Youth Insight

ed. by Tiziano Tosolini

Youth Insight

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Introduction

F. Tosolini, V. Shukuru

The choice of dedicating a monograph to the study of the situation of young people across the Asia-Pacific region (the countries where we are present and work) came about because of our intention to offer a contribution to the Synod of Bishops on the youth all over the world. For some reasons, the project was delayed. We publish it now after the conclusion of the Synod and Pope Francis' document *Christus Vivit*, in the hope that it may still be of some help in view of implementing the recommendations of the Synod.

In the variegated landscape of the Asia-Pacific region, youth represents a dynamic factor, a multifaceted reality of which it is not easy to offer a comprehensive review. In keeping with the various societies analyzed, the papers of the present monograph offer a set of approaches, different from but complementary to each other. As a matter of fact, they try to depict the reality of the youth and some of the challenges that young people are facing in Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, and Taiwan.

Indonesian youth are heirs of a glorious past, which saw them as protagonists of a social and political process leading to the

independence and full democracy of the country. Nevertheless, such momentum seems to be shrinking due to the contemporary influence of a set of factors such as: longer schooling, the quest for a better standard of living, individualism, consumerism, and the impact of digitalized social interactions. As a result, these young people have lost the drive to associate and form a social force capable of actively influencing cultural and political change. In spite of all these, it is still a fact that Indonesian youth are seen and consider themselves to be a beacon of hope for the whole nation.

In Japan, on the other side, politics seems to be a lost case for the youth. They are not able to influence decisions that are mainly taken by elderly people and their network of connections. In such a context, the youth try to adjust to the situation and find their own way in a society where they will be able to let their voices be heard only when they will not be young any more. They are aware that the future expecting them, due to the low birth rate, will not be as florid as their present situation. In such a conundrum, their reaction seems to be that of enjoying every bit of joy and satisfaction they can find here and now. Whether this can be called happiness, remains to be seen. It is also true, however, that the growing volatility of the international situation may soon call young people to become aware of and to live up to the responsibilities they have for the present and future of Japan.

The third paper, dealing with the Philippines, divides the flow of the discourse into three main sections. The first concerns the relationship of youth with their families, the environment where they grow up and their personalities take shape. The second section deals with some of the challenges awaiting the youth in society, challenges encompassing political and social transformation, education, employment, drugs, sexuality, and the impact of globalization and the digital world. The third section describes the relationship between youth and faith in relation with the Catholic Church and the possible responses provided by the Church itself for youth ministry today. The population of the Philippines is among the youngest in the world. Combined with the growing social situation of the nation and with the cultural enrichment brought about by the high rate of migration, this fact gives rise to a range of yet unexplored opportunities and challenges.

In Taiwan, the youth inherits a peculiar political history that for more than a century has haunted the nation, namely a dialectic stance toward central powers (let they be Mainland China or Japan) of which it has been considered a periphery. Such a history and its present dramatic developments (growing pressure from China, different and even opposed reactions to it) implicate the whole society and young people within it. As a result, the uncertainties of the future cast ubiquitous shadows on their life of studies and preparation to work. In such a context, the digital revolution just enhances their opportunities and their feelings of instability. Besides, a feature of present-day Taiwan is a trend towards a growing interaction with neighboring countries with the aim of making of Taiwan a mix of people and cultures. Together with the phenomenon of foreign spouses, the exchange of students is a key part of this policy and affects the role young people play in society.

At the end of each of the four papers, a section deals with the relationship of young people towards religion in general and to the Catholic Church specifically. It is possible to see that the Church faces quite similar challenges, for example the necessity of creating real interpersonal relationships, where every young person may find her/himself considered and valued for what she/he, still rather enigmatically, feels to be.

We would like to thank confreres and other consecrated people who are involved in youth ministry for sharing their experiences and insights. We thank Fr. Alvin C. Balean (Diocese of Novaliches, Philippines) and Ms. Chen Si Ying (Archdiocese of Taipei), who gave us the chance of interviewing them. We are also grateful to Mrs. Rose Marie Pelaez Regalia, Ms. Catherine Oda, Fr. Giuseppe Matteucig, Prof. Brian Reynolds and Prof. Alberto Bertozzi, who kindly reviewed the English text of our papers.

We hope that the information they provide and the immediate comparison that can be drawn among the different societies about which they relate may help the readers to have a better grasp of the situation of young people across some states of the Asia-Pacific region.

Youth Insight

Indonesia

Valentin Shukuru

Give me ten youth,
and I will shake the world

Ir. Sukarno

I n Indonesia, there is a slang which is being more and
more used on television and in social media net-
working to express contemporary Indonesian youth,
namely "*Kids Zaman Now*." This expression combining English
and Indonesian words simply means "Kids nowadays." While it
is still disputed who might have coined it, the phrase is satirically
used by adults and even young people themselves to describe
the behavior and lifestyle patterns among modern youth of this
largest Muslim majority country in the world: home to more
than 250 million people. The expression has gone so viral on the
Internet that Ecko Show, a local Hip-Hop artist, has come up
with a song entitled "Kids Zaman Now."

In his song, the artist criticizes young people today who are
growing up faster but are disrespectful of their elders. Today it is
a generation that is rarely monitored. Though still in junior high

school they are already familiar with dating. By the time they are seniors, hugs, kisses and free sex are no longer unfamiliar to them. In the song the artist notes that the times have changed and then he explains: there are no longer two criteria for differentiating men from women, we are in an increasingly sophisticated world where all is available; young children prefer browsing social media than studying mathematics or memorizing chemistry formulas; they understand love songs better. In the last stanza, in what sounds like an alarming call to the society, the artist exclaims: How are you Indonesia?

In Indonesia, in songs like this and more generally on social media, the young generation is often portrayed as being in moral danger, a far cry from the image of the revolutionary youth who transformed the socio-political landscape of this archipelago ninety-one years ago. Recent studies on Indonesian young people point to the subtleties of generational transition among contemporary youth. Yet, in their journey towards adulthood and amid many contradictory forces, young Indonesian are still capable of striking a not-always-easy balance, and as such, they embody hope for their country.

This short study revisits the role played, throughout the twentieth century, by Indonesian youth in the national awakening and then examines the challenges facing young people in Indonesia today. Drawing on insights from recent studies, we will then present an overview of some of the trends among young people in Indonesia. Being involved in Church youth ministry, we will sketch out a general profile of Catholic youth in Indonesia and the issues they currently face. This study will end with a conclusion in which we argue that managing the youth and activating their role through government bodies and religious institutions is the key to Indonesia's rise and a guarantee of its survival in unity despite its cultural and religious diversity.

THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN THE NATIONAL AWAKENING

Indonesia is one of the youngest democracies in the world. The history of its population, particularly the history of Indonesian youth is older than the country itself. Almost all the political and social events that took place throughout the twentieth century and the beginning of the millennium in Indonesia bear the indelible mark of young people. Building on their shared experience of colonial oppression, young intellectuals from different parts of the archipelago became involved in openly nationalist organizations.

To be sure, the wind of youth revolution that swept away the long Dutch colonial rule began to blow as early as 1908 with the establishment of the *Budi Utomo* (Noble Endeavour) movement. Initially, the *Budi Utomo* was an apolitical organization made of Indonesian elite and students who sought to advance and improve agriculture and industry and promote social reform and unity among the peoples of the Dutch East Indies. According to some researchers, the organization's early policy was that: "The youth should remain 'the motor which drives forward'; the elders should be 'the steersmen, who with dexter-

ous hand know how to avoid dangerous rocks in order to bring the boat to safe harbor.'"[1] Although the *Budi Utomo*'s primary aim was not political, it gradually shifted toward political, driven by the rising sense of nationalism present among Indonesian youth.

Twenty years later, the students' activism[2] reached a point of non-return which irreversibly transformed the youth into a "proud symbol of nationhood" that persists into the twenty-first century.[3] Indeed, by 1928 during a youth congress in Jakarta on 27–28, October of the same year, aimed at stimulating the feeling of unity between young Indonesians, the youth made the landmark *Sumpah Pemuda* (Youth Pledge). Through the Pledge, the Indonesian youth boldly proclaimed the undividable character of Indonesia acknowledging *one homeland, one people and one language*.[4] Through this threefold proclamation, the revolutionary spirit of the youth of the yet-to-be independent country was leading them to take more collective actions that finally led to the 1945 Declaration of Indonesia's Independence.[5]

It is important to note, as Benedict Anderson pointed out, that participants in the youth congress had in common a middle class Indonesian background, a Dutch education and an awareness of Western cultural norms, including ideas about national identity and political independence.[6] Moreover, in contrast to the *Budi Utomo* generation, the

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1. See on this, G. Mc T. Kahin and R. B. O'G. Anderson, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Cornell University Press: 2018), 65.

2. Student activism refers to a series of collective actions outside learning and educational undertakings, which are oriented towards contributing to the change of unjust political, social, and cultural circumstances surrounding them. See on this, M. L. Weiss, E. Aspinall, and M. R. Thompson, "Understanding Student Movement in Asia" in M. L. Weiss, E. Aspinall eds, *Student Activism in Asia: Between Protest and Powerlessness* (Minnesota, MN: The University Press of Minnesota, 2012), 1–32.

3. L. Parker and P. Nilan, *Adolescents in Contemporary Indonesia* (London & New York: Routledge, 2013), 19.

4. During the Second Youth Congress which was held on October 27–28, 1928 in Jakarta, youth from across the archipelago made a Pledge known as the *Sumpah Pemuda*. The Youth Pledge read the following: *Kami putra dan putri Indonesia, mengaku bertumpah darah yang satu, tanah air Indonesia. Kami putra dan putri Indonesia mengaku berbangsa yang satu, bangsa Indonesia. Kami putra dan putri Indonesia menjunjung bahasa persatuan, bahasa Indonesia.* Which literally translates into: "We, the sons and daughters of Indonesia, acknowledge one homeland: the Land of Indonesia. We, the sons and daughters of Indonesia, acknowledge one nation: the Nation of Indonesia. We, the sons and daughters of Indonesia, uphold one language of unity: the Indonesian Language."

5. Together with the Declaration of Indonesia's Independence on August 17, 1945, the founders of the newly independent nation-state of the Republic of Indonesia adopted the Constitution of 1945 and *Pancasila* (Five Principles) or the core ideological basis of the Indonesian government consisting of: 1) Belief in the one and only God; 2) A just and civilized humanity; 3) The unity of Indonesia; 4) Democracy guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations among representatives; and 5) Social justice for the whole of the people of Indonesia. Moreover, aware that Indonesia is an archipelagic nation made up of thousands of islands, with many distinct religious beliefs, cultures, languages, and traditions, the founders also adopted a national motto to live as *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* ("Unity in Diversity").

6. B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 121–22. On the central role of the *Angkatan Muda* (Younger Generation) in the outbreak of the Indonesian revolution of 1945, see B. Anderson, *Java in a Time of Revolution. Occupation and Resistance 1944–1946* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 1.

Youth Pledge generation represented a highly politicized group dedicated to the radical pro-democratic change in the country.[7] From the above, it seems that the only reason the youth were driven to engage in political activism was their shared desire to put an end to colonialism. However, Parker and Nilan suggest that behind this youth interest was also an unresolved social problem at that time, i.e. a lack of job opportunities for the newly educated young people.[8]

As the independence of Indonesia became imminent and irreversible, the youth struggle entered into a new phase. In their book, Parker and Nilan give an account of this new phase characterized by an armed struggle for Independence. The Netherlands East Indies came to an end with the Japanese invasion. Two days after the Japanese surrender in 1945, the still relatively young Sukarno and Hatta proclaimed Independence. The four years following the declaration of Independence were a period of struggle against Dutch reoccupation and a time of martyrdom and daring heroism for the young freedom fighters.[9]

For most Indonesians, this successful struggle for an independent country which was spearheaded by the youth, still functions in the collective memory as a proof of youth's capacity to act as an agent of change. In other words, independence remains a source of inspiration that gives meaning to the present and determines the future direction of the nation; Indonesia's future lies in the past as underlined in Kwa Chong Guan's review of Indonesia's history. He states:

> Indonesians have in the midst of all their political crises since 1945 explicitly looked back into their past for rationalizations of their present and more critically, redefine a "golden era" from which they can chart anew paths into their future.[10]

After few years of independence there was an outbreak of political crises in Indonesia in which the youth played significant roles again. If during the first part of the twentieth century youth's struggle was primarily directed against foreign powers, namely the Dutch colonizers and the Japanese invaders, during the second half of the twentieth century youth's opponents became their governments. During the post-independence period, youth activists were still central to the new political regime but then they forced Sukarno to hand over power to Suharto (1966).

After a period of relative stability and development under Suharto, youth activists returned to the frontline fighting the three KKN (*korupsi*, *kolusi*, *nepotisme*, ie., corrup-

7. L. Parker and P. Nilan, *Adolescents in Contemporary Indonesia*, op. cit., 22.

8. Ibid., 23.

9. Ivi.

10. C. G. Kwa, "Rewriting Indonesian History: The Future in Indonesia's Past," in IDSS Working Paper Series, 2006, 113/II: 9–11. Available at <https://dr.ntu.edu.sg/bitstream/handle/10220/4408/RSIS-WORKPA-PER_18.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

tion, cronyism, and nepotism) that had marked the New Order regime.[11] During this era, youth involvement in social, political, and economic issues was perceived as rebellious and subversive. The government reacted through a tough implementation of policies such as the *Campus Normalization Policy/Student Coordinating Board* (NKK/BKK) destined to limit students' activities to merely academic. For Indonesian youth, this became the dark age of youth activism as their actions were strictly monitored. However, young Indonesian people have always proven their capacity to reinvent themselves and rewrite history; "They were born to reshaping the current."[12] So in 1998, the youth overthrew Suharto's authoritarian regime and charted a new path for reformation and democratization in Indonesia.

The conclusion that can be drawn from the elements listed above is threefold. First, Indonesia's history bears an indelible mark of young people. Second, at each crisis point, the *pemuda* (youth) activists identified themselves as representing a generation focused on bringing about a specific form of political and social change.[13] Finally, the political consciousness of young Indonesians throughout the twentieth century was the contributing factor for the birth of the Indonesian state, which is now considered as one of modern democratic countries in the world.

THE PROBLEMATIC OF YOUTH DEFINITION

Looking at the twentieth century, Lyn Parker and Pam Nilan discern five distinct generations of revolutionary Indonesian youth or *pemuda*. First, there was the 1908 generation which claimed to have "awakened the nation." Second was the 1928 generation, or *Sumpah Pemuda* generation. Third was the 1945 generation of freedom fighters who won the Independence of the nation. Fourth, the 1966 generation of *pemuda* who ushered out the Old Order and installed the military-dominated New Order under Suharto. Finally, the youthful masses that appeared on the streets in 1998 to push out the New Order represent a fifth generation of *pemuda*, in spirit, if not in name.[14]

At this point, a question that might be asked is why the nationalist youth movement took the qualifier "*pemuda*" (youth)? In his *History of Modern Indonesia*, Vickers argues that the members took up the term "youth" as the way of describing themselves: meaning young in spirit rather than age. "People in the Indies felt this was the right word to describe those with a new outlook for the new modern age."[15]

Nowadays, several new concepts denoting the "youth" have emerged in the Indone-

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11. The authoritarian regime of Suharto was called New Order regime as opposed to Sukarno's Old Order.

12. A. S. Ramadhan, "Indonesian Youth: The Now Gener'Action" at <https://www.academia.edu/2138593/The_Now_GenerAction_on_Contemporary_Indonesian_Youth_Movement>.

13. L. Parker and P. Nilan, *Adolescents in Contemporary Indonesia*, op. cit., 18–9.

14. Ivi.

15. A. Vickers, *A History of Modern Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 75–6.

sian lexicon. The academic literature available about those notions suggests that in Indonesia definig "youth" is problematic. The first difficulty in defining "youth" in Indonesia originates from a trend to use interchangeably the terms denoting youth and adolescence. While the terms "*remaja*" (adolescent) and "*pemuda*" (youth) are generally understood as stages of transition and growth into adulthood, another term, i.e. "*kaum muda*" (young people) is also often used and denotes youth as particular demographic group. Moreover, there is a fourth concept that is now frequently used in the media and by the decision makers in Indonesia, i.e. "*milenial*" (millennials).

If we look at the explanations provided by scholars on the differences between the various terms that are used to denote "youth," we notice that there has been a paradigm shift in the use and meaning of the term "*pemuda*." According to Parker and Nilan, the concept "*pemuda*" is an old term used throughout the twentieth century to denote youth as heroic agents of social and political change. However, the meaning and discourse surrounding the world of the "youth" have changed since 1998. Young Indonesians today are no longer usually described as "*pemuda*." The most frequent term used to talk about youth in the new millennium is "*remaja*" (adolescent).[16]

For the two authors, there are two historical reasons at the base of the shift from "*pemuda*" to "*remaja*." First, the fragmentation of youth political struggle in Indonesia in the period post-1998 and secondly, the introduction of democracy in Indonesia. In contrast to the heroic youth struggling for a common goal that was widespread throughout the twentieth century, most youth groups in the period post 1998 quickly fell apart due to in-fighting and declining interest that marked the end of the widely shared twentieth century "*pemuda*" discourse of youth. The birth of full constitutional democracy in Indonesia is a second reason that marked the end of the "*pemuda*" generations. A new generation emerged with a new kind of consciousness.[17]

The second reason for the problematic of youth definition comes from the government's enactment of a legal framework which defined the youth. The lack of agreement on a common understanding and definition of youth in Indonesia led the Indonesian government to look for a legal framework for establishing the criteria that defines "youth." In a country where there were eight youth-related policies, and each had its own definition of "youth,"[18] this was expected to become the reference on which all definitions were based.

16. L. Parker and P. Nilan, *Adolescents in Contemporary Indonesia*, op. cit., 34. Parker and Nilan note that a number of other terms have also been generated to describe contemporary youth such as *Anak muda* (literally young person), *Anak baru gede* or *ABG* (literally recently grown-up kids), *Generasi baru* (the new generation); *Generasi dating* (the youth generation to come); *Generasi galau* (troubled generation).

17. Ibid., 33–4.

18. The eight Youth-related laws and regulations are: Law no. 23 of 2002 on Child Protection, Law no. 20 of 2003 on The National Education System (*Sisdiknas*), Law no. 36 of 2009 on Health, Law no. 40 of 2009 on Youth, Law no. 52 of 2009 on Population Growth and Family Development, Law no. 12 of 2010 on Scout Movement (*Gerakan Pramuka*), Government Regulation no. 41 of 2011 on Development of Youth Entrepre-

In the 2009 Law on Youth, "youth" are defined as "Indonesian citizens who are entering an important period of growth and development and are aged between 16 and 30 years old."[19] The problem is that the same Law on Youth defines "youth" in its other sense ("*Kepemudaan*," i.e. the state or condition, equivalent to "childhood" or adulthood) as "various matters relating to the potential, responsibility, rights, character, capacity, self-actualization and aspirations of youth."[20] Reviewing and analyzing the Law on Youth in her comprehensive study, *Youth Identities and Social Transformations in Modern Indonesia*, Kathryn Robinson notes that the reasons for extending the boundary of "youth" to 30 are not explained. Also, in official definitions of "child," Indonesian Law follows the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (in which childhood stops on the eighteenth birthday), so that young people aged 16 and 17 are both "child" and "youth." Therefore, writes Kathryn Robinson:

> Many children and young people in Indonesia and young people in Indonesia would not see themselves fitting in these categories and constructions. Many young Indonesians in their middle teens do not consider themselves "children," and defining all people under the age of 18 as "children" risks infantilizing those approaching the upper limit age… Similarly, extending the boundaries of "youth" to 30 or above… risks juvenilizing young adults as something less than full members of society, less than full citizens. The extended definition identifies an age group many of whose members have already passed the main markers of "transition to adulthood," such as marriage, the completion of education, and employment in the labor force. This supports the notion that the main basis for the extended definition is political.[21]

From the above, it appears then that Indonesia's legal framework for defining the youth came short and could even be detrimental for the implementation of youth-related policies. In fact, according to a 2013 youth policy review,[22] an integrated national youth policy did not exist in Indonesia. The existing youth policies, especially National Youth Law, did not represent the needs and problems of today's youth and the state had not viewed youth as a diverse group with specific needs and challenges: such as disabled youth, street youth, youth with a different sexual orientation, and young women. Thus, the conversa-

neurship and Initiative as well as Provision of Youth Infrastructure and Facilities, Regulation of the Ministry of Female Empowerment and Child Protection no. 3 of 2011 on Child Participation in Development.

19. Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Republik Indonesia, "*Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 40 Tahun 2009 Tentang Kepemudaan*" at <http://www.dpr.go.id/dokjdih/document/uu/UU_2009_40.pdf>.

20. Ibid.

21. K. Robinson, ed., *Youth Identities and Social Transformations in Modern Indonesia* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2016), 8.

22. See on this, A. S. Ramadan, "Youth Policies in Indonesia: Activating the Role of Youth" at <http://www.youthpolicy.org/national/Indonesia_2013_Youth_Policy_Review.pdf>.

tion about the youth needs to be multidirectional, for if it is true that youth represents a demographic group age, the reality is that the youth are not a homogenous group. The very concept of youth encompasses various youth subgroups.

For example, Pam Nilan, who has studied Indonesian male youth from an anthropological-behavioral point of view, found out that even among the "group" of Indonesian male youth itself, there are three composite profiles of young men, namely the bearded devout young Muslim (*santri*), the secular cool-urban man, and the aggressive criminal or gang member man (*preman*). Moreover, the paternalistic nature of Indonesian society and the high social control in Indonesia put male youth under pressure.[23]

So far, we have been looking at the role that young people played in Indonesia's history. Throughout the twentieth century young people were active participants in all the events that occurred in their country, particularly through the 1908 movement of national awakening; the 1928 youth pledge; the 1945 declaration of Independence; and finally, the regime changes in 1966 and 1998. Even though the notions referring to "youth" have evolved and somewhat changed especially after the end of the authoritarian regime, and the political ideals of Indonesian youth are now slowly beginning to shrink, in Indonesia the term "*pemuda*" remains value-laden and often romanticized. As Parker and Nilan put it:

> The "*pemuda*" generational ideal still exists at base, but the confluence of a personally felt religious discourse, the demands for consumption, the optimism and reflexivity encouraged by the personal development discourse and the swirling, more distant discourse of neo-liberal economism have swamped this ideal, except on certain occasions when it is dusted off for nostalgic or activist purposes.[24]

TRENDS AMONG THE INDONESIAN YOUTH

Since the end of the authoritarian regime and the beginning of the twenty-first century, there seems to be a new generation of young people emerging in Indonesia. This millennium generation which did not experience the oppression of the colonial regime and right restrictions under the New Order regime is enjoying greater freedom and displays lifestyle patterns different from those of the previous generations. Indeed, young Indonesians today are increasingly educated, urbanized, and modernized. They are hyper-connected to the Internet and other social networking through their smartphones.

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23. P. Nilan, "Contemporary Masculinities and Young Men in Indonesia" in *Indonesia and the Malay World,* 2009, 37:327–44, at <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233088042_Contemporary_masculinities_and_young_men_in_Indonesia>.

24. L. Parker and P. Nilan, *Adolescents in Contemporary Indonesia*, op. cit., 176.

They are ever-present in the different shopping centers, restaurants, and entertainment hotspots in major towns throughout Indonesia. While for the young people it is just a matter of being "up-to-date," for Indonesian media and political rhetoric instead, current youth represent a generation in moral danger which is obsessed with consumption and hedonism. For instance, in a recent revision the *Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Youth and Sports* (*Kemenpora*)[25] states that behind the strategic value of the youth, lay problems, including poverty, unemployment, hedonistic, and materialistic culture, and that today's Indonesian youth have lost much of their identity, especially in terms of nationalism and patriotism.[26]

Rather than being a lost generation, what is sure and has been suggested in the various findings of recent studies, the current generation embodies substantial socio-cultural changes that are happening in Indonesia's society giving rise naturally to new dynamics and trends among young people.

In Indonesia, perhaps the first comprehensive study on young people during these last six years is Lyn Parker and Pam Nilan's book on *Adolescents in Contemporary Indonesia* (2013). Parker and Nilan argue that adolescents embody the dramatic social changes that are occurring in this vibrant, newly democratic nation—the largest Muslim-majority country in the world. The two authors note that just as young people were significant agents of social and political transformation in Indonesia throughout the twentieth century, now they are significant because they spearhead not only just globalization and youth consumer culture but also the Islamic resurgence. In other words, globalization and its consumer culture—as well as the revival of Islam—have had an impact on the youth in this country. More explicitly Parker and Nilan state that:

> Young Indonesians today are growing up in a society that their great-grandparents would barely recognize. The youth generation of today is the most educated generation in Indonesian history, and the most engaged in the world beyond Indonesia. The media and cultural freedom they experience was never enjoyed by previous generations. Their attitudes to fashion, to music, to transport and even to life ambitions, are shaped by the massive expansion in middle class consumerism that has resulted from sustained economic growth in Indonesia. To engage in a competitive labor market, young Indonesians spend increasingly

25. The Ministry of Youth and Sports (*Kemenpora*) is the governmental institution that has been given the mission of enhancing youth potentials. According to the mission assigned to the Ministry of Youth and Sports, youth development is essentially expected to bring about a generation of young people who believe and fear God, noble, healthy, intelligent, creative, innovative, independent, democratic, responsible, competitive, and have a spirit of leadership, entrepreneurship, revolutionary, and nationalist based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.

26. Kemenpora, *Rencana Strategis Kementerian Pemuda dan Olahraga Tahun 2016-2019* (Jakarta: Kemenpora, 2017), 18, at <http://kemenpora.go.id/img_upload/files/Rentsra%20Kemenpora%202016-2019%281%29.pdf>.

long periods in education. There is no certainty of employment, yet they remain optimistic. The global resurgence of Islam affects their daily lives in all kinds of ways, whether they are Muslim or not.[27]

Exploring further the world of educated young people in Indonesia, Parker and Nilan show how Indonesian young people have been able to strike a not-always-easy balance amid seemingly contradicting forces. Thus, both authors portray a unique profile of Indonesian young people highlighting some of their interesting and somewhat paradoxical characteristics such as their being modern but at the same time religious, open to the world and yet firmly embracing traditional values. They explain:

> In some ways, young people in Indonesia are remarkably like young educated people anywhere in the world; in other ways, they are distinctively Indonesian. They are both highly religious and technologically sophisticated. They are compelled by the drive for self-improvement, yet remain far less individualized than their Western counterparts. Perhaps most significantly, they show us the face of contemporary, dynamic, democratic Indonesia…, their vision of themselves and their dreams for the future are socially conservative. They are embedded in families and communities, and even though they expect to live modern, middle class lives in towns and cities, they share their great-grandparents' assumption that family is the heart of society. They are looking forward to marrying and having children. Like their great-grandparents, they will reach social adulthood through marriage and parenthood. Family remains the paramount organizational principle and structure of Indonesian society. It is still marriage and parenthood that defines a person of either sex as adult, rather than work status or independence from the natal family.[28]

Undoubtedly, the changes that the younger segment of Indonesia's population is going through bring about new trends which could be linked to their pursuit of education. In her comprehensive studies on current struggles and opportunities facing Indonesia's youth across the archipelago, Kathryn Robinson found out that there are two important generational trends among Indonesian youth, namely education and the postponement of adulthood. She writes:

> One important change that has been happening to Indonesian youth is its prolongation. As young people remain enrolled for longer in education, as their average age at first marriage rises, as entry into the labor force is postponed, they remain longer in the state of partial or complete dependency on the parental generation. Another related but in some ways contradictory trend is that each generation grows up, on the average, better educated than their parents.

27. L. Parker and P. Nilan, *Adolescents in Contemporary Indonesia*, op. cit., 1–2.
28. Ibid., 165.

> Young people thus experience an extended period in which they are biologically adult, and in formal terms "smarter" than their parents and others of that generation, but with adulthood postponed.[29]

For most young people in Indonesia, one of the keys to success which allows one to be considered in a competitive society is education. This is true, especially for young people of poor family background whose parents are forced to make many sacrifices so that their children can go to school.[30] It is therefore not surprising if, in recent statistics and other studies on young people in Indonesia, education often ranks first. According to the *Youth Development Index 2017*[31] education has the best index value among the five Youth Development Index domains in two consecutive years. This was due to the strong contribution of high school participation rates and the average length of schooling. Moreover, the development of quality education through the *Program Indonesia Pintar* (PIP)[32] and the implementation of the 12-year compulsory education curriculum has had significant success in improving the quality of education, especially at the elementary level. However, this progress still faces considerable challenges in ensuring access and equal distribution of education at the secondary and tertiary level. Besides, there is still a persistent disparity in the average length of schooling for young pepole with special needs.[33]

As stated earlier, the fact that young people are increasingly spending more of their adolescence in school implies also that they are prolonging their transition to the responsibilities of adulthood as well. This situation creates another trend among the youth which is the postponement of the age of marriage. According to Dr. Nancy Smith-Hefner, an American linguistic anthropologist and specialist of religion and gender in Southeast Asia, the rapid rise of Indonesia's middle class and the renewed interest among young people in more normative forms of Islam have had significant repercussions for contemporary patterns of youth sociability, courtship, and marriage. The rising age of first marriage for women has been linked to women's increasing levels of education and

29. K. Robinson, ed., *Youth Identities and Social Transformations in Modern Indonesia*, op. cit., 6.

30. For Batak people (Northern Sumatera) for example, children must attain the highest education, even if their parents live in poverty. In fact, the success of a child in education is also considered the success of his/her parents. Hence the Batak philosophy of "Panaikhon" meaning that children should always strive to surpass their parents especially in education completion. A number of Batak songs is full of such messages and advices for the young people.

31. *Youth Development Index* is a particularly important tool as it gives valuable information on the development status of youth in the country and provides a useful performance measure on the many policies and programs related to youth development that have been initiated by the government. It consists of five domains, which are education, health, and well-being, employment and opportunity, participation and leadership, as well as gender and discrimination.

32. The *Smart Indonesia Program* (PIP) is run by three government bodies, namely the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud), Ministry of Social Affairs (Kemensos), and Ministry of Religion (Kemenag) destined to help students across the country, particularly those who come from poor families, are vulnerable to poverty, orphans, people with disabilities, and victims of natural disasters and calamities.

33. Central Bureau of Statistics, *Statistik Pemuda Indonesia 2018* (Jakarta: BPS, 2018), 19–34, at <https://www.bps.go.id/publication.html?page=14>.

employment. In urban areas like Jakarta and Jogjakarta, increasing numbers of educated women have begun to express anxiety about the difficulties of finding suitable marriage partners.[34]

An interesting trend and perhaps the most common characteristic of the young people now in Indonesia is their being digital native. According to the Indonesia's Millennial Report conducted by the IDN Research Institute and covering eight fields, namely: religious view, family, education, media consumption, Internet, and online behavior, entertainment and leisure, consumption behavior, and political view, concluded that the political dynamics of reform and the proliferation of digital networks are influencing quite a bit the current behavior of Indonesian youth.[35] This trend is confirmed by the findings of Ali Hasanuddin and Purwadi Lilik in their study on *The Urban Middle-Class Millennials*. For both researchers, there are at least three main characteristics of the urban middle-class youth, namely: creativeness, connectedness, and confidence. If further elaborated, it means that millennials are ordinary people who think out of the box; they are rich in ideas and are able to communicate them brilliantly. They are individuals who are good at socializing, especially within the communities that they are joining, and also active in social media and on the Internet. Finally, they are very confident, bold, and will not hesitate to argue in public.[36]

After considering these scholarly findings about the most relevant generational trends present among contemporary Indonesian youth, namely: longer schooling, the postponement of adulthood (which is particularly evident through delays in the marriage age), and digital media consumption, we now take a look at the most recent statistics about the youth which might help as well to understand other youth dynamics whose "Situation is as diverse, promising and complex as the nation itself"[37], or as the American anthropologist Robert W. Hefner describes as a "Land of cultural contrasts, contests, and contradictions."[38]

According to the *Population Projection 2015–2045* data provided by the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS), the population of Indonesia over the next 30 years will continue to

34. N. J. Smith-Hefner, "Courtship and Marriage in Indonesia's New Muslim Middle Class" in R. W. Hefner, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Indonesia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 335–45.

35. IDN Research Institute, *Indonesia Millennial Report 2019*, at <https://www.idntimes.com/indonesia-millennialreport2019>.

36. H. Ali and L. Purwandi, *Indonesia 2020: The Urban Middle-Class Millennials* (Jakarta: Alvara Research Center), 18.

37. UNFPA, *Indonesian Youth in the 21st Century* (Jakarta: UNFPA, 2014), vii. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has delivered important tools destined at helping the Indonesian government to enhance its national planning and advocacy on youth development. The UNFPA Youth Mapping Reports consist of *Indonesian Youth in the 21st Century; Youth Booklet: Realizing Young People's Potential in Indonesia; Investing in Young People in Indonesia, Youth Monograph Series No. 2: Youth in Indonesia* and*; Taking Advantage of the Demographic Dividend in Indonesia*.

38. R. W. Hefner, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Indonesia*, op. cit., i.

increase, from 255.6 million in 2015 to 294.1 million in 2030 and will reach 318.9 million in 2045.[39] Even though the average annual growth of the Indonesian population during the period 2015–2045 shows that the trend will continue to decline and that the youth will not dominate the largest proportion of Indonesian population, it is essential to note that Indonesian population is still relatively young. Indeed, as reflected in *Statistik Pemuda Indonesia 2018* (Youth Statistics),[40] the demographic share of young people is estimated at 63.82 million, which represents a quarter of the entire population of productive age.[41] In Indonesia, this large population of youth can be a potential source of strength provided that all aspects pertaining to youth, mainly education, health, labor markets, economic, social, political participation, and technology are fully enhanced.

Unfortunately, Indonesian young people are still facing major issues in all these areas. For instance, various independent bodies such as UN organizations[42] often point out the issue of youth lack of participation in youth-related policies and programs. In addition, a research conducted by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) through the UN Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD) and in collaboration with the Indonesian Ministry of Youth and Sports found out that despite an increasing awareness of the fact that the transition from childhood to the realm of adult responsibilities is a critical stage in life, still many young people in Indonesia lack information about the decisions that affect their lives. According to this joined research, Indonesian young people are facing challenges in six main domains, namely: health, education, economic opportunity, technology and Internet, citizenship, safety, and security.[43]

Concerning the issue of access to technology and Internet, the 2018 Youth Statistics figures, show that 87.44% of Indonesian youth have access to technology and Internet, but this access is uneven because of persisting disparities of access to technology and Internet between urban and rural, disabled and non-disabled youth.[44] Furthermore, while current Indonesian young people are healthier than the previous generation, smoking is one of the problems that undermine youth health in Indonesia, especially among the male youth.[45] In addition to smoking, the youth are also faced with challenges *vis-à-vis*

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39. Central Bureau of Statistics, *Proyeksi Penduduk Indonesia 2015-2045* (Jakarta: BPS, 2018), 2, at <https://www.bps.go.id/publication.html?page=21>.

40. *Statistik Pemuda Indonesia* (Indonesian Youth Statistics) is an annual a government tool that provides youth data and information by looking at various dimensions in the life of Indonesia young people, including: demographics, education, health, employment, socio-economic conditions, reproductive health, and youth programs.

41. Central Bureau of Statistics, *Statistik Pemuda Indonesia 2018*, op. cit., vii.

42. For a more complete picture of the status of youth in Indonesia, see the United Nations Population Fund-Indonesia (UNFPA) publications which are important tools destined at helping the Indonesian government to enhance its national planning and advocacy on youth development. The UNFPA publications can be accessed at <https://indonesia.unfpa.org/en/publications>.

43. UNFPA, op. cit., 3–7.

44. Central Bureau of Statistics, *Statistik Pemuda Indonesia 2018*, op. cit., viii.

45. An interesting article by Pam Nilan explains how the phenomena of tobacco use during circumcision

the consumption of narcotics and illegal drugs. Indonesian population in productive age, which is mostly made of youth, is thus particularly vulnerable to smoking and drug use, which needs to be adequately addressed. Additionaly, as Indonesian youth increasingly live in the era of technological developments that are fast and addictive, following current trends may result in mental-emotional disorders such as anxiety and depression.[46]

As far as employment is concerned, half of Indonesia's youth were working in 2018 (52.87%). This means that, in Indonesia, youth participation in economic activity is quite high. Paradoxically, however, while two-thirds of young people enter the labor force, one in ten youth is unemployed. This means that unemployment is still one of the issues faced by the youth in Indonesia.[47] Young people in Indonesia do not find jobs that match their skills because of limited employment opportunities, especially in rural areas. One consequence of rural youth unemployment has been the rise of urban residents as young people move to the cities where they hope to find a job. As a matter of fact, most of Indonesian youth are concentrated in urban areas, and by 2020, the urban population is projected to reach 56.7% and by the year 2035, 66.6%.[48]

From the above, it is obvious now that, in Indonesia, young people are still facing numerous concerns. Although the government reforms introduced since the enactment of the 2009 Youth Law are taking longer to transform youth lives, it is encouraging to notice that youth development has become a national strategic agenda aimed at preparing future generations that are strong and able to play a role in nation building and take advantage of demographic opportunities. For the government, this means involving the youth in decision-making processes that will affect the country they live in, the country that they will inherit and lead.[49] For contemporary young people in transition into adulthood it means recapturing that spirit of common purpose which powered the previous

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and smoking as a sign of male maturity have resulted in the development of a general view on smoking as normal male behaviour. According to the boys, smoking portrays the image of potency, wisdom and bravery, which they described as 'machismo' and 'self-confidence'. For them, boys have to be brave enough to smoke otherwise they are seen as having an effeminate manner. See P. Nilan, "The Gang, Violence and the Life Course for Indonesian Male Youth" at <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228519256_The_Gang_Violence_and_the_Life_Course_for_Indonesian_Male_Youth>. Another article by the University of Melbourne in the series "Talking Indonesia" points to the multiple factors that have contributed to high rates of youth smoking. See "Youth Smoking: An Un-natural Disaster" at <https://indonesiaatmelbourne.unimelb.edu.au/how-do-we-make-smoking-uncool/>. And also N. Tjandra, "Indonesia's Lax Smoking Laws are Helping Next Generation to Get Hooked" at <https://www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2018/06/04/indonesias-lax-smoking-laws-are-helping-next-generation-to-get-hooked.html>.

46. On these issues, see Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak, *Statisitik Gender Tematik: Profil Generasi Milenial Indonesia: 2018* (Jakarta: Kemenpppa, 2018), 50–5, at <https://www.kemenpppa.go.id/lib/uploads/list/9acde-buku-profil-generasi-milenia.pdf>.

47. Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak, op. cit., 78–82.

48. H. Ali and L. Purwandi, *Indonesia 2020: The Urban Middle-Class Millennials* (Jakarta: Alvara Research Center, 2016), 6.

49. Bappenas, *Indeks Pembangunan Pemuda Indonesia 2017* (Jakarta: Bappenas, 2017), ix, at <https://bappenas.go.id/files/7215/3147/1294/Indeks_Pembangunan_Pemuda_Indonesia_2017.pdf>.

generation. Because the lesson of that remarkable generation is clear: if young people come together, there is no limit to what their can achieve. Indonesia's first president was convinced that he could shake the world with just ten youth. To date, Indonesian youth are not ten, but 63.82 million; they should be able "to shake the world" stage; otherwise, they may end up by becoming "*sampah pemuda*" (waste youth).

INDONESIAN CATHOLIC YOUTH

In Indonesia, young Catholics comprise about 60% (4.16 million) of the total Catholic population, which is estimated at 6.93 million. The conversation about Catholic youth in Indonesia is closely related to the history of the country itself and to the crucial role that Indonesian young people played in the struggle for democracy. Long before Indonesia became an independent country (1945), the Catholic Church provided its support for the founding of the republic. An example of this is Catholics' participation in the first session of the historic Youth Pledge (1928) that took place in the meeting room of the then *Katholieke Jongenlingen Bond* (Catholic Youth Association) at the Cathedral of Jakarta. Moreover, some Catholic leaders such as Mgr. Soegijapranata, the first native-born bishop in Indonesia, developed a special friendship with Sukarno, the first president of Indonesia. Furthermore, the Catholic youth took part in the demonstrations that ousted Suharto from power. Driven by the conviction that young people embody the present and the future of both the Church and the nation, the Catholic Church of Indonesia has always tried to accompany her sons and daughters' life journey.

Thus, the establishment of a Youth Section in the Commission on the Apostolate of the Laity of the MAWI (Supreme Council of Indonesian Bishops, now KWI or Catholic Bishops' Conference of Indonesia) in 1976 constituted a milestone. In 1980, the Church clearly voiced the need for guidelines for youth ministry, and in 1997 the General Assembly of the KWI stated that the youth ministry needed to be improved. For the Church, this was an effort to participate in the national development and formation of the young generation in line with the State Guidelines (GBHN) issued by the New Order regime in 1978.[50]

This growing concern of the Church for the formation and education of the young generation led the Indonesian Bishops to formulate the *Guidelines for Catholic Youth Ministry* throughout Indonesia; to establish a *Youth Commission* entrusted with the mission of assisting the Bishops and helping all those involved in youth ministry to identify, choose and implement programs for an integral formation and development of Catholic

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50. *The 1978 State Guidelines on Youth* aimed at: 1) increasing devotion to God; 2) growing national and state awareness; 3) strengthening idealism, patriotism, and self-esteem; 4) strengthening personality and discipline as well as noble character; 5) fostering physical and spiritual fitness; 6) developing leadership, knowledge, skills, and initiative; 7) motivating and developing youth participation in national and state life in implementation of national development; 8) developing tools for youth guidance; 9) creating and maintaining a healthy atmosphere in order to develop youth creativity and responsibility; 10) upgrading facilities and guidance tools of youth.

young people. All this was done in view of enabling young people to make valuable contributions for the welfare of both their communities and the Church.

The *Guidelines for Youth Ministry* define Indonesian Catholic youths as unmarried baptized young people between the ages of 13 and 35 years old. In this definition, childhood is significantly shortened, while the youth is expanded far beyond the governmental upper bracket. In adopting a much broader and encompassing definition of youth, the Church of Indonesia attempted to address the issues of youth accompaniment starting from the early stages of their development. However, such a broad understanding of Catholic youth raises other issues.[51] For the sake of a greater effectiveness of youth programs and accompaniment, the age bracket was finally broken into four groups: teenage (13–15 years), cadet age (16–19 years), middle age youths (20–24 years), and working-age youths (25–35 years). However, the change of terminology in the Church's conversation about the youth added even more confusions to the already complex definition and categorization of Catholic youth. The shift from "*Muda-Mudi Katolik*" (*Mudika*) to "*Orang Muda Katolik*" (OMK)[52] did not make any clearer the identity of Catholic young who are still dealing today with the impact of the times like the rest of young people in Indonesia.

Indeed, Indonesian Catholic youth are not exempted from the negative impacts of globalization and development such as individualistic, consumerist, materialistic, and hedonistic lifestyles that easily influence them. Thus, their ability to think critically and act wisely is challenged by the complexity of the problems that they experience. Some find it challenging to place hope into the future that appears increasingly uncertain due to problems streaminig from education, jobs, relationships, careers, love, the fight against intolerance, and environmental protection. This is further compounded by the scarcity of good role models in their families. In short, Catholic youth in Indonesia find it difficult to discover the real meaning or purpose of life, making them an easy target of manipulation and consumption, especially in this digital age.

To counter this danger, Catholic Church leaders have been calling on the youth to use wisely social media as a means to strengthen unity and brotherhood in the country so as to foster a loving culture which emphasizes the beauty of unity in diversity and mutual respect.[53] Besides, the Catholic Church is increasingly reminding its members that the time has arrived to end their reluctance to get involved in politics and actively participate

51. On the one hand, teenagers feel that they are still too young to be assimilated to the youth; on the other hand, the youth (college and university students and young professionals) consider themselves mature enough not to be put in the same category with high school students.

52. *Mudika* is a parochial/territorial Catholic youth group; whereas OMK can refer to an individual young Catholic or an encompassing group of young people who are Catholics. Franciscus Xaverius Puniman, a journalist and a Catholic youth activist in the 1970s is credited to have coined the term OMK that definitely replaced the term Mudika in 2005. See Yohanes Dwi Harsanto, "*Apa Perbadaan MUDIKA dan OMK?*" at <http://www.katolisitas.org/apa-perbadaan-mudika-dan-omk/>.

53. Bishops' Conference of Indonesia, *Nota Pastoral 2018: Panggilan Gereja dalam hidup berbangsa: Menjadi Gereja yang relevan dan signifikan* (Jakarta: Obor, 2018), 34.

in various joint actions through which their presence can become more meaningful and relevant.[54] All this is done to counter the results of a recent study on Catholicism in Indonesia, which suggests that there is an overall downward trend of Catholic participation in politics. As a matter of fact, in recent years, more and more Catholics have been retreating from political activity due to several reasons.

Amidst the social and political transformations underway in Indonesia, young Catholics in Indonesia are still generally open to Church accompaniment. Their view of the Church is positive: they still find the Church interesting and want to take part in it. They are increasingly becoming militant Catholics. Of course, there is a correlation between their inward militancy and the recurrent acts of intolerance towards minority groups in Indonesia. Consequently, some young Catholics feel marginalized and seek practical guidance from the Church in navigating a society in which they are a minority. Different statements made by Catholic youth at the end of their gatherings, such as the 2017 Asian Youth Day and other Diocesan Youth Days provide clues to understand the situation of Catholic youth in Indonesia. The final statement of the seventh Asian Youth Day held in Jogjakarta, Indonesia on 2–6 August, 2017 read:

> We, the participants of the 7th Asian Youth Day held in Jogjakarta, Indonesia from 2–6 August, 2017, are the millennials. We face problems and challenges in living our Catholic faith and live in a globalized era that impacts our life. Rapid technological advances give rise to consumerism, addictions, and loss of our own identity because of the fading culture. We cannot avoid modernization. Some of us may lack confidence in living our own faith. Due to pressures arising from intolerance and feeling left behind, we lack intimacy with God and His creation. We feel like we do not have enough support from different sectors of society. Therefore, as the Catholic youth of Asia, we need the chance and space to be heard and noticed… We implore the help of our pastors and our animators to be good role models and bring us to realize that our passions can be useful.[55]

What is necessary for the youth in Indonesia is a close accompaniment which pays attention to their likings, allows a complete blooming of their different skills and talents and helps them to fully play their role as faithful members of the Church and good citizens. Indeed, the Catholic Church in Indonesia remains convinced that public welfare is a work of faith and, at the same time, a duty of every citizen. Hence, bringing about dignifying living conditions for all without exception will continue to be the struggle of the Church through the work of her sons and daughters. For independence and general welfare are expressions of God's will and constitute the path to unity with Him.

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54. Ibid., 36–7.
55. Seventh Asian Youth Day Statement at <http://kmkunindra.blogspot.com/2017/08/7th-asian-youth-day-statement.html>.

This need to play a role in the Church and in the larger society is again being felt more among Indonesian Catholic youth. Recurrent slogans often heard among Catholic youth, such as *"Bangga menjadi katolik"* (Proud to be Catholic), *"Sekali Katolik tetap Katolik"* (Once a Catholic, always a Catholic), *"Katolik sampai mati"* (Catholic until the end), and *"100% Katolik 100% Indonesia"*[56] (100% Catholic and 100% Indonesian) reveal both an increasing awareness of their identity in a multicultural and multi-religious Indonesian society where they just are a small minority. These slogans also point to the call of young Catholics to step out of their comfort zones and reach out to those who are different. In Indonesia, as religious intolerance increasingly seeps in, if Catholic youth will continue to play a role for the public welfare and their presence be seen as a blessing for the nation, it will be through their active involvement in the field of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue that changes will be made. Thus, the Catholic youth are called to "rekindle their past enthusiasm for nation building" as suggested by Michael J. Schuck and John Crowley-Buck in their study on Catholicism in Indonesia. They write:

> Indonesian history suggests that the more active Catholics are in the struggle for democracy, the greater is the growth of Catholicism in Indonesia. In addition, the greater the Catholic Church grows in faithful leadership and faithful members in Indonesia, the more is provided for the growth of a religiously plural and culturally rich democracy in Indonesia. Learning from this lesson of history it is necessary that Indonesian Catholics begin to encourage each other to get involved as much as they can in the democratic struggle of their nation.[57]

CONCLUSION

In this study on young people in Indonesia, we found out that all the events that occurred in Indonesia throughout the twentieth century bear an indelible mark of revolutionary young people. Starting from the episode of the 1908 national awakening through the 1928 Youth Pledge, the 1945 Proclamation of Independence, and the regime changes in 1966 and 1998, traces of the role of Indonesian youth can still be clearly identified, both in action and in substance. Moreover, although the concepts denoting the youth have changed, the term "youth" remains value-laden because young people are still viewed as embodying hope for the future.

Drawing on recent studies, we argued that since the end of the authoritarian regime

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56. *"100% Katolik 100% Indonesia"* was the slogan of the renowned Bishop Albertus Soegijapranata (1896–1963) who successfully made the Vatican to be the among the first foreign states to recognize the independence of new country.

57. M. J. Schuck and J. Crowley-Buck, eds, *Democracy, Culture, Catholicism: Voices from Four Continents* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 97.

and the beginning of the twenty-first century, a new generation of young people has emerged in Indonesia. Indeed, amidst sustained economic growth and increasing democratization of the country, this generation—which is often depicted as being in moral danger and inclined to consumerism and hedonism—is among the most technologically sophisticated. Yet it remains rooted in their families and communities and continues adhering to traditional and religious values. Furthermore, amid seemingly contradicting forces, Indonesian young people have always been able to strike a not-always-easy balance. Further, we pointed out that there are generational trends among these contemporary young people moving into adult age: longer schooling, the postponement of adulthood which is particularly evident through delays in the marriage age, and digital media consumption.

At a personal level, we think that one of the challenges for contemporary young people in transition into adulthood is to recapture that spirit of common purpose which drove the previous generation. Because if young people come together, there is no limit to what their can achieve. Likewise, if the present generation protects and continues to defend the values that the previous generation fought for, then it will proudly be able to pass on the baton to the next generations.

Ultimately, since contemporary young people in Indonesia still find meaning and identity in religion, we think that managing the youth and activating their role through government bodies and religious institutions is the key to Indonesia's rise and a guarantee of its survival in unity and in cultural and religious diversity.

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Japan

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M any of the books, journals, and magazines showcased on the shelves of Japanese libraries and newstands seem to deal more and more with issues related to the condition of young people. These publications ask questions about the future of Japanese youth, analyzing their discontents and looking to identify their innermost desires. Televised debates and reports about young people make use of a rich and growing jargon. Expressions commonly used to indicate a number of symptoms of the malaise affecting Japanese youth include: "parasite singles" (*parasaito singoru* パラサイト·シングル, people who have reached the age of marriage but still live with their parents, whether by choice or out of necessity); "school refusers" (*tōkō kyohi* 登校拒否); "compensated dating" (*enjo kōsai* 援助交際); *otaku* (おたく, young people with a certain predisposition to technology and a limited tendency to socializing); "herbivorous men" (*sōshokukeidanshi* 草食系男子, young men who are excessively docile and passive, and thus incapable of establishing constructive relations with young women); "freeters" (フリーター, young people who seek short-term and precarious jobs as a

way to rebel against the traditional lifetime job system); *hikikomori* (引きこもり, teenagers withdrawing within the domestic walls to avoid contact with the outer world); *ijime* (いじめ, bullying); *taibatsu* (体罰, corporal punishment as an ideologically sanctioned form of discipline); and others.

Television programs occasionally deal with the generational gap that divides adults and young people, with the former characterizing the latter as "inconsiderate" (*omoyari ga nai* 思いやりがない), "self-centered" (*jiko chūshin* 自己中心), and "spoiled" (*wagamama* わがまま); and the latter referring to the former as "old-fashioned" (*furui* 古い), "stiff" (*katai* 堅い), and "inflexible" (*jūnansei ga nai* 柔軟性がない). Adults accuse young people of "being lazy," of "being unable to speak properly," and of "lacking an identity," while young people retort that adults "have no identity but only a role," "do not know how to enjoy life," and "live a life of mere formalities and conventions."[1]

And yet, those who follow these sociological skirmishes among specialists and authorities in the field will notice that something is missing in the debate, that some issues should be the object of serious reflection but are hardly ever mentioned (e.g., the slow social and cultural decline of Japanese society as a whole, not only of the juvenile world), and that there is a tendency to value statistics and diagrams more than the opinion of the interested party, that is, the young people themselves.

In this study we deal with the situation of Japanese youth and ask what kind of society they have inherited from their predecessors. We will then ask whether this society affords them the opportunity to be satisfied and happy and, if that does not prove to be the case, if it gives them the possibility to transform it in accordance with their beliefs. The study will end with an overview of the condition and expectations of young Japanese Catholics—a minority within the minority of those who will soon be called to mold the future of Japan.

WHAT KIND OF JAPAN DID YOUNG PEOPLE INHERIT FROM THEIR PREDECESSORS?

If we take a close look at the history of contemporary Japan, we will notice some key factors that contributed to shape the society and culture in which Japanese youth find themselves living.

At the beginning of the 1980s, Japanese society was looking back on a remarkable ascent from the ashes of its disastrous and humiliating defeat in World War II to the world's forefront industrialization and national wealth. During those years, while Japan was considered one of the richest countries on the planet, virtually all families had members who vividly remembered the scarcity of the wartime period and the times of poverty and struggles to overcome hardship. Having gone through the period of reconstruction,

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1. On the various expressions and manifestations of this generational conflict, see the excellent contributions in the volume edited by G. Mathews and B. White, eds, *Japan's Changing Generations: Are Young People Creating a New Society?* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

fast-paced industrialization, and rapid cycles of economic growth, each postwar generation could genuinely claim to be better off than the previous one.

The "Japanese dream" continued unperturbed even when in the mid 1980s the country reached an astonishing level of wealth and economic power. When Japan readily accepted to help the American economy by depreciating the dollar against the yen, no one could imagined that the combination of such factors as the liberalization of financial regulations and the increase of liquidity in the banks (due to Japan's relative productive ability to keep up with the demand of goods and services) would have triggered a massive spiral that propelled real estate prices to spectacular heights, only to collapse and crash with the burst of the speculative bubble economy of the 1990s. Since then, Japan experienced a deflation period known as the "Lost Decade" (*ushinawareta jūnen* 失われた10年), which sanctioned the end of the post-World War II economic boom.[2]

After the burst of the speculative bubble, the Japanese financial system underwent a crisis that had serious repercussions on national fiscal policies, industrial productivity, the labor market, and family income. Due to the tightening of money supply, many corporations tried to deal with their debts by cutting personnel expenses and shifting their manufacturing plants overseas. The negative effect of stagnant wages was felt on prices and on family consumption as the various administrations which successively came to power during the "Lost Decade" were incapable of finding a viable solution against the forces of deflation.

Unlike people from previous generations, those who had finished their studies or had just graduated from university could no longer hope to build their futures on the same economic and social premises which until then had sustained the Japanese family and labor system. The relocation of factories abroad made it harder to access the labor market, and new corporate governance models started to introduce radical changes in the employment system. Irregular and precarious employment practices were developed to meet the need for a more flexible and cheap labor in response to the liberal and capitalist system. A university degree would no longer guarantee immediate access to permanent employment. For the first time, unemployment started to be considered a social problem and soon young people were forced to make a living from temporary employment, reduced salaries, and longer working hours. In this situation, the loss of job security and

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2. Among the numerous publications dedicated to the phenomenon of the "Lost Decade" (soon changed into the "Lost 20 Years," *ushinawareta nijūnen* 失われた20年) in Japan, see Y. Funabashi, B. Kushner, eds, *Examining Japan's Lost Decades* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016); J. Kingston, "The Lost Decade of the 1990s" in *Japan's Quiet Transformation. Social Change and Civil Society in the Twenty-First Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 1–41. For an overview of the various social changes that are taking place in Japan see J. Kingston, *Contemporary Japan: History, Politics, and Social Change since the 1980s* (Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013); R. T. Segers, ed., *A New Japan for the Twenty-First Century. An Inside Overview of Current Fundamental Changes and Problems* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008); S. Kawano, G. Roberts, S. Orpett Long, eds, *Capturing Contemporary Japan: Differentiation and Uncertainty* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014); S. J. Maswood, *Japan in Crisis* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

the gradual erosion of the factors which contributed to social stability forced Japanese men to relinquish their traditional role of breadwinners. At the same time, the number of young women holding a university degree increased year after year, and soon their male peers became unable to meet their expectations as marital partners. According to some experts, all these factors contributed to Japan's current demographic crisis—although increase in the average age of marriage and decline in the birth rate certainly started well before the burst of the financial bubble.

In the last five years, Japan has lost roughly one million of its formerly 127 million people. According to the projections of the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research in Japan (IPSS, *kokuritsu shakai hoshō jinkō mondai kenkyūsho* 国立社会保障人口問題研究所), in the next fifty years Japan's population is expected to shrink by a third and, unless proper policies are quickly implemented to reverse the course of this downward spiral, the share of the elderly (aged over 65) will rise from its current 33.87 million to 39.35 million by 2042, while the working population (aged 15–64) will decrease from 77.28 million in 2015 to 50 million by 2056.[3] The repercussions of this demographic decline are already being felt across all sectors, including healthcare (due to the increase in medical expenses for the elderly), social welfare, and the pension system (which were established during a time of economic prosperity and were structured for a society with more or less universal marriage and a stable birth rate). When the funds devolved to maintaining the growing number of elderly people will cut into the disposable income of the ever fewer workers and inflate the debt burden of future generations, Japan will

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3. Cf. <http://www.ipss.go.jp/pp-zenkoku/e/zenkoku_e2017/pp_zenkoku2017e_gaiyou.html#e_zenkoku_II_A-1>. Here are some salient data from the same website. *Population Size and Growth*: According to the 2015 Population Census, which serves as the base year for these projections, the total population of Japan in that year was 127.09 million (total population including non-Japanese residents). Based on the results of the medium-fertility projection (1.45 in 2015, 1.42 in 2024, 1.43 in 2035, and 1.44 in 2065), Japan is expected to enter a long period of population decline. The population is expected to decrease to around 110.92 million by 2040, fall below 100 million to 99.24 million by 2053, and drop to 88.08 million by 2065. *Population Age Composition 1) Trends in the Young-age Population under 15.* The annual number of births in Japan (Japanese) has declined from 2.09 million in 1973 to 1.01 million in 2015. Consequently, the population of children under the age of 15 (young-age population) has also decreased from 27 million in the early 1980s to 15.95 million, as recorded in the 2015 Population Census. According to the medium-fertility projection, the population size of this age group will fall to the 14 million mark by 2021. The decline will continue and the population of this age group is expected to fall below 10 million by 2056, eventually decreasing to around 8.98 million by 2065. *2) Trends in the Working-age Population (aged 15 to 64 years).* The population of the working-age group increased consistently during the post-war years, reaching its peak at 87.26 million in the 1995 Population Census. However, since then, it has entered a period of decline and, according to the 2015 Population Census, the population has fallen to 77.28 million. According to the results of the medium-fertility projection, the population of this age group is expected to continue to decrease to below 70 million by 2029, below 60 million by 2040, below 50 million by 2056, and will eventually drop to 45.29 million by 2065. *3) The trends exhibited by the old-age population (65 years of age and over)* will grow from 33.87 million as of 2015 to 36.19 million by 2020. It will then enter a period of modest increase for some time, reaching 37.16 million by 2030, and will peak by 2042, reaching to 39.35 million. The trend will subsequently shift to a steady decrease and the size of the age group will ultimately reach 33.81 million by 2065.

almost certainly find itself on the brink of poverty.[4] In fact, the country's fiscal debt stands at 250% of its gross domestic product and, due to its inverted population pyramid, it is unrealistic to think that taxpayers will be able to repay its public debt while caring for their elderly.[5] And even though the term "hope" (*kibō* 希望) emerged as a buzzword in political slogans and televised debates, its frequent use draws attention rather to its opposite, showing a lack of confidence in what the future has in store for the Japanese people.[6] At the onset of the 2000s, the mainstream media featured lively discussions on social inequality, a concept that had received very little attention from leftist political parties, sociologists, and intellectuals reflecting on the destiny of the country. The widening disparities between rich and poor, captured by the expression "gap society" (*kakusa shakai* 格差社会*)*, was slowly eroding the widespread belief that the majority of the Japanese population belonged to the middle class.[7] However, while the public debate was dominated by concepts like temporary employment, structures of inequality, and the gradual impoverishment of the weaker social classes, no political force emerged to challenge (let alone replace) the neoliberal ideology advocated by the party in power, the Liberal Democratic Party.

The loss of productivity, market leadership, and balanced distribution of wealth were coupled with the decline of Japanese economic and political competitiveness with other Asian nations, especially China, whose stunning economic growth allowed it to emerge not only as the new economic powerhouse in the region, but also as a political power worldwide. Various opinion polls conducted at the time have shown a widespread sense of mistrust of China among Japanese people, who were worried about the security and peace of their country. China's geopolitical strategies and the strengthening of its military power were considered a threat to the delicate stability in the South West Pacific Area that had long be maintained by the hegemonic power of the United States.[8] Feelings of uncertainty and fear among Japanese were fueled also by repeated ballistic missile launches by

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4. See the stimulating studies by F. Coulmas, *Population Decline and Ageing in Japan. The Social Consequences* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008); Y. Funabashi*, Japan's Population Implosion. The 50 Million Shock* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); J. Traphagan, J. Knight, *Demographic Change and the Family in Japan's Aging Society* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003).

5. According to the on-line daily newspaper *Japan Today*, Japan's debt hit the historic record-high figure of 1.087 trillion yen. Cf. <https://japantoday.com/category/politics/japan-gov't-debt-hits-record-high-1-087-tril.-yen-at-end-march>.

6. Suffice it to notice that in 2017, the name chosen for the new political party of Tokyo's popular Governor, Yuriko Koike, was *Kibō no tō* (希望の党 Party of Hope).

7. The then popular slogan, "one hundred million middle class" (*ichioku sōchūryū* 一億総中流), is a precise expression of that conviction. It should also be noticed that many of the reforms approved in the early 2000s were signed by Junichiro Koizumi, who was Prime Minister at the time. See on this Y. Uchiyama, *Koizumi and Japanese Politics. Reform Strategies and Leadership Style*. Trans. C. Freire. (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

8. On the recent status of relations between China and Japan see R. Shibata, "Japan's Identity Crisis and Sino-Japanese Relations" in M. Mullins and K. Nakano, *Disasters and Social Crisis in Contemporary Japan: Political, Religious, and Sociocultural Responses* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 81–103.

the North Korean regime and its nuclear weapon program, as well as by the proliferation of international peacekeeping operations by the Japan Self-Defense Forces (*jieitai* 自衛隊). These operations were viewed as a patent violation of the Constitution, which expressly prohibits Self-Defense Forces to operate beyond national borders.[9] Territorial disputes between Japan, China, and Russia, as well as ongoing controversies about the atrocities committed by the Japanese army during World War II, constantly remind the Japanese people of the precariousness and fragility of peace in their region.

Probably the event which reveals even more clearly the feelings of anxiety and uncertainty affecting the Japanese state of mind is the triple disaster caused by the powerful earthquake that hit Japan in March 2011. A magnitude 9.0 earthquake off the shore of northwestern Japan caused a massive *tsunami*, which in turn hit the costal towns and villages, claiming more than 16.000 lives and leaving 340.000 without homes, most of whom still live in evacuation centers. The earthquake and the *tsunami* were followed by the nuclear disaster occurring at the Fukushima Dai-ichi Nuclear Power Plant complex, whose radiations affected wide portions of the territory and forced hundreds of thousands of local residents to evacuate their houses. Air and water pollution, the dangers connected to the dispersion of radioactivity, and the implementation of energy saving programs following the immediate shut-down of the remaining nuclear reactors affected not only the lives of the residents of the impacted areas, but also urban centers of the Greater Tokyo and its surrounding prefectures, as well as the entire country. Moreover, the hesitant way in which Tepco (Tokyo Electric Power Company, the operator of the power plant) dealt with the calamity and the Government's lack of transparent communication after the incident instilled in the population a sense of mistrust and resignation about the accuracy and veracity of the official information made available to them concerning the real extent of the disaster.

Paradoxically, this complex situation of instability, fear, and insecurity led to the re-installment of the Liberal Democratic Party in political power. Its conservative ideology and its attempts to mobilize the nation for the revitalization of a "beautiful Japan" (*utsukushii kuni e* 美しい国へ) brought forth a new wave of nationalism, which resulted in street rallies against Korean minorities (including cases of hate speech) and the revision of the 2006 Fundamental Law on Education (*kyōiku kihon hō* 教育基本法), which rehabilitated patriotic morality as a central element of education and legitimized the use of the flag and of the national anthem in public schools.[10] By contrast, the same feelings of

9. R. Matthews and K. Matsuyama, eds, *Japan's Military Renaissance?* (Hampshere and London: The MacMillan Press, 1993). See also note 11.

10. On this topic, see: M. Mullis, "Neonationalism, Politics and Religion in Post-disaster Japan" in M. Mullins and K. Nakano, *Disasters and Social Crisis in Contemporary Japan: Political, Religious, and Sociocultural Responses*, op. cit., 107–131; H. Hardacre, "Revision of Administrative Law a Shortcut to Constitutional Revision" in T. Inoguchi and U. Jain, eds, *Japanese Politics Today: From Karaoke to Kabuki Democracy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 201–17. The slogan "Toward a beautiful Japan" is evoked in the title of a 2006 book by the then Prime Minister, Shinzō Abe.

dismay contributed to foster civil protests, social movements and political demonstrations against the legislation supporting the expansion of the role of Self-Defense Forces, against renewed attempts to rewrite the Constitution through the Peace and Security Preservation Law (*heiwa anzen hōsei* 平和安全法制), and against the Public Information Disclosure Law (*tokutei himitsu hogohō* 特定秘密保護法, eventually approved in December, 2013), which many considered as blunt censorship of critical voices opposed to the Government.[11]

Now, if in this brief overview we focused primarily on the political and socio-economic events in Japan's recent history which contributed to shape the context in which generations of young Japanese happen to live today, we will now move on to consider the changes to the religious landscape which took place during the same period.

A notable phenomenon on the Japanese religious scene is the presence and proliferation of movements referred to as "new religions"—so called because they are manifestly different from the traditional religions of Shinto, Buddhism, and Confucianism (as well as Christianity), even though they are heavily influenced by their principles and beliefs. In general, studies of this phenomenon distinguish three groups of new religions based on the timeline of their appearance.[12] Modern Japanese history begins with the Meiji era (1868), and the first group of new religions (among which Tenrikyō 天理教, Kurozumikyō 黒住教, and Ōmotokyō 大本教) emerged during the social turbulence that lead to and followed the so-called Meiji Restoration. This period witnesses the transition from the feudal system of the Tokugawa era (1603–1868) to a modern and industrialized State,

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11. The Japanese Constitution, written immediately after the war under the supervision of the u.s. occupying forces, stood for an indisputably pacifist approach in foreign policy. For the Defense Department this meant the establishment of the Japan Self-Defense Forces, namely, armed forces allowed to operate only to protect the national territory against armed attacks. These forces were forbidden from operating beyond Japan's territorial waters. The new Peace and Security Preservation Law altered this approach and, with it, the Constitution. In fact, Japan will now be able to deploy its armed forces also for other purposes than self-defense. Moreover, in keeping with the State Secrecy Act, disclosure of a state secret will be punished with incarceration for ten years, while soliciting for such a disclosure, even if unsuccessfully, will be punished with five years in prison. The most disturbing aspect of the new legislation is the indeterminateness of the concept of "state secret" and the fact that public administrations can impose it arbitrarily whenever they see fit. For example, if the Ministry of Defense or the Ministry of Industry consider certain information sensitive to national interest, whether political or military, they will prohibit or at least strongly inhibit its disclosure, as with the data concerning the current nuclear emergency at Fukushima. For a careful analysis of the State Secrecy Act, see L. Repeta, "Japan's 2013 State Secrecy Act. The Abe Administration's Threat to News Reporting" in *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 2014, 12/1 at <https://apjjf.org/2014/12/10/Lawrence-Repeta/4086/article.html>. These two laws were ratified during the first mandate of Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, who is a member of both *Shinseiren* (神政連 *Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership*, established in 1969) and of *Nippon Kaigi* (日本会議 *Japan Conference*, established in 1997), two institutions tied to Shinto ideology whose purpose is to revive ancient traditions such as support for the figure of the Emperor and the role of the Imperial House in public life. On Abe, see the recent study by D. Akimoto, *The Abe Doctrine. Japan's Proactive Pacifism and Security Strategy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

12. For an in-depth study of these religious movements in Japan, see T. Tosolini, ed., *Threshold Religion* (Osaka: Asian Study Centre, 2012), 65–88, including bibliographical references.

but with a kind of government overseen directly by the Emperor. During this time, the founders of the new religions were primarily shamanic figures who drew deeply from Shinto, Buddhist, and Christian traditions. However, their activities were limited and regulated by the Meiji Constitution, since the principles which guarantee the freedom of religion and the separation of religion and state will not be established until the third Constitution in the history of Japan, drafted during the country's military occupation by the Allies (*Supreme Command of Allied Powers*, or scap) and promulgated in May, 1947.[13] The Japanese Government, for example, systematically and violently persecuted the members of Ōmotokyō because this religious movement accorded its shamanistic leader Deguchi Nao (1836–1918) the status of a living god whose authority outranked that of the Emperor.[14] This fact obviously constituted an act of *lèse-majesté* against the Japanese Government (which established Shinto as the state religion, with the Emperor as the supreme figure), leading to the destruction of all buildings and facilities owned by Ōmotokyō and to the exile of its spiritual leaders.

The second group of new Japanese religions (among which Sōka Gakkai 創価学会, Risshō Kōseikai 立正佼成会, and Reiyūkai 霊友会) came to prominence immediately after the war. Their founders were for the most part Buddhist laypersons who promoted their own interpretation of Buddhist scriptures and teachings. The new Constitution adopted after the war guaranteed freedom of religion and allowed these new movements to proselytize, which led to an increased number of followers and transformed these groups into powerful religious organizations.[15] From a doctrinal standpoint, their major appeal consisted in the earthly benefits (*genze riyaku* 現世利益) based on the ritual of ancestor worship.

13. The other two Japanese Constitutions are the Seventeen-article Constitution (*Jūshichijō kenpō* 十七条憲法), drafted by Shōtoku Taishi in 604, and the Meiji Constitution (*Dai nihon teikoku kempō* 大日本帝国憲法), promulgated in 1889. Bocking writes about the latter: "The Constitution of the Empire of Japan (*Dai nihon teikoku kempō*) promulgated in 1889 was the result of seventeen years of secret drafts and debate over issues including religious freedom and the role of Shintō in relation to the state. The constitution, based on a final draft by Itō Hirobumi and Inoue Kowashi, incorporated a distinction between private religious belief and public religious activity proposed by Herman Roesler, a German legal advisor to the Japanese government. Article 1 proclaimed that 'the empire of Japan shall be ruled over by emperors of the dynasty, which has reigned in an unbroken line of descent for ages past', while Article 3 stated that 'the person of the emperor is sacred and inviolable'. Article 28 of the Constitution made the provision that 'Japanese subjects shall, within limits not prejudicial to peace and order, and not antagonistic to their duties as subjects, enjoy freedom of religious belief'. From the 1890's participation in civic Shintō ritual was increasingly viewed as a non-religious civic duty. Consequently, freedom to withdraw from Shintō rites was unconstitutional" in I. Bocking, *A Popular Dictionary of Shinto* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1995), 118–19.

14. On the events surrounding this religious movement and Deguchi Onisaburō, Deguchi Nao's successor, see N. Stalker, *Prophet Motive. Deguchi Onisaburō, Oomoto, and the Rise of New Religions in Imperial Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008).

15. "The current Japanese Constitution has several Articles which refer to religion. Article 14 prohibits discrimination on grounds of creed, Article 19 says that 'freedom of thought and conscience shall not be violated' and article 89 forbids the use of public funds for any religious purposes not under public control. Article 20 guarantees both freedom of religion and separation of church and state. The Constitution's view that freedom of religion implies complete separation of religion and state was intended to eradicate any ves-

The third group of new religions emerged in the 1970s and were attempts to provide a solution to two problems of post-industrial Japanese society. The first problem is related to the widespread awareness that simply acquiring material affluence did not satisfy one's own spiritual needs. The Japanese, while successful in their attempt to equal the world's great economic powers, began to feel a deep sense of existential emptiness and insecurity. Some people, in order to find relief from the routine of their affluent lives, undertook Yoga training; others engaged in mystical meditation and explored the occult and paranormal phenomena. The second problem concerns the deep inequality and sharp disparity of treatment that people experienced in their daily lives and in the workplace—and this even though the Japanese people had firmly embraced such democratic ideas as the equality of all human beings. The bitter competitiveness required to gain access to prestigious universities and a school system no longer geared toward learning and knowledge, but merely toward memorizing data and information, put great pressure on all those youth whose academic performance was poor and could not bear the weight of this style of education. Adults, too, started to feel the weight of the same excessive competitiveness, bordering on exploitation. The *salaryman* (サラリーマン), hailed as the *samurai* of the twentieth century, were subject to long hours of unpaid overtime work, while the exclusion of women from public life was ideologically justified with the slogan, "Good wife, wise mother" (*ryōsai kenbo* 良妻賢母), to reinforce the notion that the area of competence of women is the family, and that their natural vocation is the education of children.

This situation of existential and spiritual instability led to the establishment of new religious movements such as Agon Shū (阿含宗), Aum Shinrikyō (オウム真理教), and Shūkyō Mahikari Kyōdan (宗教真光教団). Among them, Aum Shinrikyō deserves special mention. Its founder, Asahara Shoko (née Chizuo Matsumoto), who claimed himself to be the savior of humankind, was executed on 6 July, 2018 for the 1995 Tokyo subway sarin attack which killed 12 people and let over 6.000 intoxicated.[16] Taking its first steps in the mid 1980s as a yoga club influenced by Hindu and Buddhist ideas, by the end of the decade Aum was officially recognized as a religious movement. It began its criminal activities against its opponents partly by emphasizing the Buddhist concept of *poa* (or *powa,* the transfer of consciousness at the moment of death). This concept was reinterpretd in a violent key by the intelligentsia of the movement, teaching that to kill someone with negative *karma* will eventually help that person to achieve a better spiritual condition. This aspect of the movement went hand in hand with its growing interest for paranormal

tiges of 'state Shintō' (Kokka Shintō) and has given rise to complex legal debates about the involvement of public officials in postwar Shintō, mostly centred on the status of the Yasukuni Jinja" in I. Bocking, *A Popular Dictionary of Shinto*, op. cit., 18.

16. Of the books dealing with this incident (known as the "Subway Sarin Incident" or *chikatetsu sarin jiken* 地下鉄サリン事件), see R. Kisara and M. Mullins, *Religion and Social Crisis in Japan: Understanding Japanese Society through the Aum Affair* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); I. Reader, *Religious Violence in Contemporary Japan: The Case of Aum Shinrikyo* (Honolulu: University of Hawaiʻi Press, 2000); H. Murakami, *Underground*. Trans. A. Birnbaum and P. Gabriel. (New York: Vintage, 2000).

phenomena and the imminent arrival of Armageddon, which will spare only those who recognize Asahara as supreme *guru* and follow his teachings. In this light, Aum members were required to leave their families, entrust all their belongings to the movement, and undergo expensive initiatory practices, including the assumption of drugs. However, while Aum is considered a dangerous and criminal religion, police estimates indicate that it counts roughly 1.200–1.300 members, that about 200 people join the movement each year, and that 65% of its followers are under 35.[17]

The new religious movements that arose in this last period were attempts to provide an answer to the widespread discontent and dissatisfaction of the new generations of Japanese and to the lack of meaning that resulted from a rapid economic growth achieved at the expense of spiritual depth and the gradual and silent violation of human dignity and human rights.

ARE JAPANESE YOUTH HAPPY TODAY?

Two questions spontaneously emerge as we consider the current condition of Japanese society briefly described above. First, can young people, who inherited this condition, modify it if this fails to match their needs and desires? Second, are young people happy to belong to Japanese society today? The first question will be addressed in the next chapter. In the present one, we will take some time to reflect on the degree of happiness (or of discontent) experienced by young people in Japanese society.

This question was suggested to us by some recent publications on the degree of happiness and "well-being" perceived (or not perceived) by young people. The first publication, by the young Japanese sociologist Noritoshi Furuichi, is titled *Happy Youth of a Desperate Country: The Disconnect between Japan's Malaise and Its Millenials*. The author curiously argues that even though young Japanese will soon be forced to face an uncertain future due to the country's massive debt, its aging population, and the collapse of its welfare system, they are still able to maintain an extremely positive mindset and outlook on life with respect to the present.[18] According to the recent *Public Opinion Survey Concerning People's Lifestyles* (*Kokumin seikatsu ni kansuru seronchōsa* 国民生活に関する世論調

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17. See the article "Young People Easily Get Sucked into Aum Shinrikyo Spinoff Aleph" at <https://japantoday.com/category/features/kuchikomi/young-people-easily-get-sucked-into-aum-shinrikyo-spinoff-aleph>.

18. N. Furuichi, *Happy Youth of a Desperate Country: The Disconnect between Japan's Malaise and Its Millennials*. Trans. M. Raj. (Tokyo: Japan Publishing Industry Foundation for Culture, 2017). The first edition of the book was published in 2011 and became an instant best-seller, partially perhaps in light of Japan's concerned self-criticism during the months that followed the March 11th disaster. But contrary to the sentiments that were common at the time, Furuichi did not foresee any long-term change in the social values that had supported and guided Japan. In fact, he was convinced that many of those who were not directly affected by the disaster had already returned to their daily routine, living by the same practical guidelines they used to follow before wide areas of their country were ravaged and rendered inhabitable by the earthquake, the *tsunami*, and the nuclear incident.

査), conducted by the Cabinet Office of the Japanese Government, 78.4% of the young people interviewed declared to be satisfied with their lives—one of the highest figures recorded since 1967. Another survey on the attitudes of youth conducted by NHK (*Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai* 日本放送協会, or Japan Broadcasting Corporation) revealed that 90% of high school students declare to be "happy," and that the majority of junior high school students think of themselves as "very happy."[19]

The question asked by Furuichi is, therefore, rather unsurprising: Why do young people, despite the crisis currently experienced by their society, express a high level of satisfaction and enjoyment in life? And his answer is almost prosaic in its simplicity: Japanese youth feel happy because Japan is a wealthy and peaceful nation with low levels of crime, excellent academic standards, and well-established lifestyle infrastructure. The continuous deflation which began in the 1990s, for example, has encouraged higher-quality products at competitive prices, so that it is now possible to maintain a reasonably enjoyable standard of living at a relatively affordable price.

The second element which fosters a happy self-image among young people is the welfare of the family. In 2012, 48.9% of unmarried youth between the ages of 20 and 35 were living with their parents, whose financial support allowed them freely to spend their modest salary, without their thinking of themselves as part of that group of people approaching the poverty threshold.[20]

A third element which, according to Furuichi, contributes the happiness of youth is friendship, or relationships with friends (*nakama* 仲間). According to the *National Survey of Lifestyle Preferences* (*Kokumin seikatsu senkōdo chōsa* 国民生活選好度調査) conducted by the Cabinet Office, of the young people between the ages of 15 and 20 who were asked which factors they considered more important for happiness, 60.4% answered: "Relationships with friends." Furuichi adds:

> In response to the question, "At what times do you feel a sense of fulfillment or sense of purpose in life?" the number of youth answering "When I'm with peers or friends" is upswing. In 1970, the percentage of people reporting a sense of fulfillment when together with peers or friends was 38.8 percent, but in 1980 this figure rose all the way up to 58.8 percent, increasing to 64.1 percent in 1990 and stabilizing at around 74% percent after 1998.[21]

Thus, when Japanese youth are occasionally referred to as "inward looking" or "insular" people (*uchimuki* 内向き), it would be wrong to assume that they do now value things around and close to them, like their friends. Rather, when measuring the degree of hap-

19. Ibid., 87–95.

20. "For example, in 2009, 1.656 people in Japan died of starvation, but among them only four were in their twenties, and just fifteen were in their thirties" Ibid., 231.

21. Ibid., 96.

piness and life-satisfaction, their interest has shifted from abstract issues such as "society" and "politics" to more concrete ones such as "friendship" and "hometown"—things that are in one's immediate world. Therefore, the *uchimuki* phenomenon is not a sign of indifference toward others or of intolerance toward that which is new and uncommon (as we might suspect if we considered that many youth have no intention of leaving their country to study or work abroad);[22] on the contrary, it may also reflect high levels of *present contentment*—a consequence of the wider well-off socio-economic situation of Japan.

The mentality of Japanese youth, according to Furuichi, is well encapsulated by the formula "Enjoy today, tomorrow is coming"— for rather than striving for long-term goals, the focus of the modern youth is on having fun "here and now" (*ima, koko* いま, ここ). In fact, "When people lose hope for the future, they can become 'happy.'"[23] For this reason, today's youth cannot relate to the feelings of their parents or of those who lived through the time of Japan's fast rising living standards and economic growth during the 1980s. The mantra of those years, namely, that "I'm poor now but the future will soon be filled with riches" is no longer relevant for the new generations, who are rather intent on taking advantage of the extraordinary wealth amassed by the country during those years.

Nevertheless, it must be observed that such a stunning level of well-being does not always and immediately translate into something positive. The government's lifestyles survey which aims at those above 20 years of age, for example, showed that a significant number of interviewees were sincerely "worried about what will happen to them in the future". During the period of the bubble economy, 40% of the youth replied that they were worried about their future, while in 2009 this figure increased to 67%. Thus, these data show that when thinking about the future Japanese youth feel preoccupied, but it appears they are happy only when they concentrate on the present. After all, it is no mystery that young people look to the future with resignation: they already know that soon they will be unable to rely on the welfare provided by their families, and that within a few decades the many parents who are still supporting their children will require nursing care, and that accumulated savings will in many cases disappear entirely. This means that many young people are well aware that they will not be able to afford to get married, and the

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22. However, this does not mean that young people should be labeled "the one-mile tribe," as they were called by a recent TV show (*Kume Hirosi keizai supesharu: Shin Nipponjin arawaru* 久米宏·経済スペシャル新ニッポン人現わる! – *Hiroshi Kume's Economy Special: The Arrival of a New Species of Japanese!*). In the show, youth are viewed as a "new species," not only because they refuse to spend their money, but also because "The number of young people who never ventured beyond the radius of less than 1.6 km from their homes on their daily lives was on the rise." Furuichi thinks that such views are rather doubtful, since those who hold them fail to take into account that it is not so much young people who changed, but rather the criteria used to calculate the number of those who travel abroad. For example, when in the past youth studied outside of Japan, they would travel to English speaking countries like the U.S., and this was the index used to calculate the number of those studying in non-Japanese universities. Today, however, young people have diversified their interests and travel to several countries, including China. Ibid., 71–80.

23. Ibid., 93.

number of those who will live alone, even fearing a lonely death (*kodokushi* 独孤死), is bound to rise considerably.

Furuishi ends his study by pointing out another important aspect of Japanese youth: their (nearly total) lack of interest in political debates and in the contribution they can make to society through their participation in politics. He writes:

> Statistically speaking, relative to other nations, Japan's sense of political power-lessness is strong. The percentage of high school students who believe that they are incapable of influencing the decisions of the government by themselves is as large as 80 percent. This is twice the corresponding value found in the United States. While many young people are interested in "changing society"… this interest doesn't readily lead to voting behavior or political participation. Per-haps young people are too society-oriented, or too "other-people" oriented, so much so that they lose interest in dealing with politics related to their "own" problems. After all, even though they can build schools in Cambodia and become passionate about giving aid to Africa, they do not think about taking any kind of action for the municipality they belong to.[24]

This means that Japan will soon miss the political turnover needed to promote policies "for" and "with" young people, and to plan for their future and the common good of soci-ety. And this explains once more why the new generations of Japanese prefer to rely on a happiness based on the "*carpe diem*" slogan and a well-being "here and now," knowing only too well that what the future has in store for them is disappointment, dismay, and a life which will provide very few occasions to feel truly satisfied and happy.

However, we must notice that Furuichi's study (among the first in its genre in Japan) has not always been met with sympathetic consensus. Several critics have pointed out that his analysis attempts to measure the degree of fulfillment and satisfaction of Japa-nese youth only through socio-economic surveys and inquiries, while it is evident that one cannot avoid the question (of a rather anthropologic and extra-economic nature) concerning the very concept of "happiness." Now, an inquiry on people's "happiness" is faced immediately by the fundamental problem of a definition of this term in relation to (or in contrast with) other terms normally used in academic debates such as "existential gratification," "well-being," and "quality of life." Holtus and Manzenreiter write in a recent study:

> Quality of life is often associated with the objective factors needed to stabilize or enhance individual life chances. By contrast, life satisfaction, subjective well-being and happiness are based on individuals' subjective judgment and

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24. Ibid., 226.

self-assessment. Among these three concepts, life satisfaction is regarded as the one that is mostly linked with cognition, and happiness as the one that is seen as an effect or emotion. The conceptualization of well-being, which sometimes includes an emotional dimension, usually exceeds the hedonist dimension of positive emotions and includes activities and realms of life that may not be purely pleasurable but give meaning to one's life.[25]

After this terminological analysis, the authors conclude that to use the term "happiness" without excessively distinguishing it from "subjective well-being" seems to be the most appropriate way to describe "the overall positive appreciation of life results and prospects."[26]

Moreover, a study of the concept of "happiness" from an anthropological point of view must take into account not only the diverse interpretations of it given by different individuals contingent on their age, but also the meaning of happiness as mediated by the individual's social and cultural context.[27] For this reason, before we go on to reflect on the degree of subjective well-being experienced by youth in Japan, we would like to pause to consider the work by Mathews and Izquierdo titled *Pursuits of Happiness. Well-Being in Anthropolotical Perspective*, a study attempting to reconcile the idea of happiness as it is shaped by social and cultural structures with that conceived as the expression of the subject and its past experiences.[28] Mathews and Izquierdo argue that happiness can ben schematically divided into four experiential dimensions: the physical, the existential, the interpersonal, and the structural.

The *physical* or *material dimension* of happiness concerns the reality of the body and its place in the material world, including health, the absence of pain and physical impediments, the ability to move freely, sensual pleasure (experienced through touch and taste,

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25. B. Holthus, W. Manzenreiter, *Life Course, Happiness and Well-Being in Japan* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 6.

26. Ivi.

27. To this day, studies on the relevance of age for the concept of happiness have yielded contrasting results ranging from the so called "U-shaped effect" to its opposite (i.e., "the inverted U-shaped effect," or "bell curve"). When applied to subjective well-being, the "U-shaped effect" indicates that people perceive themselves to be happier in the initial and final stages of their existence rather than in the itermediate one, a person's working years (cf. A. Clark, A. Oswald, P. Warr, "Is Job Satisfaction U-Shaped in Age?" in *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Phycology*, 1996, 69: 57–81). By contrast, the "inverted U-shaped effect" shows that when considered on the basis of family life, financial situation, job, and health, individuals perceive themselves to be happier during the intermediate period rather than during the initial and final stages of their lives (cfr. R. Easterlin, "Life Cycle Happiness and Its Sources: Intersections of Psychology, Economics and Demography" in *Journal of Economic Phycology*, 2006, 27: 463–82). Both studies are cited in B. Holthus, W. Manzenreiter, *Life Course, Happiness and Well-Being in Japan*, op. cit., 11–3.

28. G. Mathews, C. Izquierdo, eds, *Pursuits of Happiness. Well-Being in Anthropological Perspective* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010). The authors state: "The primary value of this book… lies in the ethnographic particularities of its chapters, showing the complex varieties of well-being that exist around the world. But beyond this, the book's concluding pages map these varieties onto a common human framework, and point to at least the possibility of a broader, perhaps universal comparison of well-being," Ibid., 19.

but also through the feeling of wonder arising, for example, contemplating a sunset or visiting a temple), the pleasure of human interaction, and, last but not least, aesthetic pleasure (e.g., a haircut, a tattoo, fashion, personal adornments).[29]

The *existential dimension* refers primarily to the ability to reflect on moral questions and the different value systems that give people a sense of their existence and a direction in their behavior as individuals. Religion, ideologies, customs, and traditional values may be viewed as moral indicators that allow for a meaningful interaction among the members of the same community. To be sure, happiness may be enhanced or diminished depending on an individual's degree of autonomy and freedom from such social laws and norms, hence these factors could also be considered as elements that inhibit the individual's self-determination and freedom of action. But it is an open question whether the independence that subjects demand for themselves is only a spontaneous need or something induced (within the cognitive belief structure of values) resulting from past experiences or socially shared perceptions. In any event, while the physical dimension is at least partially leaning toward the hedonist nature of happiness, the existential dimension is likely to coming closer to its eudaimonic interpretation.

The *interpersonal dimension* derives from the simple realization that individuals are essentially social beings and that oftentimes happiness is the result of a collective action (or, conversely, that the unhappiness of individuals has a negative influence on society). Family relations, membership to various groups or associations, and one's circle of friends are only some indications of the fact that sharing, relationships, and the experience of being welcomed and accepted by others are essential to one's happiness.

One last factor which Mathews and Izquierdo consider relevant to determine the degree of well-being of individuals concerns *local* or *national institutions*, that is, structures whose task is to coordinate and coherently unify the ways in which people relate to each other, meet, and express their desires and opinions. Institutions and social and political forces are only some of the possible organizational structures in which the individual operates and can be (or feel) happy.

Now, if this formulation of the criteria used to measure the personal, collective, and cultural well-being is sufficiently clear, what would be the results of applying a similar interpretive model to the reality of youth in Japan? Would an analysis of Japanese society conducted through these numerous variables confirm the study by Furuichi, who concluded that although youth feel insecure and unsatisfied about the society they live in, instead of setting for themselves some achievable goals for the future, they are happy to

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29. For this and other descriptions, see G. Mathews, C. Izquierdo, "Conclusion. Towards and Anthropology of Well-Being" in G. Mathews, C. Izquierdo, eds, *Pursuits of Happiness. Well-Being in Anthropological Perspective*, op. cit., 248–66. See also the interesting study by A. Lingis, *Body Transformations. Evolutions and Atavisms in Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005). Through philosophical, psychoanalytic, and anthropolotical concepts, Lingis studies perception and individuals' experience of their bodies, as well as the ways in which these are inevitably transformed by evolution and culture.

live "here and now" with their friends? These are only some of the questions addressed by Carola Hommerich in her article "Anxious, Stressed, and Yet Satisfied? The Puzzle of Subjective Well-Being among Young Adults in Japan."[30] Using the criteria established by Mathews and Izquierdo, Hommerich organizes her study of happiness among Japanese youth by considering not only the subjective element implicit in the concept of happiness, but also its existential, interpersonal, and institutional factors, through which happiness is manifested. The data used for analysis were collected in a nationwide postal survey conducted in 2009 on a sample of 5.000 repondents of various ages, classes, and locations within the country. The response rate was 37.2%, and the author examined 1.633 of the questionnaires received.

In order to compare the distribution of the degree of life satisfaction across age, respondents were divided in four age groups: the 20– to 34-year olds (who are about to enter the labor market or are in the early stages of their careers); the 35– to 49-year olds (who are in the midst of their careers, have taken on responsibility, i.e, by getting married or taking on a loan to buy a house etc., and are feeling the effects of economic stagnation as companies have cut back on welfare benefits); the 50– to 64-year olds (who have established themselves in work and family life, but are beginning to worry about their financial situation as they approach retirement); the over-64-years olds (who have retired from work and whose major concern now is to avoid spending their elderly life alone).

The three possible answers to the question on the perception of happiness in relation to age were "rather not satisfied," "undecided (neither/nor)," and "rather satisfied". The result of this first analysis was that the most satisfied of the respondents were the members belonging to the first age group (62.7% for women, 40.8% for men) and to the last age group (71.1% for women, 63.8% for men). Middle aged responders, by contrast, were the most apprehensive about their live satisfaction (among those aged 35–49, 49.8% for women and 43.7% for men, and among those aged 50–60, 57.5% for women and 56.3% for men). Thus, these results indicate not only that the distribution of life satisfaction across age groups shows a typically "U-shape" (with life satisfaction being lower for the middle aged but increasing again for the two oldest age groups),[31] but also—and against Furuichi's book title—that not *all* young people are happy: in fact, the percentage of those who declare themselves to be happy is only slightly above 50% (51.7% when considering men and women together). As to the cause of this difference among the various age groups, Hommerich's question is left unanswered. She states:

What we do not know from these simple distributions is what causes these

30. C. Hommerich, "Anxious, Stressed, and Yet Satisfied? The Puzzle of Subjective Well-Being among Young Adults in Japan" in B. Holthus, W. Manzenreiter, *Life Course, Happiness and Well-Being in Japan*, op. cit., 72–88. Our account of the relation between the expressions of well-being and the variables elaborated by Mathews and Izquierdo in Japan draws from this precious study.

31. Cf. note 27.

differences between the age groups. If these distinctions relate to a certain generational "mindset," as suggested by Furuichi, then we should find that the structure of subjective well-being is different for younger, middle-aged, or elderly Japanese, meaning that different dimensions of well-being impact to differing degrees.[32]

In order to test her hypothesis, Hommerich suggests that we use the model followed by Mathews and Izquierdo, but for each dimension she decided to insert some indicators necessary to study the variations of the level of well-being experienced by people belonging to different age groups. As possible determinants of life satisfaction, Hommerich included gender and indicators of socio-economic status to measure the material dimension of well-being; the interpersonal dimension was measured "as resources of social capital in form of a tangible relationships with family and friends and feeling of belongingness to society." To represent the existential dimension of well-being, "measures of how well respondents coped with their lives as apparent through experiences of anxieties and the optimism or pessimism of their future outlook were included."[33]

Other questions—such as "Do I trust people?" "When in need, do I have family or friends on whom I can rely?" "How do I think of my role in society?"—were also asked to evaluate whether young adults consider subjective well-being independently of their degree of belonging to society as a whole.

The selected answers given by this group of youth yielded the following results. First, the variance in levels of life satisfaction explained by differences in gender and socio-economic status affects only 11% of the younger respondents, while the percentage rises slightly in other age groups. This indicates that the material dimension of well-being is of less importance for young Japanese than for members of the older age groups. Levels of life satisfaction did not differ by education for the 20- to the 34-year-old. In relation to the employment status, only unemployed who were actively looking for work had significant lower levels of life satisfaction than regular employees. Moreover, there was no significant difference among respondents who were in regular or non-regular employment. This indicates that for young Japanese—as long as the responded has a job—the precarity of the employment *per se* did not impact on their perception of personal well-being. With regard to income, only young respondents with a higher salary declared to be significantly more satisfied with their lives than those in the lowest income category, while the members of the other age groups maintained the importance of having some savings to fall back on in times of need.

When analyzing the level of social well-being and anxiety for the future, the answers given by young Japanese indicate the importance of the existential and interpersonal dimensions, as well as the level of trust toward others and toward society. However,

32. Ibid., 77.
33. Ivi.

the result that most of all contradicts Furuichi's analysis concerns the relationship with friends, in particular the confidence that one may rely on them (or on one's family) in times of need. The outcome of the survey is that for young people (as well as for members of other age groups) to have friends has hardly any bearing on one's level of life satisfaction. Instead, what was more decisive for the 20– to 34-year olds was whether they were able to feel like valuable and accepted members of society: the higher the level of social affiliation, the higher the level of personal satisfaction. Thus, contrary to Furuichi's argument, feeling like being part of the social whole matters, especially for the life satisfaction of the young. One result which supports Furuichi's hypotheses, instead, concerns the feeling of anxiety about the future: having positive expectations for one's standard of living in the future has a negative effect on the life satisfaction of the majority of the members of the 20– to 34-year olds, while this kind of anxiety does not seem to affect the members of the other age groups.

Thus, Hommerich's analysis indicates that the perception of the level of life satisfaction does indeed differ across age. For the group of 20– to 34-year olds, socio-economic status has no significant impact on personal well-being once interpersonal and existential aspects of well-being are controlled for. Furthermore, while general social trust yielded a significant positive effect on the life satisfaction of the of the 20– to 34-year olds, having friends or a family to rely on in times of need did not, thus contradicting the argument brought forward by Furuichi that for young Japanese having close friends counts most to make them happy. At the same time, and again running contrary to Furuichi's argument, anxieties experienced in the present, as well as those held toward the future, do indeed reduced the level of life satisfaction.

Now, what do all these data tell us? Can it really be positive when only slightly more than 10% of the 20– to 34-year olds feels able to hope for a better future? Is it enough to feel satisfied in the present, even when this might mean forfeiting one's future? According to Hommerich, in order to answer these questions, it seems necessary to take into account another sociological and psychological factor, one which has been ignored by the studies we have considered so far, namely, *hope*, that "something" which inspires individuals to make projects, act, and change themselves and their environment. German sociologist and philosopher Ralf Dahrendorf, for example, sees hope as the necessary ingredient that "motivates people to change their conditions, or their lives." [34] Émile Durkheim even went so far as to claim that when hope for a positive future is lost, "we may be sure that life itself loses its attractiveness, that misfortune increases, either because the causes of suffering multiply or because the capacity for resistance on the part of the individual diminishes."[35]

With this in mind, therefore, we could say that to feel satisfied simply "here and now," without worrying for what might happen tomorrow, cannot be considered the ultimate

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34. R. Dahrendorf, *Inequality, Hope, and Progress. Eleanor Rathbone Memorial Lecture* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1976), 19.

35. E. Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society*. Trans. W. D. Halls. (New York: Free Press, 1997), 190.

goal of existence—at least not when it comes at the expense of the future development of younger generations and, thereby, also to the development of society as a whole. For this reason, Hommerich, in bringing her study to a close, writes that while her work

> takes a first step toward a better understanding of the "structure" of the well-being of Japanese youth, the puzzle of their high levels of life satisfaction is by no means fully solved. It even seems questionable whether their high satisfaction levels can be interpreted as something positive. On the contrary, they seem to be indicative of a generation of youngsters who have arranged themselves with a society that does not give them room to grow, a generation who has given up on expecting more for themselves in the future and—as a result—does not speak up for their own rights or push for change.[36]

Nevertheless, we may ask whether the paralysis currently experienced by Japanese young adults derives from the inability to conform to the *status quo* or whether the same youth are incapable of—or worse, indifferent to—any social change whatsoever. Put differently: do Japanese youth, today, desire to change their society but are prevented from doing so by the older generation, or have they definitively given up all hope for any kind of social transformation, thus having resigned themselves to simply trying to survive in the present situation? The next chapter will attempt to provide an answer to this very decisive question.

YOUTH AND THE DIFFICULT TRANSFORMATION OF JAPANESE SOCIETY

The question of whether Japanese youth can change society cannot be addressed without considering the changes taking place in the world, that is, the consequences of globalization (with its insistence on the liberalization and flexibility of the job market) for society, and the spread of so-called "global values" such as consumerism, individualism, competitiveness, and efficiency. These ongoing worldwide transformations represent an immense challenge for a "conformist" country like Japan where acquiescence to respected protocols, roles, and institutionalized life paths tends to be so important that "success" does not exist independent of such legitimate means, at least for those who subscribe to mainstream values. A number of studies in social and cultural psychology have shown that in "conformist" environments social structures and practices motivate individuals to adjust the self to the situation (instead of influencing it), to maintain social harmony (instead of finding alternative ways to affirm themselves), and to affirm one's interdependence with others (rather than asserting one's individuality).[37]

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36. C. Hommerich, "Anxious, Stressed, and Yet Satisfied? The Puzzle of Subjective Well-Being among Young Adults in Japan," op. cit., 88.

37. See on this H. R. Markus e S. Kitayama, "Culture and the Self: Implications for Cognition, Emotion

Japan's answer to the pressures of globalization may be summed up in the observation that the Japanese job market did undergo substantial reforms, but it was transformed asymmetrically: on the one hand, public officials and the elite of the old generation resisted change by protecting the long-term employment system; on the other hand, the economic reforms they promoted affected only those youth who were on the verge of entering the job market, thereby blocking much of the potential that youth have to offer to innovative ideas and strategies in order to increase competitiveness in the global market.

Cheng and Chiu devised a model of social analysis in which they distinguish between "hot reactions" and "cool responses." "Hot reactions are emotional, reflexive responses evoked by perceived threats to the integrity of one's heritage cultural identity," while "cool responses are reflective mental processes that facilitate the use of ideas from foreign cultures as a means to further one's valued goals."[38] In other words, compared to resistant hot reactions, cool reactions are selectively integrative of old and new elements. Now, if we were to analyze the way a society relates to the process of globalization by means of this model, we could say that Japanese society is the typical case of a "hot reaction." For instance, while public debates in the early 2000s tended to suggest that the values of youth in their 20s had significantly changed compared to their parents' generation (i.e., the fact that they moved away from hard work and company loyalty towards self-actualization or a slower pace of living), other studies indicated that in general people interpreted the dominant life-course in a wholly "conservative" way, that is, as a steady progression from an excellent high school (or university) into a large company leading to rising wages that enable family formation. Notice, moreover, that this view was naturally assumed despite the fact that fewer and fewer young labor market entrants can now hope to meet this ideal in practice.[39]

Taking a cue from the case we just described, we could ask how Japanese youth are reacting to this situation, which destabilized a transition—that between the end of one's studies and the beginning of one's employment—once considered secure and steady. A sociological study by Toivonen, Norasukkunkit, and Uchita tries to provide an answer to this quesiton on the basis of the classic modes of individual adaptation in situations of anomie investigated by Robert Merton.[40] According to the American sociologist, the majority

and Motivation" in *Psychological Review,* 1991, 98/2: 224–53. This bibliographical reference is taken from T. Toivonen, V. Norasukkunkit and Y. Uchita, "Unable to Conform, Unwilling to Rebel? Youth, Culture and Motivation in Globalizing Japan" at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3171786/>. We rely on these precious contributions for our analysis of the relation between the phenomenon of globalization and the world of Japanese youth.

38. S. Y. Cheng and C.-Y. Chiu, "Cultural Psychology of Globalization" in R. Schwarzer and P. A. Frensch, eds, Personality, Human Development, and Culture. Vol. 2. (Hove and New York: Psychology Press, 2010), 203–4.

39. D. Chiavacci, "From Class Struggle to General Middle-Class Society to Divided Society: Societal Models of Inequality in Postwar Japan" in *Social Science Japan Journal*, 2008, 11/1: 5–27.

40. While drawing inspiration from Durkheim (according to whom anomie is a temporary situation of objective absence of stable and shared norms due to a rapid cultural change and the resulting transformation

of individuals in a given society are "conformists" who aspire to achieve certain culturally dominant success goals through accepted institutional means (e.g., education and paid work in legitimate occupations). Those who instead are unable or unwilling to conform on one or both of these counts become either *innovators*, *ritualists*, *retreatists*, or *rebels*. Schematically, these types could be described as follows:

> *Conformists*: conform to goals and are able to access legitimate means; can hope to enjoy culturally expected rewards; *innovators*: reach toward dominant goals through innovative, less legitimate means; may enjoy culturally expected rewards; *ritualists*: conform to legitimate means but have little hope for culturally expected rewards; *retreatists*: disillusioned with both dominant goals and means; disengage from mainstream society in various ways; receive no rewards; burdened by stigma; *rebels*: create original goals as well as means; engage with society on their own terms and they represent the main group driving social change.[41]

The study of Japanese youth conducted by Toivonen, Norasukkunkit, and Uchita is prefaced by two specifications: first, they assume that only those who self-identify as being part of the middle-class subscribe to the dominant success goals and life-course expectations pointed out before (approximately 90% of Japanese fulfill this condition); second, the category of "innovators" does not seem to be relevant in Japan, since it presupposes that cultural goals and institutionalized means are essentially separable from each other, while typically the members of the Japanese middle class are convinced that any notion of success depends on the adherence to certain legitimate means and social roles.

In sum, the study reveals that a significant number of Japanese young adults have adapted to the asymmetrical labor market changes by moving toward the "ritualist" type, that is, the group of those trying to conform to the dominant cultural expectations—

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of the values, norms, and rules of a given social context), Merton deviates from him for several reasons, as one can see from the following passage, taken from *Social Theory and Social Structure*: "Cultural structure may be defined as that organized set of normative values governing behavior which is common to members of a designated society or group. And by social structure is meant that organized set of social relationships in which members of the society or group are variously implicated. Anomie is then conceived as a breakdown in the cultural structure, occurring particularly when there is an acute disjunction between the cultural norms and goals and the socially structured capacities of members of the group to act in accord with them. In this conception, cultural values may help to produce behavior which is at odds with the mandates of the values themselves" in R. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 216. In other words, anomie originates from the fact that in some societies there is a strong generalized (i.e., exercised indifferently on all social strata) thrust to internalize certain goals (and to struggle to achieve them) which are typical of one class or status; at the same time, there are neither equal starting opportunities nor equal institutional means to achieve such goals.

41. T. Toivonen, V. Norasukkunkit and Y. Uchita, "Unable to Conform, Unwilling to Rebel? Youth, Culture and Motivation in Globalizing Japan," op. cit.

although the chances of deriving from it the same rewards enjoyed by the previous gen-
eration have dramatically decreased. While every year a remarkable number of young
Japanese successfully obtains a university degree (over 50% of high school students now
graduate four-year universities), 20% of them fail to find a stable job (in 1992 it was only
7%), and a fourth of *all* 25– to 34-year-olds work under atypical contractual arrangments
(temporary or part-time) without culturally valued rewards. The negative consequences
faced by these youth are well known: they will have to give up both the prospect of a
decent salary and access to essential occupational skills (since in Japan training takes
place mainly on the workplace), full social security benefits, all-important membership
in an organization that values them, the social status of an adult full-time worker, and the
opportunity to form a family.

Yet, despite such major disadvantages, most "ritualits" still accept to be part of a job
market that relegates them to the periphery of society and deprives them of all prospects
for the future. One reason for this paradoxical situation is that Japan's dualized labor
markets renders extremely difficult to move inwards from the margins into the core of
the labor force. Another reason is that the "conformist" Japanese scenario renders any
attempt at social and cultural renewal and innovation virtually impossible.

However, there are some youth who, whether by necessity or choice, do move out of the
labor market altogether: it is no coincidence, for example, that some scholars and the media
turned their attention to the phenomena of *hikikomori* (引きこもり, or people who chose to
withdraw from social life, often seeking extreme forms of isolation and confinement), *neeto*
(ニート, or NEET, an English acronym for "not (engaged) in education, employment, or train-
ing"), and of *furītā* (フリーター, or people who, after their studies, seek precarious and short-
term jobs only to be able to maintain themselves and not to lose their independence).[42] In

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42. See on this the important contribution by R. Goodman, Y. Imoto and T. Toivonen, eds, *A Sociology
of Japanese Youth. From Returnees to NEETS* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011). The goal of this work
is to illustrate why some of the problems of Japanese youth became for a time the object of particular atten-
tion, but soon returned to anonymity without having been solved. For example, "If the 1970s saw concerns
rise over returnees and what was known in Japanese as *student apathy*, and if the 1980s saw attention turn
to the affluent and imprudent 'single nobility' (*dokushin kizoku*) and 'school-refusers' (*tōkō kyohi*), the 1990s
was the era of the nerdy *Otaku*, 'compensated dating' (*enjo kōsai*), *parasite singles* and *freeters,* the latter
denoting young workers said to have rejected the hegemonic *salaryman* lifestyle. The 2000s, on the other
hand, came to be defined by the socially withdrawn *hikikomori*, work-shy NEETs and the *working poor*. From
the late 2000s onwards, the media has been replete with images of metrosexual but lackluster 'herbivorous
men' (*sōshokukeidanshi*)[men who have no interest in getting married or finding a girlfriend] and young
women engaged in increasingly aggressive 'marriage-seeking activities' (*konkatsu*), reflecting, in part, current
anxieties over gender relations. In each era, many of these youth labels have come to be taken well beyond
their original context to symbolize not just particular groups but the entire *nation*," Ibid., 2. The thesis of this
study is that the social status of these labels given to youth is not only fluid and constantly changing but,
more alarmingly, that the meaning given to each of them can be interpreted, manipulated, and exploited by
the interests of any given social entity related to this phenomenon (e.g., the government, various economic,
educational, and media structures and industries, etc.). We will limit ourselves to one of the cases analyzed by
Sharon Kinsella in the aforementioned volume, the phenomenon of compensated dating (*enjo kōsai*), which

Merton's terms, these groups of youth could be positioned as "retreatists" who have become disillusioned with both the dominant cultural goals and the legitimate means.[43]

But in spite of massive cultural and institutional restrictions, there are some youth in Japan whose comformism is less pronounced and who succeeded in finding creative ways to negotiate life and work in a globalized society. These are the people Merton calls "rebels" (perhaps better described as "non-conformists"), people who stand outside the framework of dominant cultural model by setting original goals for themselves and using innovative means to achieve them. In Japan, where public uprisings and mass protests are notoriously absent, this group of young adults are the most likely to help society to change and better adapt to the constant ebb and flow of globalization. In fact, those youth who remain in one of the other adaptive categories (conformists, ritualists, and retreatists) lack the interest, competence, and even the possibility to reconfigure the existing system, of which they are mere beneficiaries or consumers.

One of Japan's recent and best known "non-conformists" is certainly Horie Takafumi (堀江 貴文 1972–), a young ambitious investor from Tokyo who became president of the group that owned the web portal *Livedoor*. His case is instructive because Horie felt few qualms about challenging entrenched Japanese business interest, including those of the Broadcasting Corporation and its elderly owners. In effect Horie, not only exemplified the values of competition, individualism and creativity by challenging the seniority-based social model, but he also embodied the ethos of inspired global capitalism that was felt to be a threat by influential parts of the Japanese business world. Not surprisingly he met fierce resistance from the establishment, and in 2006 he was arrested on charges of security fraud

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dominated pop culture, politics, and academic research in the 1990s. The author claims that this phenomenon was not as endemic and widespread as sensationalist reports in newspapers and magazines would have us believe. She ironically contends that if we were to trust the studies and surveys on youth conducted by the various agencies in the industry, "there were 175.000 junior high and high school girls getting involved in compensated dating in spring 1996. This figure is equivalent to the population of a small city, almost four times the number of registered prostitutes in pre-war Japan, or about the same figure as the number of 'comfort women' utilized by the Japanese Imperial Army between 1930 and 1945. In the summer of 1996, the Japanese public was effectively invited to consider the scenario of approximately 175.000 schoolgirls simultaneously launching their careers as prostitutes—each meeting customers for 'compensated dates'" in S. Kinsella, "Narratives and Statistics. How Compensated Dating (*Enjo Kōsai*) Was Sold" in Ibid., 73. It is more likely that these sensationalist reports were rather due to a shift in the balance of power between genders during the 1990s: an ever increasing number of women had in fact decided to reclaim their financial and sexual independence from men, and the idea of compensated dating was an element that fit well in the intense cultural debates at that time. "Compensated dating represents a narrative about greedy young schoolgirls… who are guilty of voluntarily selling their bodies for large sums which they extort from Japanese men, and who deserve strict punishment for their unacceptable behavior," Ibid., 74.

43. Scholars usually describe the causes of these phenomena (especially *hikikomori*) by appealing to psychological factors (absence of a father figure and excessive maternal protection). However, we think that another cause should be considered, namely, the fact that youth voluntarily withdraw from the job market not only because they cannot deal with the pressure of Japanese society over self-fulfillment and personal success, but also because they refuse to share the cultural goals proposed (and/or imposed) by society and reject the available means to achieve them.

that eventually led to a two-and-a-half year prison sentence. Thus, Horie's "defeat" sent the depressing message to all those who, eager to follow in his footsteps, intended to challenge and modify the Japanese economic and cultural model without thereby sacrificing their creativity. However, Horie's misadventure, had the merit of highlight the dilemma faced by all conformist societies: whenever the mainstream institutions and elites react to the dynamics of globalization in "hot ways", "cool" and integrative adaptations by individuals and companies are resisted and held back by less adaptive but powerful elements.[44]

All of this will perhaps help us to understand why another quieter variety of talented young leaders chose to negotiate conformist pressures in less conspicuous yet highly tactful ways. These are highly ambitious and socially motivated young individuals who lead flexible non-profit organizations and small for-profit companies. Among these, worth mentioning are the names of Kudō Kei (工藤 啓 1977–), founder of the Tokyo-based non-profit organization *Sodate age* (育て上げ), whose purpose is to help unemployed youth between the ages of 15 and 39 to be reintegrated into the job market, and Komazaki Hiroki (駒崎 弘樹 1979–), founder and president of the non-profit organization *Florence* (フローレンス), whose purpose is to provide support for young mothers who are unable to care for their disabled children because they cannot leave their workplace.[45] Such young leaders, who promote their unconventional ideas as innovations and solutions to social problems, display some common features, which could be summarized as follows: They

> (1) articulate original ideas and social visions; (2) employ original methods; (3) craft implicit strategies to challenge the status quo; (4) incorporate internationally diffused ideas (such as "self-efficacy" and "social inclusion"); and (5) fuse "Japanese" and "global" values (such as interdependence and independence).[46]

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44. On the Horie Takafumi "case" see, among others, the interesting inteview granted to the *Japan Times* during the time his career was on the rise ("Takafumi Horie: Livedoor Whiz Kid Sets a New Style" at <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2004/09/05/people/takafumi-horie/>. Asked whether one day he would consider entering politics, Horie answered: "No. Japanese politics only influences Japan, which is such a small island country. I think business is a lot more interesting, because you get to do it globally." On Horie's judicial affair, see "Japanese Internet Tycoon Guilty of Securities Fraud" at <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2007/mar/16/japan.internationalnews>. The article reports that "Horie's lawyer, Yasuyuki Takai, said he feared the ruling would discourage talented young entrepreneurs from attempting to break the mold of Japanese business."

45. *Sodate age*'s (to educate) web pages is found at <https://www.sodateage.net/en/>. On the motives that inspired Kudō's intitiative and the activities it promotes, see the article "Tokyo NPO Helps Jobless in the Prime of Life Get Back on Their Feet" at <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/03/17/national/social-issues/tokyo-npo-helps-jobless-prime-life-get-back-feet/>. For an analysis of the policies adopted by Japan to help its youth (especially NEET) to enter the workplace, see T. Toivonen, *Japan's Emerging Youth Policy: Getting Young Adults Back to Work* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012). On Hiroki Komazaki see his web page at <https://www.komazaki.net/> and the web page of *Florence* at <https://florence.or.jp/>.

46. T. Toivonen, V. Norasukkunkit and Y. Uchita, "Unable to Conform, Unwilling to Rebel? Youth, Culture and Motivation in Globalizing Japan," op. cit.

Finally, we should notice that those who challenge Japanese conformism, not "head on" (like Horie), but rather in less explicit yet effective ways (like Kudō and Komazaki), come from a conformist environment (hence they do not belong among the ritualists or the retreatists), and possess the social capital (networks), the psychological resources and interpersonal skills which allow them to assume the role of rebels or non-conformists. Thus, it should not be surprising that these youth, while grown up in affluent conditions, possess some "post-materialist" values which allowed them to foster the necessary qualities (e.g., tolerance for diversity, openness, attention to the needs of others, and self-actualization) to steer Japanese society toward a different and, perhaps, better future.

CATHOLIC YOUTH IN JAPAN

In early November, 2017, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan pushlished the document *Answers from Japan to the Questions in the Preparatory Document of the xv Ordinary General Assembly of Synod of Bishops*.[47] The text is neatly divided in three sections. In the first ("Japan Statistics"), the bishops provide an overview of data from which we learn that in Japan there are 18.49 million youth between the ages of 15 and 29 (i.e., 14.5% of the country's population which stands at 126.761.000 people as of April, 2017), that the average marriage age has been stable in the last 5 years (31.1 for men and 29.4 for women), and that among young people, 64% have a job (16.3 million), 2.6% are unemployed (0.68 million), and 2.1% are NEET (0.54 million). The second section of the document offers an evaluation of the current ecclesiastical, social, and existential situation of youth and, finally, the third section presents a list of pastoral activities geared toward the vocational accompaniment and discernment of young people.

In the second section of the document ("Evaluating the Situation") the bishops point out that the Church is closely monitoring the situation of youth both at the diocesan and at the parochial level. Thus, the bishops voice their concern about certain social phenomena related to the life of young people, for instance the fact that they are so busy with study and work (or with seeking employment) that they have no time to think about their existential situation, or the difficulty they find to establish meaningful relationships with their colleagues or schoolmates (partly due to their lack of interpersonal skills). The Church, on its part, recognizes that its answers to the problems of youth have been insufficient, not only because priests are often compelled to direct their energies to the care of the ill and the elderly (given the overall ageing of the Japanese population), but also because the gap between both the language and the respective interests of youth and Church is gradually widening. Not without some apprehension, the bishops ask: Today, what do young people seek in the Church, and what do they expect from it? What place do they wish to find, and what are the major obstacles that prevent the Church to offer

47. The document can be found at <https://www.cbcj.catholic.jp/2017/11/02/16539/>.

them what they seek? The answer to these questions is rather complex, yet frank. Youth expect the Church to be a place where they can gather to regain some spiritual and mental peace, away from the obligations of society, which, oblivious of their opinions and beliefs, demands from them unconditional obedience; a place, above all, where they may find someone patient enough to listen to their problems. Young people feel the need to share their views with their peers, to establish disinterested friendships, to find a place where they may strengthen independent thinking, be acknowledged in their individuality, and valued for their faith. While aware of all this, the Church admits that it is not always able to provide an adequate response to what youth need and desire, in the first place because

> Due to the management system of the church, the reduced number of priests and so forth, we cannot satisfactorily provide a church open to young people. At the same time the companions who would walk together are exhausted and unable to welcome young people with vigor.

Secondly, and perhaps more alarmingly, the document states that

> Many young people also participate in activities such as liturgical ministries, altar serving, religious education, communications, and various committees. However, where a parish has hide-bound habits, elders treat young people as a handy labor force. Young people who have been in the parish a long time are often forced by their long connection into certain roles in the church and they tend to shy away from responsibilities because there is no freedom to do what would make them happy. There are many cases where young people stay away from the church because, "If I go to church, I will have jobs dumped on me."… As a result, there are many cases where responsibilities in the parish are borne by young people who have recently moved into the parish, those newly visiting the church, and the recently baptized.

Nevertheless, the Church recognizes that when youth manage to find a role and a place in the parish, they show

> Great skill in dealing with children. Young people seem to be more able to connect with peers and those younger than they rather do to their elders…When the young people are connected at the community, district, parish, or national level beyond the parish, they exert great power. When youth gather, they use their own initiative to supply for any lack of support from their elders. In fact, such support can become a stifling framework, narrowing their activities. It is more important than ever to emphasize autonomy.

It is essential, therefore, to allow young people to express their creativity, their initiative, and the vision through which they intend to contribute to the growth of the Church. The Church, on its part, must shoulder their efforts and provide all the human and spiritual support they need. It is no accident that the document should explicitly mention a problem that requires an urgent solution, namely the fact that many priests, whether because they lack time or the necessary jargon, are unable to provide youth with sound spiritual direction, the guidance which young people themselves wish to receive.

Moreover, the Church is aware that it needs to attract and engage non-Christian youth as well. In order to do so, the Church knows that it is important to try to take advantage of all possibilities, whether ecclesiastical (e.g., the celebration of weddings and funerals, when many non-Christian youth enter a church for the first time), traditional (e.g., festivities and volunteer activities), or innovative (e.g., the digital world, the Internet, the social media). Particular attention should be given to academic structures, places in which youth spend most of their time. In this connection the document states that

> Among Catholic school teachers and students, there are few Christians. At those schools, retreats, meditation, seminars, etc. are planned for young people. Also, as the number of priests and religious on faculties has decreased, lay faculty members oversee faith education. However, under the current educational system, it seems that faith training is becoming unclear. In response to that situation, in some dioceses attempts are being made to appoint a local parish priest to the educational institution as chaplain. In the past, there were many students who were baptized at their Catholic school and who later entered the religious congregation that ran the school. However, that situation has almost disappeared. Still, there are students who are influenced by religion classes and events such as experiential learning and volunteer activities and hope for Baptism. Also, some schools actively cooperate in church activities by providing venues when church events such as bazaars are held.

Along with the academic world, another sphere where the Church could make its positive presence felt among youth is that of Japanese culture. Although society is currently under the pervasive influence of secularization and globalization, the Church could emphasize certain identity traits that have always been appreciated in Japan. For example,

> From ancient times Japan has cherished such heart-focused ideals as caring, mercy, humility, concern for one's neighbors, the hospitality, and closeness to socially vulnerable people. From the viewpoint that the gods live in things in the natural world, there are hearts that respect nature, cherish all things, see everything is a gift from God, and receive all as a grace. The values embodied in such "ways" as the tea ceremony, flower arrangement, archery, judo, kendo or the like may share connections with Christian values in their concern for thinking

of another's position, showing hospitality, cherishing things, and maintaining harmony.

The third section of the document ("Sharing Activities") focuses on some pastoral activities promoted by the Church for the vocational accompaniment and discernment of young people, activities such as prayer (the creation of prayer groups on the model established in Taizé, monthly retreats and spiritual exercises), study (Biblical study groups, catechesis, reading of the Church's documents), social service (initiatives promoting pacifism, activities for the homeless), and attentiveness to multiculturalism (regular meetings with Catholics from other countries, promotion of pilgrimages to famous Christian places).

Finally, the document highlights three kinds of activities which the Japanese Church wishes to share with the universal Church: first, activity in support of pacifism (partly thanks to John Paul ii's exhortation to be peace builders after the painful experience of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki); second, overseas support and overseas exchange, since "Through study and overseas exposure to Asian countries, youth experience a deepened awareness of the world (especially the developing countries) and experience solidarity with them"; and third, youth activity beyond the diocese:

> Young people come together and exchange information beyond diocesan boundaries through Network Meetings (nwm). nwm is a place of free exchange among Catholic adolescents as well as laity, religious, and priests who support young people's activities, a forum to share their problems and faith. It is also a place to meet and encounter young people who do diverse activities in various areas.

With these final recommendations, the Document drafted by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan recognizes that while the situation of youth is constantly changing and the Church sometimes struggles to understand their world and their real sufferings, hence to offer the proper spiritual and human remedy, Christ's message maintains all its vitality and freshness. This message ought to be translated in a language which young people can understand, so that by being fascinated by it, they may find a way to embody it in a society—Japanese society—which has become increasingly efficient, but also increasingly lonely and spiritually poor.

CONCLUSION

In their introduction to the volume *Japan's Changing Generations*, G. Mathews and B. White present two alternative interpretations of the "generational conflict" between youth and adults:

> Many Japanese writers tend to assume that the "generational gap" is a matter of history: that young people are different from their elders in ways that will lead to a Japan of the future very different from Japan of the recent past... Others have seen the "generational gap" as a matter of life course: of youth rebelling, and then fitting into the adult social order, just as they did their elders on an earlier era... If in the 1960s somebody lamented that "younger workers are individualistic," that "the old loyalty is disappearing"... these younger workers became the corporate elders of today, making similar criticisms of today's younger workers.[48]

Both interpretations contain some elements of truth. The latter, insisting that the generational gap is a normal fact of people's lives, seems to be confirmed by the recent history of Japan. For example, the youth who took part in the protests of the 1960s have become today's corporate warriors as well as imitators of the people they then identified as the primary enemy of Japan's social and political renewal. Today, however, the generational difference appears to take on the typical features of a historic change, simply because young people seem to be more and more interested and busy in finding alternative and independent ways to shape their future. To be sure,

> This does not mean that Japanese young people are rebelling *en masse* against their elders, engaging in street demonstrations and political protests: this is clearly not happening. There is no discernible "anti-establishment" political movement among young people, no organized efforts to create a better society; young people tend to accept without protest their apparently diminished prospects in life... However, on the individual level, many of these young people are indeed acting to destroy the Japanese society of their elders.[49]

At a personal level, in fact, young people not only do they react contrary to the expectations of society (as *neeto* and *freeters* do) or shy away from open conflict (as some *hikikomori* do), but they also purposefully try to change their vital space and emphasize values like friendship, self-esteem, tolerance, greater attention to other people and their problems (e.g., the existential difficulties addressed by non-profit organizations such as *Sodate age* and *Florence*)—in a word, all those elements which can neither be marketed nor exchanged, hence values which appear to be non-conformist to a society undergoing a spiritual crisis.

