



**Speech of H. E. Mgr. Antoine Hérouard
on the occasion of the World Youth Day event
“Christian testimonies between faith and social engagement”**

Good afternoon to all of you, pilgrims of World Youth Day, and welcome to this event organised by the **COMECE Youth Net**. Today’s panel discussion, ideated by the young delegates of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union, is truly a great occasion for us **to reflect on our engagement as Christians in Europe and the world** – as the title says: “Christian testimonies between faith and social engagement”.

The **mission of COMECE** – the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union – of which I am First Vice-President – is to work for an **open, transparent, and regular dialogue with the EU institutions in Brussels**, promoting policies that put **human dignity and the person at the centre of decision-making** and truly contribute to the Common Good. Bishops delegated from all EU Episcopates and our staff in Brussels work on policies ranging from socio-economic and legal affairs to ethics and science, from education and culture to migration, external relations, and agriculture. In sum, COMECE tries to **create channels of exchange with the EU institutions** for the benefit of all citizens.

Youth is also another area of work of COMECE. The **COMECE Youth Net** was launched last year, meant to become a consultative body of the Bishops, empowering youth and allowing us to hear the **voices of young people** who are engaged in their Dioceses, Catholic networks and associations, and who are **passionate about the European project**. It is an initiative that brings in new perspectives and energy to our work – so it was essential for us to be present here at World Youth Day, to **bridge between the EU and young people of faith** from all over the world who are attending this gathering.

You know that **Pope Francis** – whom we will meet this evening – has young people dear to his heart. While waiting for his speech and presence at the opening ceremony, I want to recall his words to the **EU Youth Conference in Prague** last year. The Pope invited young people to look at the example of **Blessed Franz Jägerstätter**, a young Austrian who was killed in the Second World War because he had rejected Nazism and had remained faithful to the ideals of his faith. Pope Francis said: “Dear young Europeans, I invite you to **look upwards and beyond**, to keep **seeking the real meaning of your life**, where you **come from** and where you are **going**, and the **Truth**, because we cannot live authentically if we do not seek the Truth. Walk with your **feet firmly planted on the earth**, but with a **broad gaze**, open to the horizon, open to the sky”.

Of course, the Pope's exhortation can be very well extended to all young people in the world, beyond Europe. What he calls you and us to do is **ambitious**: how to **look for truth and justice** in a world torn by conflicts and disinformation? How to **live authentically** among the distractions of our consumerist society that ignores the most vulnerable? Or else, how to **build a strong and healthy family**, with the many challenges that affect young people today? These are questions we have to address together, and we will try to do it this afternoon.

In fact, the **panelists** we invited to Lisbon are all coming from **different areas of work and life**: the world of politics, that of social engagement and volunteering, the field of arts and culture and that of the digital private sector. Despite their diversity, they **all share one thing: their faith in Christ**. What made them persevere throughout the life and work challenges they encountered on the way? How has their Catholic faith supported them in choosing their career path? How do they practically contribute to the Common Good in their profession? These are just a few of the **questions** they will answer today, and later you will have the chance to ask your questions, as well, so start thinking about them!

Recalling the exhortation of the Pope, I also want to urge you to **be generative**: **listen** to what our guests will say, **reflect** on their words, **compare them with your experience** and then **take inspiration** from them, bringing new ideas and enthusiasm to your communities, once you are home. Oftentimes, we risk thinking that our challenges, our defeats and our weaknesses to witness God in our life are too difficult to overcome: however, it is through **listening and walking together with others** in our **communities** – the space where we encounter every day the Christ made flesh – that we understand how others have been testimonies before us, and how we, too, can be witnesses of the Gospel at school, university and at work every single day.

I am looking forward to this roundtable and wish you all to learn from today's event, so that, once again, we can do like the Virgin Mary after the Annunciation. She, who "arose and went with haste" to her cousin Elisabeth, shows us the way to spread the Gospel to all peoples.

Thank you very much to all!

✠ Antoine Hérouard
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