

Preface

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As missionary disciples of Jesus in His Church, we are called to follow our Risen Lord and share His life. Reaching out, preaching, and witnessing the Gospel embodies our commitment to Him in our everyday life, in our vocation. Young Asians represent a positive and promising gift to the Catholic Church, as well as a great challenge because of their expectations and their cultural-religious contexts. Though they represent the social environment they live in, their hearts still yearn desire, seek, and strive for a fullness of life that neither their respective culture nor economic achievement can satisfy. Dehumanizing social conditions, compounded by ethnic and religious discrimination, threaten to have serious consequences on their futures by destroying their presence, yet their struggle for a better life, for a fuller life never abandons them. Sociological and psychological perspectives of their human conditions cannot constrain them to their geographical boundaries; though referring to them as millennials and the digital generation helps us to understand their environment and our way of relating to them, but we cannot reduce them to what society and their peers have placed upon them and their environment. They belong to us and we belong to them. By giving birth and being born of love, our common human condition makes all of us one large human community. Family ties still mean a lot, no matter what evil, hatred, social injustice, and poverty can threaten to destroy. Even if socially and culturally classifiable and classified, these young people can never be pigeon-holed to an anonymous unqualified collective mass of numbers, sta-

tistics and labor force to be exploited. Their hearts still beat, hope, cry, and desire, though in the midst of a growing fierce and competitive globalizing market.

Family versus globalization, humanity versus robots and pets, freedom and creativity versus the levelling effect of digitalization and high tech competitions, but are not all of these oppositions or challenges to be confronted and reconciled? How can we proclaim to these young people the Good News of Jesus Christ, of a new and true life? How can we approach them, walk with them and invite them to Jesus' family, the Church? These are some of the main issues the Asian Churches face when they try to deal with youths in their familiar contexts, their schools, clubs, sports, music places, and in their social engagements. In a great variety of ways, they are crying out their existential needs for life, meaning, and love to be satisfied despite the fact that they may seem standardized by the digital and pervasive postmodern atmosphere of all global cultures and societies. The encounter with Jesus, the true, meaningful, living God, is made possible for them at the heart of the Church. Alive in her preaching and sacraments, in our Christian witness, Jesus invites the youth to take their life seriously and meet Him personally. They are challenged to engage with Him so as to discover and fulfil their life, though it looks apparently ordinary, simple, very often miserable and doomed to failure. Jesus encounters them, appeals to their heart in which the Spirit of God is at work, where the image of God is calling for divine human fulfilment.

In their yearning for love and to be loved, for success and prosperity, for better living conditions and cultural improvements, the Catholic Church should not be afraid to boldly proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, His Cross and resurrection, to challenge them for an authentic and demanding life commitment. Through genuine friendship and sincere empathy, we

should walk alongside them, make them feel we share a common human vocation and thirst for a better and more fulfilled life. We do not dismiss their living conditions, which are very often marked by poverty, suffering, and the lack of better prospects. By witnessing Christ, inviting them to welcome Christ into their life, they should feel taken care of by us, by a Church seriously committed to them in their life today and for the future. By responding to their longing for fulfilment, quite often expressed in the midst of beauty and ugliness, sincere generosity, and sinful self-satisfaction, charming ideals and egocentric violence, the Church should not fear to be demanding and thought-provoking.

Though we are honestly committed to their fulfilment, we are not pampering them just to drive them into the Church. They should not be taken away from the world to be co-opted into Church activities just for the sake of our pastoral programs. We should be committed to serving God to them by helping them meet His Son Jesus Christ in a true and friendly accompanied spiritual journey. The Christian faith could be meaningful to them if we care for and strongly challenge them to embrace and follow Jesus Christ, by taking care of their deep desire for love and their existential need to actively work. A Church truly committed to their Christian salvation needs to be devoted to accompany them so as to find their place in life, their divine human call to love (marriage and virginity), and to work (academic and professional engagement in the world). They might not listen to the Church, their indifference can be outrageous and their aggressive rejection can annoy us; yet, we are faithfully committed to act for the sake of our, and their salvation in Christ. Their life vocation and their struggle for humanly dignified work matters to us: faith and spiritual discernment are all about our concern with the young people, according to what Pope Francis has pointed out for the upcoming Syn-

od on "Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment," scheduled to take place in October 2018.

This publication springs forth from the program of Study Seminars held at CIAM-International Center for Mission and Formation during 2017, with the aim of examining the socio-cultural and politico-economic challenges for young Christians in the different scenarios engaging the Church's mission worldwide. In particular, the program featured the following Study Seminars: "Laicado y Mision," coordinated by Fr. Anastasio Gil, National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies in Spain (13-18 February); "Youth in Asia: Challenges for the Church's Mission," coordinated by Dr. Paolo Affatato, Asia Editor in FIDES News Agency (27 November - 1 December); "Africa and Asia Youth Seminar," coordinated by Ms. Anna Halpine, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of the World Youth Alliance (4-9 December); "Young Generations in Asia: Christians and Muslims in Dialogue," coordinated by Dr. Emiliano Stornelli, Chairman of the Religion & Security Council (11-15 December).

Special thanks go to Dr. Emiliano Stornelli for his extraordinary contribution to the realization of this new *Omnis Terra - PMU CIAM* publication. Indeed, he played a major role from the outset of this endeavor, and has provided precious advice on how to articulate the themes to be dealt with, and accompanied the authors throughout the whole drafting process of their chapters. Without his invaluable work, this volume would not have come to fruition.

Palm Sunday, March 25th, 2018