The same dynamics that regulate society seem to be reflected in the Church, where young people are almost forced to submit to the will of older Christians, who typically

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48. Cf. G. Mathews and B. White, eds, *Japan's Changing Generations: Are Young People Creating a New Society?*, op. cit., 5.

49. Ibid., 6.

make few concessions to the innovativeness of youth. In this case, too, the new genera-tions tend to avoid direct confrontation and prefer to leave the Church, but sometimes they also embrace their creativity and become involved in volunteer activities, organize prayer meetings more in keeping with their language and sensiblity, and take on the role of cathechists to help younger members to grow in the understanding of their faith.

The social change that is in act today, precisely because it is not collective and at the center of the media's attention, but rather personal and reserved, often remains invisible and hidden—so much so that several studies on the situation of Japanese youth at times record only the negative and deviant aspects of this condition, while maintaining that Japan is and will remain a country impervious to any innovation. Our study, by contrast, was an attempt to analyze some of the elements of the condition of youth which remain invisible but are also slowly contributing to change some strata of society. And in this we find ourselves in agreement with what Castiglione wrote in 1528 about those who too readily sought to label the young as the bearers of social malfunctioning:

> And truly it seems against all reason and a cause for astonishment that maturity of age, which, with its long experience, in all other respects usually perfects a man's judgment, in this matter corrupts it so much that he does not realize that, if the world were always growing worse and if fathers were generally better than their sons, we would long since have become so rotten that no further deterio-ration would be possible.[50]

50. Cited in Ibid., 199.

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Matteo Rebecchi

The Philippines has one of the youngest populations in Southeast Asia. According to the Philippine Statistic Authority, in 2010, the median age of the country's population was 23.4 years.[1] Young people, therefore, represent the backbone of the Filipino society. This is evident at first glance. One notices it right away just having a look at the overcrowded streets in Metro Manila, full of young people commuting to their offices or colleges in the morning and counter flowing homeward bound in the evenings.

The youth makes up the society and it follows that also the Filipino Church is composed mainly of young people. The life of the Church in the country with the biggest Catholic population in Asia depends very much on them.

Nowadays, the universal Church is very much concerned about the youth. The Church has always had a particular predilection for formation of young people and education. One can

1. Reference of the Age and Sex Structure of the Philippine Population, at <https://psa.gov.ph/content/age-and-sex-structure-philippine-population-facts-2010-census>.

think about the huge number of foundations of educational structures, Catholic schools, and youth centers that have been created along the centuries. It was in 1985 when John Paul II gave a commencement to the World Youth Day, which have become one global expression of the care of the Church for the youth. This particular attention of the Church for young people is also the reason why the Synod of Bishops was summoned in Rome in October 3–28, 2018.

In the Post Synodal Exhortation *Christus Vivit*, Pope Francis expresses his confidence in the youth. He says that young people are not only the future of the world but also they are its present. At no. 64 of the same Exhortation the Pope states:

> We cannot just say that young people are the future of our world. They are its present; even now, they are helping to enrich it. Young people are no longer children. They are at a time of life when they begin to assume a number of responsibilities, sharing alongside adults in the growth of the family, society and the Church.[2]

This paper tries to depict the reality of the youth and some of the challenges that young people are facing in the Philippines, dividing the flow of the discourse in three main sections. The first is the youth in relationship with the family, which is the first environment where young people grow up and are shaped. The second section is about some of the challenges for the youth in society, encompassing education, employment, drugs, sexuality, and the impact of the digital world. Finally, the relationship between youth and faith, in which it describes the situation of the youth in relation with the Catholic Church and possible responses provided by the Church itself for the youth ministry today.

YOUTH AND FAMILY

Cradle of Filipino Values

The relations within the family are the first educational paradigm that shapes each individual. This is particularly true in the Filipino culture and society where the role of the family, both nuclear and extended, is paramount. In the family children experience the love of their parents and learn all the values that will enable them to cope with challenges and problems in life. Family is also the safe environment where the individual identifies himself or herself as a member of the kinship. According to Tomas D. Andres in the Filipino hierarchy of needs, the first one is "familism," that is the need to belong to a family or a group.[3] In the Filipino context, therefore, the reality of the family becomes important

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2. Francis, *Christus Vivit*, *Post Synodal Exhortation,* § 64.
3. A. D. Thomas says: "In the Filipino hierarchy of needs, the first need is *familism* or the need to belong to a family or group. The family in the Filipino mind is a defense against a potentially hostile world an insurance

up to the point of providing the basic structural feature of Filipino society. Politics and entrepreneurship are very much shaped by familism, and therefore many companies are managed by the same family members and political power is frequently shared within the same kinship. More in general, the relationship between employer and employees replicates very often the model of familial ties. This model demands loyalty and provides mutual help and support to its members, just as it happens within the family. This kind of familism in politics and business implies also some negative consequences, as for example the perpetration of political dynasties, the career mobility fostered by blood ties rather than merit, or the authority who is expected to dispense benefits to his or her subjects.[4] The Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Culture (1997) of the Bishop Conference of the Philippines states that:

> [This is] the most striking feature of Filipino culture: the value we put on family—and family both as nuclear and extended. Attachment and loyalty to one's family are a central organizing principle of Philippine social structure and behavior. We generally define our personal interests in terms of those of the family. Personal identity is very closely tied in with its good name and honor. An individual's success is regarded as the family's success, be it in business or in politics. We aspire for excellence, achievement and economic advancement for the sake of our family. The functionality of the Filipino's family-centeredness is quite all-encompassing. Family networks facilitate the individual's access to the broader society. The family is the principal means for gaining entry into the public realm of Philippine society where both economic and political transactions are carried out, facilitated and mediated through family networks. Social alliances, whether in business or in politics, are often based on family ties too inasmuch as trust and loyalty tend to be confined to family members. A family-against-the-world mentality is often the result.[5]

It is within the family the young persons learn how to respect the elderly and the authority, and the love for their parents and grandparents. Children are taught how to show respect towards those who are ranked older or are higher in the social ladder by bowing, for instance, and pressing the back-hand of the elder person to their forehead (*mano po*). Within the family, they learn the duty of taking care of their younger siblings and of their

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against hunger and old age, an eternal source of food, clothing and shelter, an environment where a Filipino can be oneself. For the Filipino, all the basic needs are met if you have a family or a group… To a Filipino, kinship and family are two most important organizing and legalizing elements in the corpus of other factors" in A. D. Tomas, *Understanding Filipino Values: A management Approach* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 2011), 47.

4. See A. D. Tomas, *Understanding Filipino Values: A Management Approach,* op. cit., 110.

5. Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Culture, at <http://cbcponline.net/pastoral-exhortation-on-philippine-culture/>.

parents at old age. It is within the family therefore, that the individual learns the basic skills for becoming adult and a Filipino.[6]

It is in the same familial context that the person learns how to deal with others and to gain social acceptance, which represents one of the main goals the Filipino personality aims at. The Filipino needs to be taken by his or her fellow for what he or she is believed to be, and to fit that image in accordance with his or her status. To reach such goal, the young individual learns some basic attitudes. He or she needs to acquire the smoothness in interpersonal relations which is important for preserving social harmony. In the social context, Filipinos behave according to some cultural traits, such as the *pakikisama*, that is the ability of form and maintain good relationships, that also implies giving in to the wish of the leader or the majority, even when it contradicts one's idea or the common good; they talk euphemisms, that is stating unpleasant truth as pleasantly as possible; they try to go-between to prevent a direct confrontation, sometimes by making use of a mediator for delivering complaints or embarrassing requests. For Filipinos, it is also particularly hard to lose face, to receive criticisms in front of other people, and to be left out of the group. The person has a generally strong sense of shame, the *hiya*, and fear of social unacceptance.[7]

As the family embodies such an important function in shaping the character of the person, the quality of the relationships within a family is crucial for the right upbringing of the individual. According to a research on the situation of the youth at national level, The *National Filipino Youth Study 2014* [hereafter cited as "*Youth Study*"], it is reported that 68.8% of the respondents live in unbroken families, with both of parents living together.[8] This positive situation provides the supportive environment for the upbringing

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6. Andres D. Thomas lists a number of values learned by the individual in the family which are very much characteristic of his or her "being Filipino:" the interest of the individual must be sacrificed for the good of the family; parents should be very strict in watching over, protecting, and curbing their children; women are highly valued for their qualities as mothers and housekeepers; tender relationships within the family members are highly valued; someone must exert firm authority (this implies that children may marry only with the consent of the parents); authority must be respected and obeyed; one looks to authority figures for help in obtaining a job or other benefits; one must be careful about what the neighbors are thinking regarding oneself; everyone should strive to obtain economic sufficiency for the family; one must study and work hard to improve one's economic condition; social recognition is a major aim in attending school and getting a job; the woman is expected to suffer in silence; children are highly valued as a source of family strength and stability and as a form for old age insurance (*Ang anak ay kayamanan*, a child is wealth); Filipinos are deeply conscious of the status they occupy in society; the Filipino has fear of solitude; a child is indebted to his or her parents for life; sensitiveness in relationships which implies hospitality, politeness of speech, and indirection of interpersonal behavior; *machismo* (male supremacy) and the relegation of women to a secondary or domestic rule. See A. D. Tomas, *Understanding Filipino Values: A Management Approach*, op. cit., 111–15.

7. Ibid., 17–8.

8. Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines-Episcopal Commission on Youth (CBCP-ECY) and Catholic Educational Association of the Philippine (CEAP), *The National Filipino Catholic Youth Study 2014*, (Manila, 2015), 11, 163. This study has been conducted over a sample of 2.400 respondents from all over the Philippines, who were between 13 and 39 years old.

or children and the best foundation for holding down the values which can forge the youth. Growing in a united family can prevent the youth from being overexposed to risky situations and enable them to better face challenges and problems in their lives. Unbroken families give more chances to their children to be successful in their academic performances and the ability to overcome obstacles in attaining their goals. The *Youth Study* points out also that supportive parents are role models in transmitting religious faith to their children.[9]

Family Challenges

Apart from this general positive description of the majority of Philippine families, the same survey emphasizes the increasing number of broken families and single parents. The *Youth Study* reports that almost 10% of the respondents are living with single parents due to separation or divorce, whilst 13% are living with a single parent because of the death of one of them.[10] In the case of broken families, mothers bear often the burden of responsibility for upbringing their children. In other situations, the child can be adopted by relatives or be brought up by grandparents.

Although the Philippines has the biggest Catholic population in Asia, it seems that at present the Filipino family is becoming more and more fragile. Some of the factors affecting the stability of the familial institution are derived from the challenges of modernity. In the past, the traditional marriage was a contract involving two families and was not strictly founded on the basis of affection and love. The modern concept of marriage, instead, emphasizes affection and companionship, and so it becomes fragile once husband and wife fail to find emotional satisfaction in their relationship. Another element that can weaken the stability of the modern marriage is the lack of social pressure to keep husband and wife together when facing a crisis. In the past, such control was provided by the extended family and by the acquaintances in the village. Today young people, especially in urban areas, are more and more independent from such influences and are also more exposed to break ups.[11]

Another cause of the fragility of marriage, as well as the phenomenon of single-parenthood, is the traditional *machismo* of the male Filipino. *Machismo* is the sense of male supremacy and the relegation of the women to a secondary or domestic rule, and it is considered a traditional trait of the Filipinos. Moreover, in the traditional Filipino culture, wives are called to submissiveness (*marianismo*) and are considered possession of their husbands. They are expected to be faithful and subordinate to their partners, thus becoming victims of a double standard of morality where the wife is expected to be faithful to her partner and to the upbringing of children, whilst the husband feels justified to have extramarital affairs, or maintains a mistress and illegitimate children. According to

9. Ibid., 13.
10. Ibid. 13, 163.
11. E. Dos Santos, "Philippines" in T. Tosolini, ed., *Family Changes* (Asian Study Centre: Osaka, 2015), 127.

Andres D. Tomas, *machismo* is one of the main reasons of infidelity within the marriage, which is a frequent phenomenon.[12] Difficult relations between husband and wife as well as the instability of the marriage possibly affects the image of family and parental relationships in the eyes of the children, who become less and less confident in foreseeing the possibility of a stable relationship with their own future partners.

A peculiar phenomenon that affects the life of families in the Philippines is the huge number of overseas workers. It is estimated that 10 million Filipinos are working abroad and 3.000 are leaving their country every day. They support their families and relatives through the remittances which reach the amount of 22 billion $ per year.[13] As a matter of fact, while supporting Filipino families, these remittances also represent a huge benefits for the state itself due to taxation. Moreover, it seems that in general overseas work benefit more wealthy or middle-class families, whilst it provides less advantage for the low-income families in the Philippines.[14]

Apart from the evident monetary benefit that the overseas work is providing to the Filipino families, there are also undeniable impacts on the upbringing of children and the human growth of the youth. According to *Youth Study*, 3.6% of the respondents have their fathers working abroad, whilst only 2% of them have their mothers working outside the country.[15] However, according to other sources, it seems that there are more women than men working abroad.[16] Some of the overseas workers live outside the Philippines for a span of time of several months, but the majority work abroad for years or even settle down permanently in other countries, so that they go back home only during vacation and see their family only once a year. It can be that only one of the parents work abroad, but in some cases both of them live outside the country. In the latter case, children can be entrusted to relatives, especially grandparents, who take up the responsibility of raising them. For young children, the absence of one of their parents, especially in the case of the mothers, brings about big suffering. Sense of self-abasement and feeling of abandonment can arise with much impact on the growth of the person in his or her young age. This sense of solitude is only partially mitigated by the financial support and the gifts regularly

12. Andres states that "Machismo sometimes leads to marital infidelity on the part of the Filipino husband. Although there are no official statistics, it is observed that 90 percent of Filipino husbands are unfaithful" in A. D. Tomas, *Understanding Filipino Values: A management Approach,* op. cit., 115. See also Ibid., 117 and E. Dos Santos, "Philippines" in T. Tosolini, ed., *Borderline Gender* (Osaka, Asian Study Centre, 2014), 118.

13. See E. Dos Santos, "Philippines" in T. Tosolini, ed., *Family Changes,* op. cit., 131. Official data say that the number of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) who worked abroad at any time between April and September 2018 was estimated 2.3 million. See J. B. Perez, "Total Number of OFWs Estimated at 2.3 Million (Results from the 2018 Survey on Overseas Filipinos)" in *Philippine Statistic Authority*, at <https://psa.gov.ph/content/total-number-ofws-estimated-23-million-results-2018-survey-overseas-filipinos>.

14. See Ibid. 131.

15. See *Youth Study,* op. cit., 163.

16. See Unpublished Interview with Fr. Alvin C. Balean, Youth Ministry Director of the Diocese of Novaliches, Quezon City, April 5, 2019.

received from the parent abroad.[17] The lack of closeness and love cannot be completely replaced by material provisions. Furthermore, it seems that if the absence of the father is more easily accepted by the child who can see in it the fulfillment of the duty of the one who is supposed to be the breadwinner within the family, on the other hand it is harder to accept the fact of having the mother abroad. In the latter case, children generally suffer more and they easily come to blame her for neglecting them, as she is escaping from the duty of being the main reference and the fulcrum of unity of the family. Moreover, it seems that the fact of regularly receiving gifts from the parents abroad fosters the materialistic and consumeristic attitudes in the children, who become spoiled and accustomed to enjoying material gifts which are beyond their real needs.[18]

We have already mentioned that women are traditionally submitted to men especially in the marital relationship. This *machismo* culture makes the men become less responsible and committed both in family and in society. Whilst young boys and also adult men spend time in amusements, playing basketball, or stay overnight drinking with friends, women on the other hand are more responsible and active in taking care of the family and of the upbringing of children. In the Filipino culture therefore, family is very much founded upon the role of the mother, which represents the most loyal and committed element within the family. The father can be physically absent (due to separation, single-parenthood or because he works overseas), but in some cases, although physically present, he may be psychologically absent: his improper way of living makes him a less crucial figure in the eyes of children compared to the mother. This fact seems to be mirrored in society too. In modern times, women won their suffrage rights in 1937 and two of the presidents of the Philippines were women, Corazon Aquino and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.[19] Since the precolonial period, the Filipino society was very much relying on the contribution of women, up to the point of becoming a predominantly matriarchal society. In the traditional household, women are the head of the house, while men are more occupied by outside activities, such as hunting and agriculture. Women, therefore are the real pillars of the family and society. The education of children is traditionally entrusted to the mothers, who are the ones who mainly hand down the values of the traditional culture, such as good habits and proper behavior. If fathers are considered to be breadwinners, mothers are also the ones to whom the administration of the family's money is entrusted.[20]

Many children, especially those who belong to single-mother families, grow-up

17. For one experience of child of overseas workers, see S. Diaz, "La nostra dignità" in F. Bellelli, ed., *Sotto la pelle uguali e fratelli* (Canterano: Aracne Editrice, 2018), 53–6, 183–88. For the analysis of an interesting experience of integration of Philippine overseas workers in a parish in Italy, see the study G. Gavioli, *La Parrocchia diventa luogo ospitale: da un'esperienza, una proposta di pastorale interculturale* (Canterano: Aracne Editrice, 2017).

18. See E. Dos Santos, "Philippines" in T. Tosolini, ed., *Family Changes,* op. cit., 133–34.

19. Reference of the Presidents of the Philippines, at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Presidents_of_the_Philippines>.

20. See A. D. Tomas, *Understanding Filipino Values: A Management Approach*, op. cit., 108–9.

feeling the lack of affection from their fathers. This fact can bring about sense of loneliness, lack of guidance, emotional fragility, up to the point, in some cases, of developing an unbalanced image of the self. As they grow under the dominant care of a female figure, their own sexual identification is possibly affected. Together with other factors, this deficiency can bring about same sex attraction (SSA) in the individual.[21] Moreover, the absence of one or both parents due to separation, to overseas work, or adoption to relatives or acquaintances, produces sense of loneliness and abandonment in the young individual with consequent distress, anxiety, and depression. Sometimes even children of wealthy family, whose parent are working overseas, feel the sense of neglection, betrayal, and abandonment, although their material needs are fulfilled and they enjoy luxurious lifestyle.[22]

The sense of abandonment can lead to depression. The young person can reach the point of thinking about committing suicide. It is an alarming fact that the suicide rate among young people is increasing in the last few years. The last data available are the ones recorded by WHO, which reported 2.000 cases of suicide between 2000 and 2012 the majority of whom were aged between 15 and 29 years old. Filipino people are well known as a happy population as well as resilient people able to overcome difficulties. Nevertheless, cases of depression and mental illnesses are increasing, especially among the youth.[23] Fr. Robleza states:

> Young people today, especially Gen z [teenagers born after year 2000], are lonely. Depression is a creeping disease. This is not only due to social media, but to a lot of factors like dysfunctional families, consumer materialism combined with commoditization, superficial faith, the anonymity of shopping malls, or the dearth of community living in high rise condominiums. Do will still wonder why the index of suicide among the young is rising… and fast?[24]

The family which is supposed to be a harmonious environment, can become a place where a child experiences violence. This is fostered by the condition where many families

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21. See J. McTavish, *Matters of the Heart: Articles on Same Sex Attraction, Homosexuality and Lesbianism*, (Claretian Communication Foundation, Inc., Quezon City, 2018), 77.

22. Fr. Laguerta reports the case of a young daughter of wealthy parents working abroad who says that every day thinks about committing suicide because she feels abandoned by her parents. Her lifestyle is luxurious. She is not lacking anything, but she is envious of her school mates who have someone who scold them when they get home late, whilst she has now one waiting for her when she gets to her lonely flat. See J. Laguerta, *Ministering and Evangelizing the Youth,* unpublished Conference in Our Lady of Annunciation Shrine, Quezon City, 12 March, 2019.

23. S. Tomacruz, "A Cry For Help: Mental Illness, Suicide Cases Rising Among Youth" in *Rappler*, at <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/211671-suicide-cases-mental-health-illness-youth-rising-philippines>. About depression and sense of loneliness among teenagers, see also A. D. Robleza, *Kim.2: The Rules Have Changed* (Salesian Society of St. John Bosco: Makati City, 2018), 21.

24. A. D. Robleza, *Kim.2: The Rules Have Changed*, op. cit., 72–3.

live. In squatters and poor urban areas, families live in very small and miserable houses, with no walls separating the bedroom of the parents from the living room or the place where children sleep. Furthermore, it is not rare the case of couples where the husband is not the father of the daughters of his partner, due to promiscuity, second marriage, or new relationship after divorce or separation. Then the family can become the place where abuses or incestuous rapes occur.[25] The abuse of alcohol can be an additional cause of family violence and sexual abuses. Those who work in youth ministry are aware of the huge amount of young people who belong to dysfunctional families, where the preconditions for a normal and healthy growth are not provided and where the familial environment, which is supposed to be the safest place, rather becomes a threat for them and a hindrance for their proper growth.

Another important phenomenon typical of the urban context are the street children. According to official statistics they are estimated to be 250.000 nationwide, but some say they can be more than 1 million. They are children, mainly boys (70%), aged 7 to 17 years old, and so this phenomenon particularly affects young children, but also many teenager and youth. They live in big cities and it is believed that 75% of them still return home after living and working in the streets. Living in the streets exposes them to different kind of harsh conditions such as hunger, cold, and sickness. Their livelihood depends on car washing, vending, scavenging, begging, peddling drugs, and petty theft. They are often victims of abuses and sexual exploitation, including prostitution. Street children become frequently victims of drug addiction (rugby-sniffing).

Not all the street children are permanently living in the streets or are abandoned by their families. Some of them are street-based, that is children living alone (either abandoned or runaways) and working in the streets. Others are children of street-based families, and so are living with their families as street-dwellers. Still others are children who work on the streets but return home daily to their families; many of them receive formal school education. According to social workers, the reasons why children live in the streets are poverty and large families, the breakdown of family structures, unemployment or underemployment, the limited access to basic social services, and the shift from traditional values to the allure of the consumeristic and materialistic culture. It is also believed that the immediate cause for many children to leave their homes is physical or sexual abuse within the family. Once they experience violence or feel neglected, they leave their homes and live part-time or full-time in the streets, whilst some of them are

25. According to Natashya Gutierrez, "From 2011–2016, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) served a total of 2,770 incest victims out of a total of 7.418 victims of sexual abuse, with a recorded average per year fluctuating between 400 and 500 victims. DSWD data says majority of incest victims are girls between the ages of 14 and 17" in N. Gutierrez, "Rape Within the Family: The Philippines' Silent Incest Problem" in *Rappler,* at <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/investigative/171457-incest-rape-philippines-sexual-abuse?utm_campaign=echobox&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&fbclid=iwar0vqtwg5e5rq0scg6lhgqtb_ywzrpoplgdvvgxroribyoasgsi3uwy4g3e#echobox=1556011046>. Such data refer only to the cases which are reported to the authorities, and therefore probably represent only a small portion of the phenomenon.

simply abandoned by their parents. The harsh living conditions of these young people are very much affecting their growth and undermine their future.[26] Among such severe situations, however, human dignity is not obliterated and some of these children find the strength to overcome difficulties and start a new life, so that also in the streets we can find signs of hope. Recently the Church declared Darwin Ramos, a street child of Manila, "servant of God." He died at the age of 17 due to a genetic disease. He belonged to a family of garbage collectors, and dedicated himself to help other street-children. His life has now become a model of holiness for the youth of the Philippines.[27]

In conclusion of this section about youth and family, a spontaneous consideration comes to mind. Probably the main challenge faced by many families in the Philippines is the problem of poverty with all its consequences, including lack of education and the impact of a miserable lifestyle on the quality of relationships within the family members. However, apart from the dramatic challenge of poverty, in many families there is also the internal difficulty of setting a responsible parenting. In *Amoris Laetitia* Pope Francis states: "The overall education of children is a 'most serious duty' and at the same time a 'primary right' of parents."[28] Upbringing children is a duty but also a right to be defended against external threats that tend to take away this important responsibility from the hands of parents. In the context of the Philippines, these words sound particularly striking as a reminder of an important reality. The Philippine society is very much influenced by the Catholic Church and Christian moral values, yet, as a matter of fact, many parents are not yet able to work out the responsibility of educating their children according to the Catholic vision. If, on the one hand, faith seems very much alive in the majority of the Filipinos, on the other hand it is clear that the real life within the family is often detached and still not transformed by this faith. A house filled with sacred images and parents devoted to the main Filipino Catholic symbols (Black Nazarene or Santo Niño) are not always mirroring human formation and the best setting for upbringing children. There is the need of formation programs to help Catholic families better connect beliefs and worship to their concrete way of living. I would say that this applies especially to men and fathers, who appear to be the weakest elements in the family, but probably also in society and in the Church.

YOUTH AND SOCIETY

School

Formal education provided by school is a fundamental element for the growth of the

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26. See Reference of street children at <http://www.hope.org.ph/street-children-at-risk.html>.

27. See J. Torres, "Vatican Names Filipino boy 'Servant of God'" in ucanews, at <https://www.ucanews.com/news/vatican-names-filipino-boy-servant-of-god/85336>.

28. Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, § 84.

young person. While during the Spanish colony education was provided only for west-erners with some exceptions, the rule of US brought to the Philippines the universal education system based on the one that was implemented in the US. In 2013, the Philippine government extended the basic education cycle from ten to twelve years. Secondary education has been extended from four to six years and divided in two: Junior High School (4 years) and senior High School (2 years). Thus, currently, education is compulsory from the age of 5 up to 17 and is divided in 12 grades: elementary school (grade 1 to 6), junior high school (grade 7 to 10) and Senior High School (11 to 12).[29] Education fee in public schools is free, but there are additional costs that weigh on families.[30] After the completion of the formal obligatory education, the young person who can afford the cost of further studies has access to college or university, which provide higher preparation and skills that enhance the chances to find good and well remunerated employments.[31]
Besides the educational system provided by the state, the Philippines abounds with private schools, especially Catholic institutions. Many of the universities have a religious affiliation. Some of the Catholic universities in the Philippine reach high quality standards and have a long tradition. The University of Santo Tomas in Manila was founded in 1611 and therefore it is the oldest existing university in Asia. The quality of education in private institutions is generally higher than that of public schools. However, the education fee in private schools and universities, even if run by religious orders and congregations, is unaffordable for many of the young Filipinos.

Unfortunately, not all the youth can bring to completion their basic education. According to *Youth Study*, 18.1% of the respondents dropped out of school, and almost 50% have been out of school for less than a year. Moreover, cutting class frequently is admitted to be a common behavior by 14.4% of them.[32] The reason why they drop out of school is mainly because of financial problems: the parents are not able to afford the tuition fees and the additional costs of education. Sometimes it is also necessary to stop studying to find a job in order to contribute to the income of the family or to support siblings, so that they can go to school.[33] Poverty, therefore, is the main cause for interrupting education.[34] According to the *Youth Study*, many of the respondents belong to families with regular

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29. W. Macha, C. Mackie, and J. Magaziner, "Education in the Philippines" in *Word Education News & Reviews*, at <https://wenr.wes.org/2018/03/education-in-the-philippines>.

30. Reyes says: "Philippine public schools do not charge tuition fees, but it's not the only financial consideration. School supplies, uniform costs, meals and transportation add up to the costs as well. When an emergency occurs, such as a family member falling ill, or a parent losing his job, it also usually forces the child to drop out of school" in T. Reyes, "The Real Cost of Education in the Philippines" in *Rappler*, at <https://www.rappler.com/brandrap/advocacies/105019-real-cost-education-ph>.

31. According to *Youth Study*, more than 50% of the respondents are enrolled in college or university. See *Youth Study*, 10. On the reform.

32. See *Youth Study*, op. cit., 176.

33. See *Youth Study*, op. cit., 11.

34. According to *Youth Study*, the average income of almost 50 of the respondents' families is less than PHP 10.000 (190.91 US Dollars)/month. See *Youth Study*, op. cit., 165.

but very low income, often below the minimum wage.[35] These conditions expose them the risk of interrupting their basic education. An UNICEF survey in 2015, revealed the inequality in education attainment. It is estimated that only 69% of the elementary school graduated from poor families continue into high school, compared with 94% of children from richer households. Moreover, according to the same research, more girls enroll in school and less of them drop out than boys.[36]

The Church is trying to respond to the challenges of education. Apart from upholding the primary right of education by running a huge number of kindergartens, schools, professional courses, and universities, spread all over the country, it provides also programs for providing awareness on the importance of education to young people who drop out of school. The Diocese of Novaliches has implemented a counseling program for unschooled youth with the same purpose.[37]

Work

Official statistics provided by the Philippine Statistics Authority indicate that the rate of unemployment in the Philippines is surprisingly low. By July 2018 the employment rate was estimated 94.6%, which is a stunning achievement. Employed persons fall into different categories, namely: 1) wage and salary workers (65.3%); 2) self-employed workers without any paid employee (26.2%); 3) employers in own family-operated farm or business (3.8%); and 4) unpaid family workers (4.6%).[38] These data, which do not refer only to the youth, but also encompass adults, provide a very positive image of the employment in the country. Nevertheless, having a job does not automatically mean getting a good salary. Some kind of work, especially in the case of farmers, garbage collectors, or laborers, do not provide enough income to eliminate poverty and liberate families from misery. Moreover, we cannot also overlook the rather big amount of underemployed people, that is estimated at 17.2%. Those who fall into this category are people that work less than 40 hours in a week.[39]

The Bureau of Local Employment (BLE) says that more effort is needed to reduce unemployment especially among the youth. For July 2018, it was estimated that 1.040 million of young people (between 15 years and 24 years old) were unemployed in the Philippines. It is true that in 2017 the rate of unemployment of the youth reduced compared to

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35. See *Youth Study*, op. cit., 15. The minimum wage in Metro Manila is PHP 537 (USD 10.25) per day, see D. Galvez, "DOLE Raises NCR Minimum Wage to P537 with P25 Hike" in *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, at <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1050451/dole-raises-ncr-minimum-wage-to-p537-with-p25-hike>.

36. See Y. T. Chua, "'Education for All' Ending; PH Fails to Meet Targets" in *ABS-CBN News*, at <https://news.abs-cbn.com/focus/04/10/15/education-all-ending-ph-fails-meet-targets>.

37. See Unpublished Interview with Fr. Alvin C. Balean, Youth Ministry Director of the Diocese of Novaliches, Quezon City, April 5, 2019.

38. L. G. S. Bersales, "Employment Rate in July 2018 is Estimated at 94.6 Percent" in *Philippine Statistics Authority*, at <http://www.psa.gov.ph/content/employment-rate-july-2018-estimated-946-percent>.

39. Ibid.

the past, but was still 14.4%, and so was still rampant. According to BLE it is still difficult for the youth to find a decent job. Oftentimes this is due to the mismatching of demand and supply of labor, as well as the limited absorptive capacity of the economic system. Another negative element is the fact that often young people do not have the knowledge and the necessary skills to get a good job. This means that there is the need of programs for better preparing the youth for future profession.[40]

Many young people in the Philippines leave rural areas to migrate to big cities, allured by the hope of a better fortune. Official statistics say that 2.9 million people have changed residence between year 2005 and 2010 and 50.4% of them are long-distance movers, which means that they moved from a province to another.[41] Moreover, the level of urbanization of the Philippine population has increased from 45.3% to 51.2% between 2010 and 2015.[42] This is a very high rate of urbanization, even compared to other countries in South-East Asia. It is not a surprise to see how overcrowded a city like Manila is. Young people migrate to these urban areas mainly because of rural and agricultural poverty. It seems that the excessive parceling of the land due to wrong past governmental land reform which induced unproductivity of agriculture, and the mechanization of agriculture are among the causes of the exodus from the countryside.[43] These people sometimes become guests of relatives who have already settled down in the city thus finding a good opportunity to ameliorate their situations, but in other cases, dwell in precarious conditions, in miserable houses with basic services, in informal settlements. They have to adjust to the new urban cultural set up, to relatively new language (especially if they move from Mindanao and Visayas to Manila), to new customs, and to the challenge of commuting in an overcrowded megalopolis. They accept any kind of job with the sole aim of surviving. Sometimes, the quest for a better future is successful, but in other cases these young people only move from the poor condition of the countryside to a new misery of the urban context.[44]

Unemployed and out-of-school youth are exposed to conditions of vulnerability and marginalization. A person in these conditions easily becomes a so called "*istambay*" (from the English "stand-by"), meaning "A person readily available, physically able and yet has nothing else to do but waste time or do things of no significant consequence to

40. G. M. Cortez, "Dole Agency Fags Lack of Inclusiveness in Youth Employment Despite Job Growth" in *Business World*, at <https://www.bworldonline.com/dole-agency-flags-lack-of-inclusiveness-in-youth-employment-despite-job-growth/>.

41. Reference of Domestic Migrants, at <https://psa.gov.ph/content/domestic-and-international-migrants-philippines-results-2010-census>.

42. Reference of Urban Population in the Philippines, at <https://psa.gov.ph/content/urban-population-philippines-results-2015-census-population>.

43. See M. M. Alunan, "The 'Rural-to-Urban Migration'" in *Business Mirror*, at <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2017/10/24/the-rural-to-urban-migration-paradox/>.

44. See UNESCO, UNDP, IOM, and UN-Habitat, *Overview of Internal Migration in Philippines,* at <https://bangkok.unesco.org/sites/default/files/assets/article/Social%20and%20Human%20Sciences/publications/philippines.pdf>.

himself/herself and his/her family."[45] The situation of many youth is therefore very much affected by the difficulty of getting proper education and good jobs. It is not surprising, therefore, to see so many young people wasting time during the day in the suburbs of Metro Manila and other cities. Delinquency, drug addiction, robberies, and other sorts of risky behaviors cannot but develop in such conditions. According to an unpublished dissertation of Batan, a Filipino Sociologist, which is referred by the *Youth Study*

> The prevalence of the phenomenon of idle youths in the country is symptomatic of the interrelated problems in the educational system and the labor market in the Philippines. It would be unfair, therefore, to blame youth inactivity or idleness solely on them.[46]

It is for this reason that the leaders of society, first of all the politicians, should bear their portion of responsibility in being on the side of the causes of such situation. It is their duty to look for solutions and to create the conditions for providing education and employment to all, especially to the more vulnerable layers of the social ladder.

Drugs

The *Youth Study* reports that at least 20% of the respondents have engaged in risky behaviors. 24.5% of them admitted to have experienced getting drunk, while 18.4% having surfed prohibited Internet sites without supervision of adults, almost 15% have physically harmed someone; 9.9% acknowledged to have been frequenting unfamiliar or dark places like bars, restaurants, dark streets, etc.; 12% had experienced gambling and excessive computer gaming leading to lack of sleep or socialization. Almost 8% admit having experienced premarital sex. The majority of them say that the guidance of parents is the main element that can prevent them from engaging in risky behaviors, and so they point out once again the fundamental role of the family in supporting the proper growth of young generations. As we have mentioned above, sociological data give evidences that teenagers who are raised in unbroken and supportive families are less exposed to develop risky behaviors including addiction to alcohol and drugs.[47]

The problem of drugs is not exclusively pertaining to the youth.[48] Both users and people involved in the production and distribution in the network of drug trafficking can be also adults. Nevertheless, the addiction to drugs is a social plague which jeopardizes especially the future of young generations. In 2015, it was estimated that there were 1.8

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45. *Youth Study*, op. cit., 13.

46. Ivi.

47. See *Youth Study*, op. cit., 36–7, 176–77.

48. According to *Youth Study*, op. cit., 176–77, 2.6% have smoked marijuana and 1.7% have taken prohibited drugs (these data, besides the fact that they look underestimated, seem to be contradictory, since marijuana is itself a prohibited drug in the Philippines). Reference of the legality of Cannabis in the Philippines, at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cannabis_in_the_Philippines>.

million drug users in the Philippines which equals 1.8% of the total population.[49] According to data collected on samples of patients in rehabilitation, the profile of the drug addict is male (ratio of male and female 10:1), men age of 31 years old, single (53.2%), with average monthly family income of Php 12.337 (237.33 USD), with duration of drugs use for more than 6 years. The main substances of abuse are: Methamphetamine Hydrochloride (*Shabu*), Cannabis (Marijuana), and Contact Glue (*Rugby*).[50] The use of drugs starts from early age. Teenagers, especially street children, easily become addicted to rugby-sniffing, since glue is effortlessly available. The individual begins sniffing for imitation of peers, the eagerness of exploring something new, and also for forgetting personal problems. A research conducted at the stage of college studies shows that the possible causes of drug abuse in young students are related to peer influence, lack of attention and love of parents, and weak understanding of spiritual and moral values. Moreover, the study points out the absence of School Anti-Drug Abuse Council and the lack of drug abuse prevention activities represent other negative factors.[51]

It is well known how the current government and especially president Rodrigo Duterte has made of the "war on drugs" one of the main strongholds of his policy. While campaigning for presidential elections he expressed his intention of eliminating crime by eliminating the criminals: "Hitler massacred three million Jews. Now, there are three million drug addicts. I'd be happy to slaughter them. If Germany had Hitler, the Philippines would have (me)."[52] Since his installation on 2016 and his call to "war on drugs," it is estimated that 7.000 died in extrajudicial killings in drug-related cases. But according to documentation obtained by *Rappler*, "In about two years—from 1 July, 2016, up to 11 June, 2018—police have recorded 23.518 Homicide Cases Under Investigation (HCUI), equivalent to an average of 33 people killed a day."[53] Not all of these homicides are necessarily connected with anti-drug operations, although most of them probably are. But what is clear is that the call for "war on drugs" has somehow legitimate vigilantes to act in immunity and then has paved the way to an escalation of violence that is producing victims and great suffering.

Human Right Watch reports on the *modus operandi* for the extra judicial killings. Usually the perpetrators of the homicide are operating in groups of two, four or dozens,

49. See J. Galilan, "DDB: Philippines has 1.8 Million Current Drug Users" in *Rappler*, at <https://www.rappler.com/nation/146654-drug-use-survey-results-dangerous-drugs-board-philippines-2015>.

50. Reference of drug addiction in the Philippines, at <https://www.ddb.gov.ph/component/content/category/45-research-and-statistics>.

51. See F. B. Caday, "Causes of Drug Abuse among College Students: The Philippine Experience" in *The International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention,* 4/4, at <https://valleyinternational.net/index.php/theijsshi/article/download/789/774>.

52. Rodrigo Duterte, September 30, 2016. On the "war on drugs," see Human Right Watch, "License to kill" Philippines: Police Deceit in 'Drug War' Killings" in *Human Right Watch*, at <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/03/02/license-kill/philippine-police-killings-dutertes-war-drugs>.

53. R. Talabong, "At least 33 killed daily in the Philippines since Duterte assumed office." In *Rappler*, at <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/204949-pnp-number-deaths-daily-duterte-administration>.

wearing civilian clothes with their masked faces, acting behind closed doors. Once the man is shot dead, the police arrive within minutes. This pattern is reiterated in many cases. The police are also blamed of having been paid to kill an assigned number of black listed people. Some also report about the implantation of evidences (sachets of *shabu* and guns left close to the dead corpse of the victims) for justifying the fact that the killed person was a drug addict or a pusher, and that he resisted to vigilantes. Moreover, Human Right Watch investigated several cases and found that all of them, apart from a middle-class victim who probably was killed as a result of mistaken identity, were poor. This contradicts the statement of the government which claims to target "drug lords" and "drug pushers."[54]

Some of the bishops have explicitly condemned the policy of the government on this matter and a Pastoral Letter of CBCP *Rejoice and Be Glad*, issued on July 9, 2018 mentioned the problem. This pastoral letter that was read in all the Catholic Churches of the Philippines was clearly blaming the extrajudicial killings:

> Are we to remain as bystanders when we hear of people being killed in cold blood by ruthless murderers who dispose of human lives like trash? Do we not realize that for every drug suspect killed, there is a widowed wife and there are orphaned children left behind—who could hardly even afford a decent burial for their loved ones? Do we not care when poor people's homes are searched without warrants, or when drug suspects are arrested without warrants, or detained without charges?[55]

Nevertheless, it seems that the voice of the Church is left unheard. Some of the leaders are openly criticized and even threatened. Bishop Pablo Virgilio "Ambo" David has been recurrently vulgarly attacked by the President himself. But despite confronting the leaders of the Church, the midterm elections that have taken place the last 13 May have witnessed the successful outcome of senatorial candidates who are endorsed by the current administration: the popularity of President Duterte is still very solid.[56]

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54. See Human Right Watch, "'License to kill' Philippines: Police Deceit in 'Drug War' Killings." In *Human Right Watch*, op. cit.

55. See CBCP, *Rejoice and Be Glad!*. CBCP Pastoral Exhortation, at < http://cbcponline.net/rejoice-and-be-glad/>.

56. See Philippine Daily Inquirer Editorial Office, "Monday Massacre" in *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, at <https://opinion.inquirer.net/121390/monday-massacre>. Bishop Ambo David was given open support by pope Francis during the *Visita ad Limina* on 24 May, 2019. The following is the testimony of the bishop himself: "I was ready to step out already when he held my arm and said, 'Wait. Please let me give you a special blessing. I want you to know I am with you as you face trials in your ministry in your diocese,' the prelate recounted. 'Then he pulled me to himself to give me a warm paternal embrace, pressing his head against mine, and brushing his hand gently on my back as he whispered into my ears, 'Courage." To this, David said all he was able to say was 'thank you, Holy Father'" in E. Renedero, Pope Francis to Bishop Critical of Duterte: I am with You" in *ABS-CBN News*, at <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/05/24/19/pope-francis-to-bishop-critical-of-duterte-i-am-with-you>.

Nobody denies that the problem of drugs represents a social plague. The risk for the youth of being affected and terribly damaged is a dramatic reality. As long as drugs will be at hand, many young people are under threat of falling into the hell of addiction. But although nobody can deny the need of engaging a "war on drugs," the question is on what would be the most effective strategy for conducting this war. So far, the current administration has tried to eliminate the crime by eliminating the criminals. Facts, however, show that this strategy has revealed its inadequacy. The president himself has admitted that the results of his "war on drugs" are disappointing.[57] Therefore, beside the fact of being morally questionable, this policy seems inadequate to solve the problem which instead is worsening. The youth, are therefore damaged twice, both by the consequence of drug addiction and also by the risk of becoming victims of unknown gunmen.

Perhaps, instead of repressive policies which penalize the more vulnerable layers of society, the government should look for other options. The basic one is to face the problem of poverty of families, since the poor seem to be the most exposed to the risk of drugs. Education is another element which can help the youth to be more aware of the risks connected with the use of drugs. Moreover, there is the need for activating more rehabilitation programs and supporting those private institutions that are already working on this field. Impartial investigations must be also conducted to identify and prosecute those responsible for killings, which so far are operating in immunity, thus paving the way to the legitimization of street violence. It is also necessary to seriously stop the production and the import of drugs. On this matter, as the President already stated, the increase of drug-trade is a global phenomenon, but this should not prevent the government from being more determined in stopping the syndicates that are still in control of drug trade and its import from foreign countries.[58]

Sexuality

The *Youth Study* reports on sexual misconduct of the young Filipinos. According to this survey 18.4% of the respondents admit to surf prohibited websites in the Internet; 2% have engaged in paid sex, whilst 2.5% have experienced pregnancy (if female) or got someone pregnant (if male); 4.6% claim to have frequent sexual contacts; 4.8% have had sexual

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57. On 2 April, President Duterte said in remarks during the rally of the ruling Partido Demokratiko Pilipino-Lakas ng Bayan: "You can read it every day, even in the crawler of the TV networks. There are billions worth of drugs. Before, it was only thousands. Drugs, I cannot control, son of a b****h, even if I ordered the deaths of these idiots." See R. Villanueva, "Duterte: Drug War Failed" in *Manila Times*, at <https://www.manilatimes.net/duterte-drug-war-failed/535127/>.

58. Bishop Ambo David states clearly: "There is no war against illegal drugs, because the supply is not being stopped. If they are really after illegal drugs, they would go after the big people, the manufacturers, the smugglers, the suppliers. But instead, they go after the victims of these people. So, I have come to the conclusion that this war on illegal drugs is illegal, immoral, and anti-poor" in P. Esmaquel II, "Bishop David: 'Biggest Lie' to Say Drug War Is Against Drugs" in *Rappler*, at <https://www.rappler.com/nation/228698-bishop-david-says-biggest-lie-to-say-drug-war-is-against-drugs>.

intercourse with more than one person; 7.9% have engaged in unprotected sex; 2.1% have appeared in pornography. These data have probably to be taken as underestimating the phenomenon due to the fact that some of the respondents were probably reluctant to disclose their sexual behavior.[59] Official statistics based on the results of the 2013 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study (YAFS) conducted by the University of the Philippines Population Institute (UPPI) and Demographic Research Development Foundation, say that 35.5% of young male Filipinos and 28.7% of young females have engaged in premarital sex. Moreover, one in every 10 Filipina teen aged 15–19 years old is already a mother and 13.6% have begun their childbearing.[60] The access to pornography, fostered by the Internet and cellphones, is very common. 75.8% of young men watch pornographic movies and/or videos while 38.1% of women do the same; 26.4% of men, and 5.1% of young women visit pornographic websites.[61]

Fr. Alvin Balean thinks that premarital sex is rather a common phenomenon among teenagers and youth. According to his experience, this is mainly due to the fact that today young people are very much adventurous, eager to experience whatever sounds new. This applies both to the sexual realm, but also to the above mention problem of the use of illegal drugs.[62] Probably premarital sex is also fostered by some cultural reasons. We have mentioned above the cultural trait of *machismo*, which in some way legitimizes the practice of extramarital sex among young males. At the same time, the same freedom is not granted to young women, who are instead expected to preserve their virginity until their wedding and to be faithful to their husbands later on. Promiscuity is also very much a common behavior. Living in miserable conditions in small and inadequate houses, is also a possible cause of high rate of premature sexual intercourse. Sometimes, the incorrect moral conduct of parents can also give way to sexual misbehavior in their children. The possible outcomes of such wrongdoings that put heavy burdens on the shoulder of the youth, especially young girls, are premature pregnancies and single-motherhood. Finally, premarital sex puts people at risk of infection of HIV and other kinds of sexually transmitted diseases.

Homosexuality is widely tolerated in contemporary Philippines. This phenomenon was probably already present in traditional cultures in the Archipelago in the pre-colonial era. Cross-dressing was a characteristic of some indigenous healers and religious figures, such as the *babayan*, that is the shamans of various ethnic groups. Nevertheless, homosexuality in the Philippines definitely developed in the 70s and 80s, probably due to the influence of the western gay culture. Currently, the Philippines is considered a gay-

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59. See *Youth Study*, op. cit., 176–77.

60. See L. V. Castro, "One in Every 10 Filipina Teens is a Mom!" in *Philippine Statistic Authority*, at <https://psa.gov.ph/gender-stat/announcement/FS-201403-SS2-01>.

61. Ibid. See also C. Ordinario, "A Third of Pinoy Youth had Premarital Sex" in *Business Mirror*, at <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2016/04/04/a-third-of-pinoy-youth-had-premarital-sex/>.

62. See Unpublished Interview with Fr. Alvin C. Balean, Youth Ministry Director of the Diocese of Novaliches, Quezon City, 5 April, 2019.

friendly nation and 73% of its citizens are thinking that homosexuality must be accepted. At the same time many people in this prevalently Catholic country perceive the Church to be unsupportive of the right of LGBTs.[63]

The cross-dressers or *bakla* are rather common in Filipino society. It is difficult not to notice their presence in streets and in common places, including churches. It is said that every barrio has at least one. They work in beauty shops as manicurist, hairstylist, or couturier. Despite the fact that the common use of the term *bakla* refers to all male homosexuals, strictly speaking, the *bakla* falls under the category of a transgender rather than that of a gay. "All *bakla* are homosexual, but not all homosexual are *bakla*,"[64] in the sense that gays do not normally adopt cross-dressing and they identify themselves as men who feel attraction for other men, while the transgenders (real *bakla*) perceive themselves as women souls (*pusong babae*) caged in male bodies (souls dwelling in wrong bodies).[65] Rather hidden, but also present, is the phenomenon of female homosexuality.

According to James McTavish, there are not reliable data concerning the incidence of homosexuality in the Philippines, whilst in US it is estimated that 2–3% of the male population are gays. According to the author, who is an expert in Catholic moral living for years in the Philippines, same sex attraction among the teens is usually transitory. Teens can engage in same-sex behaviors for adventure, money, peer pressure, for expressing hostility against male peers, or general rebellion, or as a consequence of prior sexual molestation. Therefore homosexuality, especially among the youth cannot be considered necessarily a permanent condition. For this reason, different kinds of homosexuality fall in the following categorization: 1) accidental; 2) reactional; 3) structural homosexuality.[66]

According to the same author, it seems that male homosexuals have often experienced some of the following conditions: 1) sexual abuse by an older homosexual male; 2) poor relationships with fathers and/or mothers; 3) peer labelling during a formative childhood period. In the case of female same sex attraction, the author lists among the possible causes: 1) relational problems with the mother and/or the father; 2) sexual abuse (around 50% of lesbian women report a male sexual abuse); 3) identity struggle (searching of the self, but with a distorted concept of femininity). According to McTavish, therefore, the influence of the environment in which the young individual grows is crucial in the definition of his or her sexual attraction and gender identity. Relationships with parents and older significant persons are decisive in the identification of the self. This is very much relevant in the Filipino familial context which, as we have seen above, is very often characterized by a distorted perception of the paternal figure, due to physical absence

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63. See E. Dos Santos, "Philippines" in T. Tosolini ed., *Borderline Gender* (Asian Study Centre: Osaka, 2014), 119–20, 123.

64. Ibid., 123.

65. Ibid., 122–23.

66. See J. McTavish, *Matters of the Heart: Articles on Same Sex Attraction, Homosexuality and Lesbianism*, op. cit., 18.

(overseas workers, single parenthood of the mother, adoption) or possible misconduct as result of the *machismo* culture. At the same time, the author affirms that there are no evidences about genetic causes of homosexuality, that would mean that nobody is really born homosexual.[67]

The same author points out the risk of living a homosexual conduct, especially among the youth. The risks for the health are: increased risk of infections, including HIV/AIDS, human Papillomavirus (HPV), Viral Hepatitis B and C, Gonorrhea and Syphilis, increased risk of anal and other kinds of cancer. There is also a higher risk of mental disorders, increase of suicidal tendencies, depression, and anxiety. Homosexuals are more exposed to the risk of abuse of alcohol and drugs. Moreover, homosexuality combined with promiscuity multiplies the risk of transmission of diseases to other people. This applies to those who live in miserable houses, in poor and overcrowded suburbs of big cities and squatter areas. But it seems that also modern call centers, where many young people work day and night, are environments prone to sexual misconducts.[68]

Worldwide researches have revealed that between 2001 and 2009 the Philippines was one of the seven countries in the whole world where the incidence of HIV and AIDS cases was still rising. Local statistics have also shown that 94% of the cases of diagnosed HIV cases are male and more than half of them are 25–34 years old. Moreover, the main cause of infection is sexual contact, and the most at-risk category are male having sex with male partners, which equals to 92% of the cases of HIV infections in the Philippines. Currently, the rate of HIV infection is still less than 1%, but between 2006 and 2010 it doubled.[69]

Digital World and Social Media

The digital revolution that has transformed the world through the Internet has of course reached also the Philippine archipelago. The life of the Filipino youth is, just as young people of any other country, very much influenced by the Internet. Today it is not possible to be immune to the digital world and social media. Some non-digital-native people still think they are able to preserve their independence by switching off gadgets. Others think that dependence on the Internet is something to happen in the future. Nevertheless, according to Gheno e Mastroianni, living in connection through the Internet is already a reality here and now. As a matter of fact, we now are already living in constant connection with other people through the Net and the gadgets have already assumed a new role in the life of people, especially among millennials and teenagers. Gadgets are not mere tools of communication but they are already perceived as extensions of the human body. Fr. Robleza says: "Your smartphone is now part of your human anatomy. Digital media has become intimate, like a body-part, at the immediate and total control of the person

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67. Ibid., 7–10, 58.
68. Ibid., 9–14, 49.
69. Ibid., 35–6.

Some call it the sixth human sense."[70] The problem, therefore is not how to free ourselves by disconnecting from the digital world, but how to educate ourselves to inhabit it in an active and positive way, which gives us the possibility of enjoying its benefits and at the same time preventing us from being manipulated or even annihilated by it.[71]

As far as the situation of the Philippines is concerned, according to a self-reported survey, in 2018, over a population of 105.7 million people, 67 million use Internet. There are 121.4 million mobile phone subscribers that means 115% of the Filipino population. The average daily time spent connected to the Internet is 9 hours and 29 min. Filipinos spend 3 hours and 37 min. per day watching broadcasts and videos, and 2 hours and 8 min. for listening to music. As far as social media are concerned, there are 67 million Filipino that are currently using these platforms, most of whom through cellphones. Moreover, Filipinos spend more time on social media (average of 3h and 57 min. per day) than any other population in the world. They are followed by Brasil, Indonesia, Thailand, and Argentina. Regarding the age distribution of social media users within the Filipino population, with particular reference to Facebook, 53% of the users are aged between 18 and 34. Facebook is the most active platform (57%), followed by Youtube (56%), FB Messenger (49%) and Istagram (36%).[72] These data confirm that most of the Filipino youth are almost constantly connected online, probably even more than the youth in other countries.

The Internet is a virtual place where almost everything is made available, both good and bad. The Internet is a fantastic tool for connecting people, facilitating short and long-distance communication, which some years ago was totally unthinkable. Today it is possible to communicate through emails, to have a video chat with someone who is living on the other side of the planet, to record a song with musicians playing in different countries without physically meeting in a studio, or to have a complex diagnosis in an underequipped hospital in the jungle, just by consulting a network of specialists in other countries through e-health connections. The Pope himself, in his latest Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*, points out that

> The web and social networks have created a new way to communicate and bond. They are a public square where the young spend much of their time and meet one another easily, even though not all have equal access to it, particularly in some regions of the world. They provide an extraordinary opportunity for dialogue, encounter and exchange between persons, as well as access to information and knowledge. Moreover, the digital world is one of social and political engagement and active citizenship, and it can facilitate the circulation of inde-

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70. A. D. Robleza, *Kim.2: The Rules Have Changed,* op. cit., 23.

71. See V. Gheno and B. Mastroianni, *Tienilo acceso: post, commenta, condividi senza spegnere il cervello* (Milano: Longanesi, 2018), 42–3.

72. See the *We Are Social 2018 Internet Report*, at <https://wearesocial.com/blog/2018/01/global-digital-report-2018>. These data were presented to the Xaverian Formators of Asia by Fr. Chito Dimaranan, SDB in Villa Consuelo, Caloocan, 12 March, 2019. See also A. D. Robleza, *Kim.2: The Rules Have Changed*, op. cit., 18.

pendent information providing effective protection for the most vulnerable and publicizing violations of their rights. In many countries, the Internet and social networks already represent a firmly established forum for reaching and involving young people, not least in pastoral initiatives and activities.[73]

Nevertheless, despite these undeniable benefits, the digital world also contains dangers that challenge the netizens. As the Internet is a globalized platform, these challenges are not geographically characterized and therefore apply to any user in any part of the planet, including the Philippines. The Internet provides different sorts of websites. Apart from the websites which are of common use and easy access, there is the so-called Deep Web which generally contains innocuous material which is not indexed by the normal Web engines, and therefore has difficult access. Below this level, we find the so-called Dark Web, which is unreachable by common Web engines and contains illegal and dangerous material, like, for example, instructions for assembling bombs. Internet also gives room to the "trolls" (those who creates disturbance) and "haters." Internet can be used for "cyberbullying," "cyberstalking," and it provides the tools for destroying the fame of a person or for his or her "blasting" (more competent people humiliate a less expert person up to the point of annihilating him or her). Some of the games available in the Internet are able to subjugate people up to the point of inducing self-hate or self-harm. It is the case of games that challenge the individual to prove his or her courage, and which final trial is the call to commit suicide (the Blue Whale). Some games incite to dangerous behaviors: Tide Pod Challenge (chowing or eating laundry detergent pods), extreme selfies, balconing, and stirring into anorexia or bulimia.

The Internet is the main platform for distribution of pornography and can be used as tool for sexual exploitation, including minors.[74] The digital world has also brought about new sort of addictions such as the addition to games. The individual, sometimes just for overcoming boredom, begins playing videogames and then he or she cannot stop doing it anymore even during the night, also because frequently these games are interactive and need the participation of people who are physically located in different places, even in different continents. Some of the consequences are wasting of time, lacking of concentration, and becoming less responsible in fulfilling one's duties.[75]

The Pope himself points out that

> The digital environment is also one of loneliness, manipulation, exploitation and violence, even to the extreme case of the "dark web." Digital media can expose people to the risk of addiction, isolation and gradual loss of contact with concrete reality, blocking the development of authentic interpersonal relation-

73. Francis*, Christus Vivit: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation To Young People And To The Entire People of God,* § 87.

74. Ibid., 20–34.

75. O. Tuazon, *No Hold Barred: Questions Young People Ask* (Metro Manila: Cobrin Publishing, 2012), 53–68.

ships. New forms of violence are spreading through social media, for example cyberbullying. The Internet is also a channel for spreading pornography and the exploitation of persons for sexual purposes or through gambling.[76]

In his Exhortation *Christus Vivit*, the Pope continues saying that there are huge economic interests operating in the digital world, as well as organizations capable of using the Net for manipulating consciences. Some platforms induce the communication among people who think alike, fostering polarizations and discouraging dialogue between groups of different opinions. Fake news is published online and false information created on purpose are able to put in jeopardy the reputation of individuals. Online relationships can become inhuman, such as in the case of pornography which distorts a young person's perception of human sexuality. Some people experience a kind of "digital migration," letting behind cultural and religious values, for entering into a world of loneliness and of self-invention.[77] According to the Pope, the youth have the mission to find out a new synthesis between the real and the virtual world:

> The fresh and exuberant lives of young people who want to affirm their personality today confront a new challenge: that of interacting with a real and virtual world that they enter alone, as if setting foot on an undiscovered global continent. Young people today are the first to have to effect this synthesis between what is personal, what is distinctive to their respective cultures, and what is global. This means that they must find ways to pass from virtual contact to good and healthy communication.[78]

What the Pope says to the youth of the world applies also to the youth of the Philippines. Living in the digital world is already a reality for the Filipino youth too, and this need of being permanently online is easily confirmed by observation. It seems in fact that Filipino youth cannot live detached from their cellphones. Everybody must have one, even if there is no money for other more important things. Furthermore, the conditions of life in the overcrowded city of Manila foster this necessity. People spend hours in going to office or school because of traffic, and therefore kill the time by chatting or watching movies while commuting.

The Internet is an almost infinite source of information. Many young people of any layer of the social ladder can now access information that in the past was available only for those who could afford high education. Information is at hand, it is enough to google it and it is instantly provided. On the other hand, it is more and more difficult to verify what is true and what is not. The spreading of fake news shows how information provided by the Internet can be deceiving. It is therefore more and more necessary to verify

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76. Francis, *Christus Vivit,* op. cit., § 88.
77. Ibid., § 89.
78. Ibid., § 90.

the veracity and trustworthiness of the sources. Furthermore, the Internet can become a powerful weapon for influencing masses. It is this probably the case of the last presidential election campaigns in the Philippines, where Duterte made massive use of social media.[79]

Appearance is paramount in the digital world and it is very much appealing to the Filipino youth. FB users strive to have as many friends as possible. In some case, getting enough "likes" produces also monetary benefit. But more generally, having "likes" provides the sense of social acceptance. People post their pictures in FB and write short texts, hoping to get the approval of more and more friends. Being unfriended by someone can therefore become a tragedy. The selfie culture is rampant and induces people to post pictures with the sole aim of receiving approval. This affect the way of posing for pictures and even the way of dressing, with the purpose of catching the approval of friends. One's self-esteem is more and more tied to this virtual social acceptance. Nevertheless, this superficiality nourishes narcissism and dependence on the others' response. People tend not to think and act on the basis of values they believe in, but on the basis of the expectation of social recognition.

The Internet is the main tool for connecting with other people through the social media. The rate of FB users in the Philippines is impressive. This can be seen as an opportunity, a sign of the need of togetherness which is in the DNA of the Filipinos. Nevertheless, this need of being connected has ambivalent meanings. The overuse of Social Media can undermine the desire of building real relationships. As young people feel satisfied by virtual connection, they are at risk of weakening their ability to relate with real friends without having gadgets as "media" that can bridge them. The media becomes a shield, a tool for defending the self from the other, whose reactions are unpredictable and beyond one's control, and who can be friendly but at times can also hurt. The media is a protection against the unbearable fear of the freedom of the counterpart in a relationship, it is a protection against an excessive closeness.[80] The gadget, therefore, makes the individual feel connected and at the same time it becomes a hindrance for communion, and so transforms communication into virtual friendship, which is unavoidably illusory and unreal. The paradox is that the digital world that is supposed to mediate communion and intimacy, becomes source of loneliness. As Sherry Turkle says:

> When technology engineers intimacy, relationships can be reduced to mere connections. And then, easy connection becomes redefined as intimacy. Put

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79. See "Can Comelec Catch Up with Social Media?" in *Rappler*, at <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/226688-can-comelec-catch-up-social-media>.

80. Regarding the fear of closeness, teenagers feel that texting is better than talking on the phone, because: "Texting offers just the right amount of access, just the right amount of control… texting puts people not too close, not too far, but just at the right distance." See S. Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York, Basic Books: 2011), 15.

otherwise, cyberintimacies slide into cybersolitudes. And with constant con-
nections come new anxieties of disconnection, a kind of panic.[81]

There is therefore the need, also for Filipino youth, to learn how to benefit the potenti-
ality of the digital world, making it an instrument of real (not virtual) communion and
fraternity.

YOUTH AND FAITH

Dismissing Faith?

Youth Study gives a very optimistic vision of the religiosity of the Filipino youth. Accord-
ing to this research 97.4% of the respondents are convinced that religion is important,
and 85.4% claim to be religious.[82] Young people say that they are highly influenced by the
parish priests, their mothers, and co-members in Church-based youth organizations in
their being Catholic. On the other hand, fathers' influence is felt less important. About the
meaning of their being Catholic, the youth claim to believe in what the Church teaches
and they do what the Church asks them to do in term of attendance to religious services.
They are also Catholic in the sense of living out what they consider to be "Catholic val-
ues" such as tolerance, inclusiveness and openness to other religions. Young people also
appreciate Christian human values such as tolerance, respect, inclusiveness, and a uni-
versal approach to life's realities. They also easily accept the sacramental mediation as a

81. S. Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, op. cit.,
16. The same author describes the fear of real relationships which induces the need for the mediation of
technology, up to the point of preferring robots to human beings, see Ibid., 4–11. The influence of the digital
world has also brought about the so-called E-P-I-C culture within the youth: *Experimental*, *Participatory*,
Image-based, *Connected*. 1) *Experimental*: the native digitals need to experience everything. They are not
attracted by ideas, but by experiences. They are very adventurous in experiencing also risky behaviors; 2)
Participatory: they do not want to be represented, but they want to participate in. The youth have created two
neologisms: FOMO: the fear of missing out. If they cannot get what other have, they get depressed. It can be
also a consequence of digital envy; FOBO: it is an evolution of FOMO, that is the fear of behaving outcompete.
These syndromes can bring the individual to contemplate suicide; 3) *Image-based*: they are stimulated in
all senses: for teaching them it is necessary to stimulate of all the senses; 4) *Connected*: they need to be
connected, but at the same time they are often feeling lonely. See, J. Laguerta, *Ministering and Evangelizing the
Youth,* unpublished Conference in Our Lady of Annunciation Shrine, Quezon City, 12 March, 2019.

82. There is a correlation between religiosity and the correct growth of the individual. Jet U. Buenconsejo
studied how having a "spark," that is a deepest interest or passion in life, is important for the growth of
teenagers. With reference to the religious spark he says: "In this study, the participants noted that their
religious sparks prevented them from delinquency and other negative behaviors, including suicide. It also
acts as their source of strength in times of challenges and difficulties in life. These findings are supported
by several authors stating that religiosity and spirituality are potent sources of resilience and strength
among young people particularly in times of adversities, disadvantages, and traumas through the formation
of human adaptive systems that provide social support and attachment relationships." J. U. Buenconsejo
"Sanctification of Adolescence: A Qualitative Analysis of Thriving Among Filipino Youth With Religious
Sparks" in *Philippine Journal of Psychology*, 2018, 51/1: 121–54, 147.

Catholic approach to religiosity. Furthermore, they enjoy freedom to profess the Catholic faith with a very low level of governmental restrictions, especially if compared to other countries in Asia. The Constitution states that religion shall be allowed to be taught in elementary and high schools within the regular class hours,[83] and there are virtually no limitations in building churches, or hindrances in worshipping or for other religious activities.

According to the data collected by the *Youth Study,* 45.4% of the youth still attend the Sunday mass, and 34% attend mass more than once a week. Moreover, 49.8% say that they go to confession a few times in a year, with an attendance of 84.5% for Christmas, 74.2% for the *Misa de Gallo,*[84] 68.5% for Ash Wednesday, and 65.2% for Easter Sunday.[85] These data honestly surprise and probably overestimate the real attendance and participation of the youth in sacraments. They contradict the impression of experts and the testimony of those who are actively ministering to the youth in parishes and other organizations. In a conference held in the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Annunciation, Quezon City, Fr. Laguerta, an expert in youth ministry for the Archdiocese of Manila, portrayed the paradoxical situation of the Catholic youth in the Philippines. Half of the Philippine population is younger than 23.4 years, which means that the biggest portion of the Filipino population is still very young. Nevertheless, if we observe the reality of Sunday masses in the Filipino churches, we easily realize the attendance curve goes the opposite: the assembly is mainly composed by children and adults with relatively few young people.[86] This situation is confirmed also by Fr. Armand D. Robleza, according to whom one out of three of the Pinoy millennials is not affiliated to any religion, while only 55% of Pinoy millennials consider themselves Christian (including Catholic).[87] Moreover, an important element to be taken into consideration is the fact that the attendance of masses and church-based activities is mainly composed of women. Men are very few both during masses and other meetings. This situation is also is replicated in the youth ministry where the large majority of the attendants are girls.

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83. See R. Card. Vidal, "Religious Instruction in Public Schools an Opportunity, and a Challenge" in cbcp *online,* at <https://cbcponline.net/religious-instruction-in-public-schools-an-opportunity-and-a-challenge/>.

84. *Misa de Gallo* are masses celebrated early in the morning during the novena that precedes Christmas.

85. See *Youth Study,* op. cit., 17–24. According to the 2008 Regional Survey for South East Asia, the attendance to mass every Sunday was 65%. See Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (fabc) and Office of the Laity and Family-Youth Desk, *Asian Youth and the Eucharist: A Regional Survey 2008* (fabc-olf-Youth Desk: Taytay Rizal, 2008), 43. Among other, the survey also reveals that the youth have a superficial understanding of the Eucharist, see Ibid., 59. The *National Filipino Catholic Youth Study 2013* reports that mass attendance rate at least once a week for the Filipino youth is 79.4%. This percentage seems frankly unbelievable. See "National Filipino Catholic Youth Study 2013: Its Joys and Hopes," at <https://www.ceap.org.ph/upload/download//201410/7114053166_1.pdf>.

86. J. Laguerta, *Ministering and Evangelizing the Youth,* unpublished Conference in Our Lady of Annunciation Shrine, Quezon City, 12 March, 2019.

87. A. D. Robleza, *Kim.2: The Rules Have Changed*, op. cit., 9–10.

According to the *Youth Study,* the youth are still taking the teachings of the Church as true and they are accepting its guidance for what moral life is concerned. They acknowledge that life is a gift from God and abortion is a sin. They do not support euthanasia and acknowledge that divorce should never happen in a family. They also agree that the use of artificial contraceptives and homosexual acts are morally wrong. Young Catholics neither approve premarital sex and they are not supporting the Reproductive Health (RH) law (about the legalization of artificial contraceptives).[88] These data show that the youth still trust the Church and look at her as a mother that can provide them guidance. They still believe that human life is an unnegotiable value and then disapprove abortion, and uphold responsible sexuality.

In my view, however, these data seem to be too optimistic. As a matter of fact, many studies already attest that the youth is dissatisfied by the teaching of the Church which they already consider outdated, too much restrictive, and even discriminative, especially in matters of sexual morality and homosexuality. Fr. Robleza SDB, reports that in US 60% of millennials say that Christianity is "judgmental," and 64% think that the Churches of different denominations are "anti-gay." This opinion is probably shared by many Filipino youth too.[89] The scandals that have lately involved the Catholic clergy have also badly affected the perception of the Catholic Church and its clergy. According to Robleza, after year 2000 there is a consistent number of young people that have left the Catholic Church due to the scandals about sex abuses of the clergy and the debate about same sex marriage.[90]

It seems that, while teaching and proposing an ideal way of living, the Church should find out a way to convey its message in a more profitable way so as to be accepted by the youth. First of all, the Church and in particular its ministers need to provide a clearer and more coherent testimony of their being disciples of Christ: Pope Francis is pushing the Church in that direction when he blames clericalism and calls the Church to conversion. Furthermore, the Church must also perfect the way she talks to the youth. It is not the case of adulterating the radicality of the gospel, but presenting it in a way that is more acceptable and understandable by the youth so that it can be taken as guidance for their

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88. As far as I am able to correctly read the data presented by *Youth Study*, on the points of premarital sex and the support of the Reproductive Health Law, it seems to me that there is a contradiction between the comment to the data at p. 21 (that I take as reference) and the data in table 4 at p. 171. In the latter is reported that the majority agree that "There is nothing wrong with pre-marital sex," and they agree with the statement "I support the Reproductive Health Law (R.A. 10354). See *Youth Study*, op. cit., 21, 171. Moreover, the report says that 71.3% of the interviewed youth take part in church-based organizations. This element probably indicates that the sample of respondents was in some way not really depicting the totality of the Catholic youth, but was mainly addressing the portion of youth that is already actively present in church-based groups. It would had been better to broaden the scope of the chosen respondents so to have a more inclusive vision of the Filipino youth, taking in those who do not go to church and do not actively attending church-based activities.

89. See A. D. Robleza, *Kim.2: The Rules Have Changed,* op. cit., 9.

90. Ibid., 17

lives. At present, the youth are not much attracted by the theological certainties, which were more convincing for older generations, but they are more interested in knowing concrete experiences of Christian life. They do not want only to learn some teachings, but they themselves want to be protagonists in living out the Gospel. Furthermore, the youth also asks the Church to give them room, to listen to them, and to accept their doubts and contradictions while giving them guidance. This, according to Robleza, is the approach of Pope Francis: "He is not about to tear down truth and dogma; he is just telling the Church to accept the doubts of people, especially the young people."[91]

Father Robleza points out that now the young people tend to be "spiritual" and less and less "religious." Many young people refuse the affiliation to an established religion, and prefer to mix up elements form many religious traditions according to their taste. The idea of "'Spirituality' allows millennials to avoid choosing one religion and instead combine elements from many."[92] This tendency is fostered by the availability of information about religious values and practices which one can find online. It is very easy to get access to such information and create a spiritual mix which meets the needs and the taste of the individual. The opinion on moral issues is also very much depending on the Internet. According to Robleza "When a morally questionable post coming from a famous personality gets more than a million 'likes,' then it is true!"[93] In the Internet, opinions are shared very easily and gain a strong impact on the uncountable number of users, and at the same time truth and lie stand side by side with the same value.[94] The result of such tendency is the proliferation of self-made religiosity, which distances the youth from making choices and being responsible for their own spiritual conversion. It is no longer the person that strives to meet the requirement of the religious journey, but on the contrary, it is the spirituality which is twisted to meet the wishes of the person.

The Filipino youth are also very much attracted by sects and Pentecostal Churches. Many become members, though some of them only temporarily. The *Iglesia ni Cristo* (a non-Christian Church, which does not acknowledge the divinity of Christ) or the "Born Again" Evangelism are among the most active in proselytizing. In some cases, the youth are attracted by some financial benefit or by the fact that being part of the new sect provides also some guarantee for a better future, such as finding a job or getting scholarship.

Sometimes religious organizations may proselytize by means of giving away material aid on occasion of calamities.[95] Apart from these deviations, the effectiveness of the missionary approach of these religious groups often relies on the personal relationship and friendship. The candidates to Born Again Churches, are approached one by one by

91. Ibid., 34.
92. Ibid., 18.
93. Ibid., 30.
94. Ibid., 31.
95. On proselytism of some sects and organizations in exchange of aid after the Yolanda tragedy, see T. G. Santos, "Don't Trade Faith for Aid, 'Yolanda' Victims Urged" in *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, at <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/618435/dont-trade-faith-for-aid-yolanda-victims-urged>.

people who personally take care of them. It is because of this personal closeness that the person feels attracted.[96] Moreover, the liturgical services of the Born Again are very much alive and enriched by modern pop songs and dances, which meet the sensitivity of many Filipino youth. Attending a Born Again service is therefore not only the chance to listen to speakers who explain the Bible or some religious teachings, but becomes an appealing and emotional experience: people feel good. The interest in attending the services is even enhanced by the fact that the religious service can be integrated with healing prayers which have a strong impact on the Filipino sensitivity. We are witnessing a proliferation of new Churches and sects in the Philippines and they are very much attractive for those young people who feel unsatisfied by the usual Catholic way of worshipping.[97]

Popular Spirituality

Popular devotions, which characterize the Filipino way for expressing faith, are still very much appealing to the youth. The Filipino soul feels the need to express faith with emotions and also in a visible and tangible way. For the Filipinos, prayer is also a physical and emotional experience.[98] It is for this reason that processions, penitential rituals, venerations of statues and relicts are very much popular in the Philippines. The first evidence of the popular love for devotions is probably the veneration of the Santo Niño statue which was donated by Magellan to the king and the people of Cebu upon his arrival in the Philippines in 1521. Ever since, the devotion for the sacred statue has taken roots in the Filipino soul.[99] Another important devotion is the procession of the Black Nazarene which takes place in Manila every year on 9 January, involving millions of people every year for the "*Translacion*" of the sacred statue of Jesus carrying the cross and the connected celebrations in the Quiapo church.[100] Thousands of people (some say millions),[101] including many youth, are also joining the "*Alay Lakad*" (walking offering) every year, a penitential pilgrimage mainly from Manila, but also from neighboring towns and cities, and heading to the Shrine of *Nuestra Señora de la Paz y Buen Viaje* of Antipolo. The pilgrimage is held on Holy Thursday evening until Good Friday morning,[102] walking for about 30 km. Another example is the *Magdarame*, the dramatization of the passion of Christ in Pampanga, in which penitents are willing to be crucified after undergoing

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96. See J. Laguerta, *Ministering and Evangelizing the Youth,* unpublished Conference in Our Lady of Annunciation Shrine, Quezon City, 12 March, 2019.

97. See M. L. Tan, "Born Again" in *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, at <https://opinion.inquirer.net/86708/born-again>.

98. J. P. N. Samia, *Tayo Na Sa Antipolo: Theo-dulâ of the Alay Lakad sa Antipolo* (Don Bosco Center of Studies: Parañaque City, 2019), 83.

99. See P. De Charentenay, *Filippine: arcipelago asiatico e cattolico*. Trans. R. Leone. (Ancora & La Civiltà Cattolica: Milano, 2017), 11.

100. See A. A. Gonsalves, "Understanding the Fierce Devotion Behind the Black Nazarene," at <http://www.quiapochurch.com/understanding-the-fierce-devotion-behind-the-black-nazarene/>.

101. See J. P. N. Samia, *Tayo Na Sa Antipolo: Theo-dulâ of the Alay Lakad sa Antipolo,* op. cit., 62.

102. Ivi.

flagellation and carrying wooden crosses. The *Magdarame* calls many participants, up to the point of becoming a touristic attraction.[103] Other examples of devotions are the celebration of the *Misa de Gallo*, the novena in preparation of Christmas which consists in masses celebrated very early in the morning (3 or 4 AM) during the days previous to Christmas, the *Salubong*, which is the dramatization of the encounter of Mary with the Risen Lord on the dawn of Easter, as well as the *Pabasa*, the uninterrupted chanting of the Passion of the Lord whose duration can be 1–3 days.[104] But many other examples can be found everywhere in the Philippines, and what is interesting about our topic is the fact that these devotions are often involving many youth, even those who usually do not go to church on Sunday.

The attendance of the youth to these expressions of popular spirituality has different meanings. Some just join them because of the connection with their *barkada*, or group of peers. Others join a pilgrimage for courtship. Some do it just because it is part of tradition, something that must be performed every year. Some others have made a vow (*panata*) or are requesting for a special blessing or a grace from God, such as passing an exam or the healing of a friend or a relative. Some others just take the chance to pray and feel closer to God.[105] Whatever reason is given to why the youth are so attracted to these devotions, they all reveal the deep desire of the Filipino soul to express faith not only in abstract and thoughtful way. Filipinos do not pray with only their minds—and probably not only with their hearts too—but also with their bodies. It is also for that that Filipinos like singing and dancing during religious celebrations. It is part of the Filipino way of worshipping and experiencing communion with God. In the case of the pilgrimage to the Shrine Virgin of Antipolo, those who join the *Alay Lakad* pray through their "walk."[106]

The corporal expression of the faith is very much evident in the acts of *punas-punas*, that is the touching or wiping religious images. According to Mercado, "The action of *punas* convey the notion of power being transmitted from the holy object to the hand-kerchief or towel or the hand itself of the believer."[107] The action of touching is therefore important for feeling connected with the spiritual power which is conveyed by the sacred image, and so it is believed to be a way for expressing communion with the supernatural.

Another element of the popular spirituality is the *panata*, that is the vow which is expressed through a penitential action. The *panata* is an example of the spirituality of negotiation, in which the individual thinks that the ritual action performed (sacrifice, penance, offering, fasting, or prayer) allow him or her to reach a higher position which

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103. Reference of the *Magdarame*, at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crucifixion_in_the_Philippines>.

104. Reference of the *Pabasa*, at <https://manilacatholictraditions.wordpress.com/chanting-the-passion-of-christ/what-is-pabasa/>.

105. See Samia, J. P. N., *Tayo Na sa Antipolo: Theo-dulâ of the Alay Lakad sa Antipolo*, op.cit.*, 89*.

106. Ibid., 83.

107. L. Mercado, ed., *Filipino Popular Devotions: The Interior Dialogue between Traditional Religion and Christianity* (Manila: Logos Publication, Inc, 2000), 44, quoted by Ibid., 85.

eases the negotiation with God. The individual believes that the sacrifices performed will make God listen to and grant the requested graces.[108]

As far as popular devotions are concerned, the Church values popular spirituality as rich and positive expressions of faith. In the concluding document of Aparecida in 2007, the Bishops of Latin America state:

> We cannot deprecate popular spirituality, or consider it a secondary mode of Christian life, for that would be to forget the primacy of the action of the Spirit and God's free initiative of love… [The popular piety] is a Christian spirituality which, while it is a personal encounter with the Lord, includes much of the bodily, the perceptible, the symbolic, and people's most concrete needs. It is a spirituality incarnated in the culture of the lowly, which is not hereby less spiritual, but is so in another manner.[109]

It is also evident that, apart from the positive side of popular piety, there are also some risks. In some cases there is the concrete danger of physical harm, such as in the penance rituals which include flagellation and even being nailed to a cross—self-harming extreme expression of folk religion are strongly disapproved by bishops and so are not part of the genuine Christian spirituality—or imposing upon oneself heavy sacrifices. In some cases, there is the concrete risk of trivialization of the sacred, in order to reach fanaticism.[110]

The image of God can be also distorted. Overemphasizing the idea of having the power to negotiate with God in a sort of spiritual trading in which giving something to Him (fasting, prayer, or penance) grants the worshipper the right to obtain the requested grace. In this way the filial abandonment to the paternal love of the Heavenly Father can be dismissed in favor of a spiritual mindset which is very close to magic. Moreover, devotionalism can drive away people from the need of personal conversion and from a more convinced involvement in service and participation in the life of the ecclesial community. It is important, therefore that the youth, while taking part in the popular piety,

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108. Ibid., 90.

109. Pope Francis states in *Evangelii Gaudium* § 124: "The Aparecida Document describes the riches which the Holy Spirit pours forth in popular piety by his gratuitous initiative. On that beloved continent, where many Christians express their faith through popular piety, the bishops also refer to it as 'popular spirituality' or 'the people's mysticism' (Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, Aparecida Document, 29 June 2007, 262). It is truly 'a spirituality incarnated in the culture of the lowly'. (Ibid., 263) Nor is it devoid of content; rather it discovers and expresses that content more by way of symbols than by discursive reasoning, and in the act of faith greater accent is placed on *credere in Deum* than on *credere Deum*. (Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *S. Th., II-II, q. 2, a. 2*). It is 'a legitimate way of living the faith, a way of feeling part of the Church and a manner of being missionaries' (*Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, Aparecida Document*, 29 June 2007, 264)."

110. Ibid., 119.

draw spiritual energies for becoming better Christian and better citizen, thus preparing themselves for giving their contribution for the good of the Church and of the world.[111]

The Church's Responses

The Filipino Church is very much concerned about ministering to the youth. Dioceses and parishes implement different kinds of activities for young people's formation. According to Fr. Alvin C. Balean, the diocese of Novaliches in Metro-Manila has different programs. The periodic Diocesan youth days are able to summon 1.000–3.000 young participants. Moreover, each parish has local activities of formation whose effectiveness depends much on the ability and the commitment of the priest in charge of the youth ministry. According to Fr. Balean, the youth respond with particular enthusiasm when they are involved in the practical preparation of dramas, liturgy, and other activities connected with the celebrations of Christmas and Holy Week. On the other hand, it seems that only a few parishes have weekly meetings specific for the formation of the youth.[112]

The Bishop Conference of the Philippines dedicated the year 2019 to the youth and set the National Youth Day of Cebu on 23–28 April as the climax of the year's activities. The spirit of the Year of the Youth proposed by the Bishop Conference is based on three main elements which are clearly expressed by its motto: Beloved, Gifted, Empowered.[113] A letter of the Bishops Conference, which introduces the Year explains the meaning of these three words. It reminds young people the fact of being first of all loved by God. The same letter says that they are also gifted because of the grace of baptism and confirmation, and so they are entrusted the responsibility to be witnesses of Christ, as the martyrs St. Pedro Calungsod and Richie Fernando, as well as many other young Filipino missionaries and volunteers. While acknowledging the manifold challenges that the youth face in the world, the letter asks them to be aware of their strength and capabilities for giving their contribution for a better world and society, following the example of Mary. They are urged to reach out the peripheries and to bring the good news of salvation to the lost,

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111. Ibid., 170–75. Bernard Raas sees the following possible dangers of popular devotions: they can become more important than liturgy; they can be one-sided and as such they can cause people to develop false priorities and values; there is the danger of too much subjectivism, externalism and sentimentalism; they can give a wrong feeling of security in the presence of the living God (i.e. promises of a kind of spiritual "insurance" about salvation, or can create a merchant-mentality: "I do something for God so that He will give me back what I need"); the danger that popular devotions easily degenerate into magical or superstitious practices or even idolatry; they can be abused for other purposes like moralizing or didactic intentions (prayer has not the main purpose of teaching or to induce people to act in a particular way). See B. Raas, *Popular Devotions: Making Popular Religious Practices More Potent Vehicles of Spiritual Growth* (Manila: Logos Publications, 2014), 26–8.

112. See Unpublished Interview with Fr. Alvin C. Balean, Youth Ministry Director of the Diocese of Novaliches, Quezon City, 5 April, 2019.

113. See Conference of the Bishops of the Philippines, "Filipino Youth in Mission: Beloved, Gifted, Empowered. Pastoral Letter for the 2019 Year of the Youth," at <http://cbcponline.net/filipino-youth-in-mission-beloved-gifted-empowered/>.

the least, and the last. The letter invites the youth to be aware of their being in mission to make disciples for Jesus. Finally, the letter recalls the words of Pope Francis who challenged the youth during the 2013 World Youth Day: "So make a mess! But also help in cleaning it up… a mess that brings a free heart, a mess that brings solidarity, a mess that brings us hope, a mess that comes from knowing Jesus and knowing that God, once I know Him, is my strength" (WYD 2013).[114]

One element which is pointed out during the Year of the Youth is the need of formation. It is rather evident that the parishes and dioceses need to improve the formation of their young people. The *Open Letter of the Filipino Youth to the Catholic Church in the Philippines* says that one of the goals of the Year of the Youth should be the youth formation aiming at "An evangelized youth conscious of his/her giftedness, transformed by a personal encounter with Christ, and growing and maturing through youthful formation and activities."[115]

There is the need to find out new methodologies for accompanying young people to encounter Christ and grow in discipleship. The traditional formative programs are showing their limitations. The respondents of the *Youth Study* acknowledge that "The traditional ways of proclaiming and celebrating their Catholic tradition and its values are no longer meaningful and effective in addressing their personal search for meaning and experience of the transcendent."[116] Apart from the commitment in the sacramental service (especially masses), the Church of the Philippines relies very much on the Basic Christian Communities, which are supposed to involve the youth. Nevertheless, some honestly admit that: "Majority of those who are actively involved in BECs are women—very few men and youth."[117] The Basic Christian Communities, therefore are in reality working well only for adults, but they are less appealing to young people, unless they are reshaped to meet the needs of the youth. Moreover, the Church is also aware that there is a need for a new evangelization addressing those young people who are standing at the margins of the Church or are not yet touched by her message. The Church seems hesitant in sharing the experience of the encounter with Christ with the youth who are living at the peripheries or have left her. She provides the sacramental ministry for those who are already actively present, but is less able to invite new people.

The respondents of the *Youth Study* suggest some possible ways for reach out to the youth: through basic ecclesial community especially designed for the youth; weekly catechesis; a reorientation for the youth ministry and local youth activities in chapels; using technology as a medium in promoting youth programs and in spreading the teachings

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114. Ivi.
115. See The Filipino Youth 2019 Onwards, "An Open Letter of the Filipino Youth to the Catholic Church in the Philippines" in *CBCP News*, at <http://cbcpnews.net/cbcpnews/an-open-letter-of-the-filipino-youth-to-the-catholic-church-in-the-philippines/>.
116. *Filipino Youth*, op. cit., 27.
117. A. L. Picardal, "Basic Ecclesial Communities Today" in *CBCP News*, at <http://www.cbcpnews.com/cbcpnews/?p=67527>.

of the Catholic Church; programs to address their needs as young people; the Church should promote the importance of Bible reading and study; the Church must teach on how to internalize and live the faith. Moreover, they also suggest youth camps and encounters for reaching out to the "unchurched," which represent one of the biggest challenges for the Filipino Church today.[118] These suggested ways for ministering to the youth seem to me less innovative. Perhaps we need more creativity for meeting the changes that are happening in the youth world.

Besides the "conventional" approach to youth ministry, I would like to end this section describing, even if only sketchily, two interesting examples—among many others—on how the Church is moving ahead with creativity in finding out new ways for reaching out to the contemporary youth. The first is the one proposed by Fr. Jason Laguerta, who, apart from being an expert in youth ministry, is implementing a particular methodology for ministering to the youth in his parish in Santa Mesa in the Archdiocese of Manila. According to him, it is no longer the time for organizations and huge projects for the youth. Dealing with the millennial and generation z[119] which are very much influenced by social media, Laguerta thinks that young people need to go beyond the virtuality of feeling "connected," which they easily find online, for meeting with someone who can offer them the gift of a real and intimate friendship. In this approach, listening, accompanying, and being with them, are very important values. Different form the dominant idea of many people involved in ministering the youth, Fr. Laguerta thinks that it is not necessary to open an FB account for ministering to young people,[120] because they are already overwhelmed by virtual connections. What they lack of is a real experience of communion with someone who can offer them friendship, care, and guidance. It is for this reason that, according to Laguerta, it is better to give up big projects and activities that summon a big number of young people. What they need instead is a personal relationship with the priest who mentors a small group of youth (10–12 people), meeting them every week for a prolonged span of time (1–2 years). This formative journey ends when the youth are enabled to step forward, becoming leaders capable of accompanying and forming other youth. In this stage, each young leader will be entrusted a small group of youth whom he or she is responsible for. According to Laguerta, this methodology is at the same time a way for forming people and also for making them missionaries, that is responsible for the spiritual journey of others. The young person therefore is formed to become at the same time disciple and missionary. Moreover, although this process takes

118. See *Filipino Youth*, op. cit., 26.

119. Millennials are the youth born between 1980 and 2000, and Generation z, those born in 2000 or later. See A. D. Robleza, *Kim.2: The Rules Have Changed*, op. cit., 10, 20.

120. An example of evangelization through social media in the Philippines is the "*Almusalita* with Fr. Luciano Felloni," that consists in commentaries on the daily Mass Readings posted in Facebook with more than 30.000 views per video and shares to about 2.000 per post. See A. Valenzuela, "Making the Word of God Viral" in *World Mission,* at <https://worldmissionmagazine.com/archives/july-2017/making-word-god-viral>.

place in small groups, it has a multiplicative effect. Fr. Laguerta believes that in few years the number of young people involved in the formative journey may be higher than the one obtained through the traditional ways of ministering.[121] A similar personal approach to the youth, which underlines the need of personal relationships, is adopted by some other movements, like the "Singles for Christ." Also there, the new members of the youth ministry group are entrusted to leaders which take care of them in a personalized way. Once again, the formation meets its completion when the young person is enabled to become leader and formator of others.[122]

Another interesting approach to the youth ministry is the experience of the weekly fellowship and worship called "The Feast" founded in the Philippines by Eugenio Isabelo Tomas Reyes Sanchez Jr., commonly known as Bo Sanchez. In the website of The Feast, the founder of the movement himself recounts its origins. He was struck by the words of a Bishop who told him that only 15% of Catholics go to Church every Sunday. Researching on his own, he found that in some areas the frequency to Church is even less than that. Bo Sanchez was already part of "The Light of Jesus Family," a group composed by relatives and friends who tried to live their Catholic faith with radicality. After some years, he realized that this group was not really making efforts for reaching out to people who had left the Church. It was a rather exclusive group, very much introverted. Bo Sanchez himself blames this very common attitude of Christian organizations: "We don't deliberately look for the lost. Jesus said if a shepherd has 100 sheep, but loses one sheep, won't he leave the 99 sheep to look for the lost sheep?"[123] It was this awareness that pushed him to begin a new experience of evangelization with the explicit aim of reaching out the "unchurched." The gatherings of The Feast are held purposely not in churches, summoning hundreds of people, mainly youth. Bo Sanchez explains that

> This is the reason that in most parts of the world, we don't hold The Feast in parish churches… If we put The Feast in church, we'll only attract mostly religious people. Many of the unchurched won't go near a church. Some are angry at the Church or bored at the Church. That's why we put The Feast in malls, movie houses, restaurants, civic centers, offices, and homes.[124]

The atmosphere of The Feast's gatherings meets the spirit of the youth: modern songs, testimonies of conversion, and experiences of the Gospel put into practice. Worshipping and prayers are done in such a way that touches the feeling of the participants. Everything is very well organized and entrusted to lay people, who take care not only of practical and

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121. See J. Laguerta, *Ministering and Evangelizing the Youth,* Unpublished Conference in Our Lady of Annunciation Shrine, Quezon City, 12 March, 2019.
122. Ivi.
123. B. Sanchez, "Feast Stories," at <http://feaststories.com/>.
124. Ivi.

organizational things, but also of teaching and sharing testimonies. The role of the priest during The Feast's gatherings is confined to the mass:

> We don't just preach religious topics. We talk about messages that are relevant to secular people's life. Our songs don't sound religious. And shucks, the preacher or worship leaders or singers don't look religious either.[125]

Finally, the members of the fellowship gather weekly in small groups of 12 to 15 people, the so called "Light Groups." They meet for praying and for sharing on how the Bible applies in their concrete life. Also in The Feast, close relationships, mutual help, and concrete communion are crucial elements for the formation of the youth.[126] The approach of The Feast is deliberately set up for reaching out to the "unchurched," striving to materialize the new evangelization of the youth. According to Bo Sanchez, there are currently 285 Feasts scattered all over the world "Bringing thousands of unchurched people back home to God."[127]

CONCLUSION

The national hero José Rizal dedicated a poem to his motherland's youth.

To the Filipino Youth
(A La Juventud Filipina)

> *Unfold, oh timid flower!*
>
> *Lift up your radiant brow,*
> *This day, Youth of my native strand!*
> *Your abounding talents show*
> *Resplendently and grand,*
> *Fair hope of my Motherland!*
>
> *Soar high, oh genius great,*
> *And with noble thoughts fill their mind;*
> *The honor's glorious seat,*
> *May their virgin mind fly and find*
> *More rapidly than the wind.*

125. Ivi.
126. Reference of Light of Jesus Youth, at < https://www.lojyouth.com/light-groups.html>.
127. Ivi.

Descend with the pleasing light
Of the arts and sciences to the plain,
Oh Youth, and break forthright
The links of the heavy chain
That your poetic genius enchain.

See that in the ardent zone,
The Spaniard, where shadows stand,
Doth offer a shining crown,
With wise and merciful hand
To the son of this Indian land.

You, who heavenward rise
On wings of your rich fantasy,
Seek in the Olympian skies
The tenderest poesy,
More sweet than divine honey;

You of heavenly harmony,
On a calm unperturbed night,
Philomel's match in melody,
That in varied symphony
Dissipate man's sorrow's blight;

You at th' impulse of your mind
The hard rock animate
And your mind with great pow'r consigned
Transformed into immortal state
The pure mem'ry of genius great;

And you, who with magic brush
On canvas plain capture
The varied charm of Phoebus,
Loved by the divine Apelles,
And the mantle of Nature;

Run ! For genius' sacred flame
Awaits the artist's crowning
Spreading far and wide the fame
Throughout the sphere proclaiming

> *With trumpet the mortal's name*
> *Oh, joyful, joyful day,*
> *The Almighty blessed be*
> *Who, with loving eagerness*
> *Sends you luck and happiness.*[128]

In this poetry, Rizal acknowledges and praises the talents, the strength, and the genius of his young fellow countrymen. He is persuaded of the rich dignity of the young Filipino, whom he urges towards the struggle for a bright future of their country. He himself, a multifaceted and talented young man, was willing to lay down his own life for this cause. If alive today, Rizal might probably praise the Filipino youth with the same words. Also today the youth in the Philippines are bestowed virtues, values, intelligence, strength, and creativity. They are potential builders of a bright future for the Filipino society. They are hard workers, willing to make sacrifices, resilient, able to adapt and struggle in difficult situation. The huge number of overseas workers clearly show how the Filipinos are capable to commit themselves for the good of their families.

While recognizing the undeniable values which characterize young people of the Philippines, in this paper, we have pointed out the challenges that the Filipino youth are facing today. The family, an element of such importance in the Filipino mentality, is the place where the youth are brought up and where they find and experience the vital ties which constitute the foundation of their personality and life. Nevertheless, the Filipino families are not always able to provide a supportive environment for their children. It is the case of broken families, single-parenthood, and the families of overseas workers. Poverty is unfortunately a factor which very much affects the relationship within the family and can undermine the correct education of the youth.

Moreover, there are different challenges which originate within the society. Education is an important element for the human growth. But not all have the possibility to enjoy it, especially due to the inability of parents to afford the expenses. The difficulty of finding a good and well remunerated job threatens the future of many youth in the country. Social problems like drugs are also putting in danger the youth. On this matter, the response of the current government, which has adopted the policy of eliminating the criminals in order to eliminate the crime through the so called "war on drugs," is showing its inefficacy. Sexuality is also a realm in which the youth are challenged and exposed to possible misconducts and their unavoidable consequences.

In the globalized world, the Filipino youth, Millennials and Generation z are digital native. They, as almost any other young people in the world, are also facing the challenges coming from the digital world, which if on one side is opening up many new possibilities to have access to information and to easier communication, is on the other hand expos-

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128. J. Rizal, "To the Philippine Youth," at <http://www.joserizal.ph/pm14.html>

ing them to the risk of solitude and distress. The need of real and personal relationships cannot be obliterated, also for those who are surfing, and maybe even drowning, in the ocean of virtuality.

Finally, we have also tried to see how the youth in the Philippines, a country in which 80% of its population claim to be Catholic, relate with faith. Despite some optimistic statistics, it is rather clear that Filipino youth are getting more and more distant from the Catholic Church, especially the boys. This is possible due to the influence of modern culture, but also to the image of Church which is damaged by the scandal of sexual abuses of the clergy. On the other hand, the youth is still attracted by popular spirituality, in virtue of the involvement of a more emotional, personal, and even physical approach to worship.

We have also seen the responses of the Church to the new challenges of the youth. The Church is aware that things are changing and it is very committed in offering a ministry that meets the needs of today's youth. Nevertheless, what the Church offers is not always adequate and appealing for the youth. Traditional ways for ministering need to be renewed. Some new proposals are coming up, as fruits of the creativity of the Church, like the case of Fr. Laguerta, with a program of formation in small parochial groups which emphasizes personal relationships, and new movements like The Feast, which strives to reach out the youth who are "unchurched."

The Filipino youth are rich in talents and at the same time are exposed to new challenges which can jeopardize their future if not addressed in a proper way. The Church has the responsibility to accompany the youth in their difficult path in a creative and constructive way. Paraphrasing the title of the National Youth Year 2019, the Church is called to help the youth reach the awareness to be beloved, gifted, and empowered. Darwin Ramos, a street child who was recently declared "servant of God," was able to testify his being beloved, gifted, and empowered despite the difficult social context where he grew up. His life can now inspire many young people in the country and also abroad. Despite his young age and the poor condition of his family, he was willing to serve other unfortunate children, and capable to transform his terrible disease in an experience of faith. Bishop Ongtioco testifies that: "Darwin is an example of holiness. Being a street child, afflicted with myopathy, he is closely united with Christ in his suffering and joy."[129]

Pope Francis is very much confident in the gifts which are bestowed to the youth for the renewal of the Church and society. He is very much aware of the problems which are currently afflicting the Church and the world, but he also believes that the youth are capable to give a major contribute for a better future: "This dark moment, not without the valuable help of the young, can truly be an opportunity for a reform of epoch-making significance, opening us to a new Pentecost…"[130] The Filipino youth are called to be part of it.

129. J. Torres, "Vatican Names Filipino Boy 'Servant of God'," op. cit.
130   Francis, *Christus Vivit,* op. cit., 102.

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Taiwan

Fabrizio Tosolini

T alking about young people is a difficult task all over the world. The age delimitations of the young are uncertain: not everywhere is one young in the same years of life; not everywhere does youth have the same duration and is accompanied by the same expectations, on the part of those who live through it, their families and society. Furthermore, an analysis of the phenomenon should at least try to cover a reasonable period of time to give a more complete view of the ways in which it has evolved.

However, precisely today, to ascertain whether there is a more accentuated line of continuity, when compared with other age groups, between the protagonists of youth culture in earlier times and those of more recent times, is not easy. Perhaps such continuity is visible from the outside, but subjectively, it is not generally perceived. Overcoming pre-existing constraints is part of starting to feel oneself as protagonist. If this is true in relation to the families of provenance, it is much more so in relation to the different age groups.

Other complicating factors are the different social situations

in which young people grow and the impact of media globalization on conscience and youth orientations in a given society, in particular if Western market culture has entered the traditional culture of that society only in relatively recent times.

An invitation to a concert for young people in Southern Taiwan in the summer of 2019 sets 12 and 35 years as the age limits.[1] Taiwan's 2007 Youth Policy Launching and Promotion Act defines youth as between 12–24 years.[2] However, 12–35 years can be considered the most inclusive extremes within which to speak of youth in the small but varied and intensely rich universe of Taiwan. As for Taiwan itself, it has been a suspended reality on the abyss of non-existence for more than 40 years, since the thesis of a single China and the pressure of the PRC have deprived it of diplomatic recognition by the UN and by almost all the states.

THE TAIWANESE CONTEXT

Some features make of Taiwan a unique place and a unique social and cultural environment. To recall some of these may be useful.

Although Taiwan is small (around 36.000 sq. km), it has 23.500.000 inhabitants. This makes of Taiwan the 56th largest country in terms of population and the 17th most densely populated country in the world. And this is not all: more than 50% of the territory is barren mountains and forests, with a very scarce density of population. Correspondingly, the West Plain is practically one huge long city extending for more than 400 km, from North to South. The greater part of the population live in this area, where in some places the density reaches record heights. The average density is 656 units per sq. km.

About 75% of the population live in cities.[3] Houses and factories, high rises, storage buildings and highway or railway viaducts crowd an already restricted space and squeeze little paddy fields where rice risks growing an unwelcome guest.

A great energy and passion for action and a quest for excellence characterize the Chinese spirit. Such a practical attitude is visible in the field of religion too. Everything is in a perpetual transformation; what is important is to make the most of every opportunity that presents itself. It is a sort of practical metaphysics, where what is absolute is the quest for one's advantage. That seems to be the first rule, even in ethics.

The high population density, combined with the fact that Taiwan has poor material resources, increases the pressure on people to rely on their own capacities in order to

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1. Other divisions of youth age roughly follow the different levels of the school system. So, we have the 12–15 (junior high school) level, the 15–18 (senior high school) level, the 18–22 level (university), the 22–25 level (postgraduate, entering society level, which can extend till 35).

2. See "Taiwan Factsheets Youthpolicy" at <http://www.youthpolicy.org/factsheets/country/taiwan/>.

3. See "La popolazione e la cultura di Taiwan" at <http://www.voyagesphotosmanu.com/popolazione_taiwan.html> and "World Population Review" at <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/taiwan-population/>

grow economically.[4] And a surprising level of growth has taken place in the in the last 50 years, though there are now some signs of crisis.

Another feature of Taiwan is its multicultural profile. The approximately 15 different tribes of indigenous peoples, the different traditions among the Han Chinese population, the presence of overseas workers from the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, recent policies promoting an outreach towards South-East Asia, marriages with foreign women, are creating a culturally multifaceted society, which at least shows openness to other cultures.

This is also due to a major factor that has been polarizing the life of Taiwan in recent years and will continue doing so for years to come: a growing pressure from Mainland China towards unification (understood in the PRC's terms). This problem is turning out to be one of the major flashpoints in the world, because of the involvement of the US, which has pledged to defend Taiwan in case of aggression.

The recent economic war between the US and China is creating additional reasons for contrasts verging on the risk of an all-out war also involving the US allies.

Pressured by China, Taiwan has reacted by desperately trying to find friends that share its vision of democratic freedom, so that the threat from China becomes a threat to Western values, involving the whole world.

Besides, the threat from China has exacerbated a deep divide that has characterized Taiwan society from the very end of the Second World War: an antagonism between the Taiwanese Chinese (85% of the population), and the *Waishengren* (12%).[5] These are the Chinese who migrated to the island because of the Civil War (1945–1949), a war at the end of which Chiang Kai Sek was compelled to flee to Taiwan and leave China in the hands of Mao Tse Tung.

Such a divide is mainly visible with reference to the issue of the relationship with China. While the Taiwanese Chinese are oriented towards freedom from China, even independence, the descendants of the refugees of 70 years ago have a more open approach to the problem and favor some kind of cooperation that, in the long run, will inevitably place Taiwan under Chinese control. The political climate is affected by these oppositions and is reflected on a social level.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND TAIWAN

First, it should be noted that Taiwan is still a relatively young country. The 15 and 24 age range makes up almost 13% of the population.[6] If the age bracket between 25 and 35 is

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4. "Taiwan's economy is growing rapidly. An estimate of its nominal GDP per capita for 2016 is $21,571. Its total PPP is over 1 trillion, putting its economy in 21st place when compared to other countries in the world" at <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/taiwan-population/>.

5. See "Taiwan Population 2019" at <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/taiwan-population/>.

6. See "Index Mundi" at <https://www.indexmundi.com/taiwan/demographics_profile.html>.

added, the percentage becomes much greater. As for the island's demographic situation and forecasts for the future, the data are slightly divergent. However, a certain concordance can be seen in stating that, despite a fall in births,[7] for more or less ten years, there will still be a growth in the total number of the population; then there will be a notable decrease, until it reaches 16 million around 2065.[8]

It is important to observe, however, that this decline is already visible now among young people. In 2019–2020 more than 150 university courses were canceled due to a lack of enrolled students.[9] Schools are generally suffering from the reduction in the number of pupils[10] and this is generating an immediate domino effect on educational structures and their employees, with loss of jobs and need for restructuring, and a long-term effect on the whole of society.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES

James C.T. Hsueh, a professor in the Department of Sociology at National Taiwan University, portrays the evolution of family patterns in Taiwan in this century in the following way:

> First, the total number of households increased over time although the total population did not increase as much. Second, the nuclear family comprised the largest share but has waned over time (47.9% to 37.3%). Third, the traditional stem family (where three or more direct lineages cohabit) was still important but declining in share (15.2% to 14%). Fourth, the smaller-sized households, such as single (10.8% to 11.9%) and couple-only (12.5% to 17.9%), are increasing. Finally, unconventional family forms, such as one-parent families and grandparents with children (atavistic), have increased in quantity, although they take up a smaller proportion.[11]

7. "With only 181.601 births last year, Taiwan's birthrate dropped to an eight-year low in 2018, announced the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) on Sunday (Jan. 6)." K. Everington, "Taiwan's Birthrate Plunges to an 8-Year Low in 2018" in *Taiwan News*, at <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3611847>.

8. K. Everington, "Taiwan's Population Trending Toward Faster Decline than Predicted" in *Taiwan News*, at <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3519266>.

9. "According to statistics provided by the Ministry of Education (MOE), a total of 172 courses across colleges and universities throughout Taiwan will be suspended in 2019 due to low recruitment levels," R. Drillsma, "MOE: Taiwan University and College Departments Closing Due to Declining Birth Rates" in *Taiwan News*, at <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3590293>.

10. "The Ministry of Education (MOE) estimates that the number of college students will decline by 40% to reach 723,000 by 2028. The reduced number of applicants will affect all universities, but the weakest schools are expected to be hit hardest" in M. Fulco, "Falling Population Squeezes Taiwan's Universities" at <https://topics.amcham.com.tw/2018/11/falling-population-squeezes-taiwans-universities/>.

11. J. C. Hsueh, "A Profile of the Taiwanese Family" at <https://ifstudies.org/blog/a-profile-of-the-taiwanese-family>.

Less births also means that families have fewer sons and daughters, and this, along with a number of other factors such as the double work of parents and the importance of school programs, has led to the emergence of a different pattern of interaction at the family level. Such a model, occurring in the years of childhood, shows its consequences during and after university studies.

At elementary and middle school age, children experience a complex series of interactions. Relationships with peers find expression not within the family, as there are few moments spent together with the (few) brothers and sisters (in the nuclear family there are no cousins). Indeed, in the school environment episodes of bullying happen, which mark them deeply and for a long time. Family dynamics are replaced by collective dynamics. In the same way with as their peers, the adults with whom they spend their time are not family figures, but teachers, school staff, sports instructors, music teachers, convenience stores clerks.[12] These relationships are casual. They do not strengthen and indeed even weaken self-image, the level of self-esteem, the ability to find inner motivation and enthusiasm for any project, to make decisions about one's life.[13]

The relationships between children and their parents (or one of the two: it must be kept in mind that in recent years on average there is a divorce every three marriages) is characterized by a certain contradiction between the intensity of affection and the small amount of time dedicated (for many reasons) to them. For parents, this situation gives rise to a sense of pressure and anxiety, with the fear of not living their responsibilities well. In the children, it creates a sense of loneliness. In children, such a feeling is accompanied by the effect of pressure caused by constant reproaches and few rewards. (Parents would say that all this is for their own good, so that children always improve).

Another factor that affects the quality of the relational life of children and young people (in reality it involves practically all of the population) is the widespread use of mobile phones and the virtual world[14] that they bring with them. The mobile phone has become, at least in terms of the amount of time involved, the first partner in the relationships of children and young people. From "medium" it becomes "message" and invites everyone to lose themselves in a world of infinite information, the attractions it offers, at most by participating with some commentary, as random as the relationship of which it is a part.

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12. It is not uncommon for parents to take their children to school and have an impromptu breakfast with them in one of the convenience stores present throughout the city. The times of family intimacy are reduced to almost non-existent.

13. A dark topic in the life of many children is sexual abuse, the perpetrators of which, in 47% of the cases, are family members to the victims (for the year 2016 see <https://international.ccf.org.tw/news_detail/pressrelease/pressrelease/25>).

14. While in Italian the adjective "virtuale" ("virtual") involves positive connotations (for example the semantic closeness with "virtuoso," "virtuous") and therefore is in some way attractive, the Chinese translation of the term is much more realistic. "Virtual" in Chinese is translated as 虛擬 (*xūnǐ*), in which *xū* means "empty," "void" and *nǐ* means "planning," "imitating," "imagining." Whatever way you interpret it, the idea of emptiness always remains, the idea of something that is vague, fleeting, random. Indeed, people prefer to use the term "digital," which is much more neutral.

It also creates a form of fragmented intelligence, unable to concentrate for long on the same object, therefore unable to reach high levels of motivation and perseverance. Again, this fact too weakens the personalities of young people.

Besides, to lavish one's attention on 'things' or on relations mediated by the code constituted by the digital world, reinforces the tendency to establish relationships of utility without real reciprocity. There is not, therefore, a real nourishment of the humanity of the persons involved, but on the contrary, it contributes to a process of depersonalization that seems to be the main trend of the universally prevailing market culture.

The mysterious and terrifying figure of a sacred monster hidden behind the digital world looms, devouring, as in the time of the Jewish Moloch, the personal existence of those who sacrifice their time and attention to it. Boys and girls who enter the age of youth, especially those who live in the cities or according to the city life model, carry with them this series of conditions, which cannot but influence the way in which they will live out their future years.

Things are slightly different for kids who live in a more traditional context. Family relationships exert a greater influence and they see and assimilate the models of life they see in the adults around them: a life linked to manual work, to a small business, where celebrations and feasts in temples are still a source of aggregation and identification with a community.[15]

These young people choose school programs that quickly give them the possibility of a job. In some way, for them, the time of youth is shorter; they are almost in a hurry to become and be considered adults in the immediate context in which they live. This obviously also involves taking up habits (such as smoking) which, in the long run, have negative effects on their physical and moral life.

SCHOOL, SOCIAL LIFE, WORK

High School

In Taiwan, beginning from 2014, compulsory education lasts 12 years, from 6 to 18 year of age. After 6 years of elementary school (6 to 12 years of age), there are years of junior high school (12 to 15), then three years of senior high school (15 to 18).[16]

However, "students may study, under the current education system, for up to 20 years, which includes 6 years of primary education, 3 years of junior high school, 3 years of senior secondary school, 4 to 7 years of college or university, 1 to 4 years for a master's degree and 2 to 7 years for a doctoral degree. Top choices in Government Colleges and

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15. In the celebrations of traditional religion, large groups of teenagers and young people play demanding parts such as drum players and performers in ritual dances. It seems that this participation, reserved for males, also has, in some way, a function of initiation.

16. See "Education in Taiwan" at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Taiwan>.

Universities are: engineering, followed by Business administration, humanities, education, social and behavioral sciences, while in private institutions they are: business administration, engineering, personal service, health and humanities."[17]

The three years of senior high school are geared towards the university entrance exams. Preparation for such exams begins by choosing areas of interest, in order to enter the corresponding university departments (in addition, students need to attend military education classes, under the supervision of military officers stationed at the schools).

However, due either to low scores in their exams, or to the entry conditions of the departments selected, students may end up studying subjects that are not of their best liking or in universities they did not sign for.

Because of the arrangement into two three-year stages, already at 15 students need to start thinking of their future: their choices of studies and work perspectives. This drives them towards an early assumption of responsibility with reference to their lives. In the years of senior high school great pressure is put on them.

At the metro stations, the first to appear in the morning are students going early to school to prepare for the lessons. Late in the evening, flocks of students crowd the stations: they are going back home after hours of Bǔxí bān (補習班, lit. "remedial education classes"), the privately run cram schools where they attend additional lessons to improve their skills and score higher in the exams.

However, such pressure does not necessarily result in strengthening the self-confidence of the teenagers, or their commitment towards long-term planning of their lives. It often only succeeds in further weakening their already fragile inner world – also because of the poor gratification parents and families are able to give them: nobody really knows *for what purpose* they need submit themselves to such an ordeal.

Besides this, two other factors make the construction of the personality of young students more difficult. The first is the absence of any value or spiritually-oriented teaching. Perhaps in order to avoid unnecessary polarizations, the state forbids any religious teaching, thus depriving the young subjects of a possible reference to an ideal world in which they may find the foundations of their commitment in life. They are strong in scientific subjects and win international awards, but they do not know why they should give the best of themselves for something that in the end does not satisfy their deepest needs.

In order to try to solve such an objective deficiency of Taiwan educational system, some universities have started preparing teachers who can give classes on Life Education, helping students, in an interreligious way, to reflect on major issues of their lives. Starting in 2010, the 330 high schools in Taiwan offered a course on life education.[18]

17. E. Andrew A. Carbon SDB, "Youth of Taiwan Today 2016" PPT. Courtesy of the author.

18. M. Man, "The core life education courses are a solid form of mental training. Following a set sequence, the participants learn about philosophical concepts, get an introduction to religious studies, and take classes in death education as well as basic ethics. The program gives teachers an opportunity to focus on philosophy, religion, death and ethics – topics that were not on the curriculum at teachers' colleges in the past." Quoted

A second factor is the enacting of the *Gender Equity Education Act*, in 2004.[19] For almost 15 years, this kind of education has been at work among students, and has added to the incertitude of many about their identity.[20]

On November 24, 2018, Taiwanese citizens answered a multi-question referendum. Some of the questions were on LGBT rights, education and same-sex marriage. The National Referendum Proposition 11 ("Do you agree that the Ministry of Education should not implement the Enforcement Rules of the Gender Equality Education Act in elementary and middle schools?") was approved by 7.083.379 voters (67.44%) and rejected by 3.419.624 voters (32.56%), with a turnout of 55.73%. Proposition 15 ("Do you agree in accordance with the Gender Equality Education Act that national education of all levels should educate students on the importance of gender equality, emotional education, sex education, and same-sex education?") was rejected 6.805.171 voters, 65.99% of the voters (the turnout was 55.3%; in favor were 3.507.665, 34.01% of the voters).[21] Such outcomes notwithstanding, given the power of the lobbies behind the LGBT movement, it is foreseeable that there will not be any major shift from the actual course.

According to the data provided by Fr. Carbon SDB,[22] by the age of 15 to 17, 10% of males have already had a sexual experience with another person, compared to 12% of females. In Tainan, 72% used internet as a main way to seek a sexual partner and 73% had sex with friends found on-line, a sign of the estrangement of sexual life from daily direct relationships the teenagers live. This can be linked to the high rate of internet addiction tendency: 73%, while actual internet addicts are 17%. About 63% of internet addicts suffer also from depression, alcohol and/or substance abuse.

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in <https://tw.forumosa.com/t/life-education-in-high-school-classes/55021>. See also: S.-S. Ng, W. Chan, "Introducing 'Life Education' in People's Republic of China (Taiwan Province)" in *International Association for Religious Freedom* at <https://iarf.net/REBooklet/RoCTaiwan.htm>.

19. "The General Provisions states the purposes of the act: 'to promote substantive gender equality, eliminate gender discrimination, uphold human dignity, and improve and establish education resources and environment of gender equality.' In recent years this act has become controversial because it has implemented anti-discrimination on LGBT rights and LGBT sex education" at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_Equity_Education_Act>.

20. "An opinion poll conducted in November 2016 by the Kuomintang found that 52% of the Taiwanese population supported same-sex marriage, while 43% were opposed. Another poll commissioned that same month found similar numbers: 55% in support, and 45% in opposition. Support was highest among 20–29-year-olds, but decreased significantly with age" at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Same-sex_marriage_in_Taiwan>. Those who by 2016 were 20–29 years old, 11 years earlier were 9–18 years old: they were the first to receive the kind of education promoted by the *Gender Equality Education Act*.

21. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2018_Taiwanese_referendum>. In the meantime, on 24 May, 2019, Taiwan legislation has bluntly disregarded the outcome of Proposition 10 ("Do you agree that marriage defined in the Civil Code should be restricted to the union between one man and one woman?"), which was approved by 7.658.008 voters (72.48%), and made a law on same-sex union, calling it "marriage." See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Same-sex_marriage_in_Taiwan>. It is possible that the same kind of logic applied for the law on same-sex marriage be at work in implementing the results of the referendum in what pertains to the Gender Equality Education Act.

22. E. Andrew A. Carbon, *Youth of Taiwan Today 2016*, PPT, quoted above.

Recently, due in part to government promotion by agencies, interest for sport is increasing, especially for basketball, volleyball and soccer (both male and female teams). Traditionally, Taiwan promoted individual sports, such as tennis, or badminton. An exception was baseball, perhaps because of its importance in Japan and because it is a typical US sport, where Japan (and Taiwan) want to show their ability. These sports do not foster a spirit of group cooperation in view of a common goal; they only create some individual champions that many may envy and try to emulate.

Perhaps with a view to countering counter individual isolation and solitude, many agencies are implementing policies that favor these sports. One risk is that only marginal groups, such as Aboriginal young people, profit from these opportunities, without a real evolution in the ways youngsters think and value their experiences. Indeed, Chinese tradition does not know sport.

There are forms of physical training, connected with spiritual cultivation, but their purpose is to enhance the energies and capabilities of the body, preserving them in view of future needs, rather than wasting them in useless contests that can only give transitory glory without really improving the conditions of the body.

It is in this multifaceted context that teenagers grow and begin to form their ideals. Their inner world remains largely mysterious. It is accessible perhaps to their equals, with whom they have the courage to share it, or to their parents, or to those in charge of counseling inside the schools. Adults, however, cannot but use their own eyes to assess the world of young people. In this way, distortions of reality may easily happen, resulting in misinterpretations and increased feelings of solitude and uncertainty, a gap that is difficult to bridge.

We should also acknowledge that practically everybody shares a sort of deep trust in a common belonging to the national community as organized and ruled by the organs of the State. Such a deep trust allows all ages to rely on the system and therefore find a way to rely on each other. Unfortunately, such a feeling of belonging, strong as it may be, does not take into sufficient account the fact that every single individual is also a person, with a desire for infinite realization. Such a realization is not in the power of the state to guarantee. It is because many trust the human community as capable of offering what is not in its power to give, that they experience disappointment, feelings of depression, and solitude. This is more visible among the young generations.

University

The years of university studies are for young people a clear moment of shift and change. After years during which they had to follow very tight schedules and were under pressure from parents and family members, suddenly they find themselves in an environment where many important decisions are in their hands, while the distance from their families grows more and more. Parents do not dare to control them as during their high school years; to choose among many optional courses is up to them; the times of lessons vary

with the semesters; they may live in dorms, closer to their schoolmates; they discover new friends and activities. Suddenly, an incredible amount of freedom falls on their shoulders, shoulders that carry this weight with difficulty. Campuses become the environment where they begin to enter their adult life. In some sense, a university campus is still a protected environment that shields them from some major challenges—at least as long as their families have sufficient money to support their studies. If they need to work, at least a part-time job, then their psychological growth proceeds at a faster pace.

During this time, they start looking with more attention into their future, and orient themselves towards the jobs they like more. During this time, there may also be opportunities for knowing boy- and girlfriends, although the time for the choice of marriage partner may not yet be ripe. The same is true for spiritual choices, such as a religious affiliation and even special vocations within a particular religion.

Politics

Among other aspects, one that is typical of this span of time is an increased interest in politics. On this point, Taiwan has a very long tradition. It dates back to the opposition to the rule of the Qing Dynasty; to the foundation of the first Republic of Asia in 1895; to the dialectics with the Japanese rulers; to the opposition to Chinese rule in the first years after the end of the Second World War and then till the end of the White Terror (1949–1987).[23] Oftentimes, leaders of such opposition movements were young people, who often payed a heavy price for their commitment to freedom.

An important moment in which young people played an key political role in Taiwan was in 2014, when the so-called Sunflower Movement arose. In terms of ideals, it was heir to the Wild Lily Student Movement (March 1990, less than one year after Tian An Men), which asked for direct elections of the President and Vice-President, and new general elections.[24]

The Sunflower Student Movement erupted when the Legislature passed the Cross-Strait-Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA) without the previously agreed-upon clause-by-clause review. The students (with the DPP behind them) considered this Agreement as damaging to Taiwan's economy and leaving it open to political pressure from the PRC. Upon seeing their requests unanswered, crowds of students, together with academics and civic organizations occupied the Legislative Yuan, on the evening of 18 March. The protest further escalated when another group of protesters occupied the Executive Yuan, on 23 March. Police evicted them from there the following morning, while the students terminated the occupation of the Legislative Yuan (the first in Taiwan's history) on April

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23. See "White Terror (Taiwan)" at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_Terror_(Taiwan)>.

24. See "Wild Lily Student Movement" at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wild_Lily_student_movement>. A smaller youth protest movement, the Wild Strawberries, was active starting from November 2008. Its requests were not accepted by the government and the movement stopped its sit-ins in January 2009 (see "Wild Strawberries Movement" at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wild_Strawberries_Movement>).

10, at 6.00pm.[25] The movement then went ahead and a new political party took shape in 2015: the New Power Party. In the 2016 general election, it won five legislative seats, thus becoming the third political formation in the Legislative Yuan.[26]

This is a macroscopic event that however shows how diffused is the willingness of young people, in this case university students, to take responsibility for the life of the country.

This tradition is confirmed by the number of young candidates at every level of the political arena. They perceive the intricacy and volatility of the situation of Taiwan and are willing to offer their contribution to work out acceptable solutions.[27]

It is however necessary to realize that in Taiwan entering into real political life is not easy at all.

One reason is that getting into politics is very expensive. Those who apply must pay a lot of money, hundreds of thousands of NTDs; maybe they do not win, and that is lost money. For example, to become mayor takes around 2 million NTD, maybe without success. In other states, it may be easier. In Taiwan, besides money, another prerequisite is necessary: somebody in the family who has had an experience in politics, for instance, the father or mother of the young politicians-to-be who has been elected to some post. Thus in Taiwan, politics becomes a family affair, a business of the clan. As a result, few enter into the political arena, and many take to heart what happens, from outside. Others think that the situation cannot change, and they are not interested. We are moving towards a polarization of positions, with less and less space for a free and open dialogue.

It is indeed a fact that the pressure of the PRC toward Taiwan is mounting and this creates an even bigger polarization between the two historical parties of the island. Every attempt at finding a way out meets strong opposition. There is a frequent swing from positions favorable to a more friendly approach to the PRC to a set of diversified policies that aim at freeing Taiwan from the mortal embrace of China.[28]

In more recent times, under the "America First" policy inaugurated by US President

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25. See "Sunflower Student Movement" at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunflower_Student_Movement>.
26. See "New Power Party" at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Power_Party>.
27. "The 2018 midterm elections were a referendum on DPP policy more than anything. However, the inflow of fresh young candidates in both camps was recognition that neither party has had a popular central government in the past several election cycles (the KMT was dumped in 2014 and 2016, much as the DPP was shellacked this year). Now, both parties, surprised by the midterm results, must embark on a re-evaluation of policy, ideology, and candidates. The parties must attempt an image makeover, entering new frontiers, and offering new substance," J. X. Morris, "KMT Shocks with Its Success in Taiwan Elections" *The Diplomat*, at <https://thediplomat.com/2018/11/kmt-shocks-with-its-success-in-taiwan-elections/>.
28. "DPP policy over the past two years has not been effective enough to convince Taiwan's civil society they have domestic issues under control, and individually many Taiwanese feel left behind as the DPP has pursued lofty goals. The past two years of DPP government in Taiwan have been defined by three larger trends: the New Southbound Policy, an attempt to establish stronger linkages with southeast Asia as a means to pull Taiwan out of China's orbit; domestic fiscal reforms, including addressing the stalled economy and looming pension crisis; and a move toward progressive policies and ideology, including legalization of gay marriage and halting nuclear power plants." J. X. