and later on with various non-profit organizations. He went to Rome to complete a master's degree in philosophy with a dissertation on the social philosophy of Charles Handy.

During the interview he spoke of one problem he saw in the work place – the lack of balance it creates in personal life. “Greed enters because

people are ensnared in a false notion of progress that centres around things,” he said.

“So they work for money as the main purpose and neglect other aspects of their lives, particularly their families. But in the workplace I did meet people who had a different balance in their priorities. They worked to earn the money they needed. How much do we need? We need enough to live on and how much is enough is for each one to decide with personal responsibility. It might be more or less, depending on the different stages of life”.

“I saw it in successful businessmen. One I knew gave less priority to his work for many years while his family was young and required more of his time. Years later he went into development and made enough money to give each child a house at marriage”.

“People like that aren't troubled by envy because they set their own standards. Envy is a problem because we want to be like the Joneses. But if we ourselves sort out how much is enough for us then envy is eliminated from the equation”.

Fr Paris also shared some insights from the years he spent in the workforce. He said a major issue he encountered in the workplace was dishonesty. “In every job I encountered different excuses people used to justify dishonest practices. In the public service people thought they were underpaid compared with the private sector and so they shirked in their work. In some otherwise highly paid finance positions people wanted to earn as much as the high-flyers and envy unsettled them. The balanced people were the ones who found purpose in doing their work well. And they also

sought a purpose outside of themselves and their job. For example, to somehow serve others through their work: their colleagues, their clients, and their families”.

“One graduate economist I worked with in the public service in Argentina was the one who used to organize the office football matches, dispose of the tea leaves and tell the jokes. He ended up as finance minister”.

Fr Paris’s first job in Australia was with a firm of economists that provided information to the money and foreign exchange markets. The markets in Australia were growing. The Australian dollar had just been floated and the finance markets opened up to international competition. “From the shores of Lake Tahoe the boss guided an operation with outlets in every

financial capital of the world,” he said.

“As manager for Australia and New Zealand I enjoyed a lot of autonomy but received excellent training and supervision,” he said. “The business grew, aided by the growing financial markets. But, best of all, I learned how trust and wise delegation can help a person to grow in the human dimension more than he would have dared to on his own”. “One conclusion I came to during this period was that the world of work has much to learn in how to treat people as persons”.

Speaking of what inspired him to become a priest, Fr Paris said there were many influences, but there was no question about the main inspiration. “It was the example of Saint Josemaría Escriva, the founder of Opus Dei,” he said.

“I would not be here otherwise. I just missed out on meeting him personally when he spent three weeks in Buenos Aires in June 1974. But I can say I know him better than if I had encountered him then because I believe I know him in the lives of many members of Opus Dei”.

“What attracted me to Opus Dei, when I was a student at university, was the family-like atmosphere that I encountered in my dealings with them. I was welcomed, respected and attracted into participating in myriad activities to help spread the Christian ideals among other young people and, eventually, to all segments of society. This is what Saint Josemaria Escriva set out to do and I hope to dedicate the priesthood to continuing that service”.

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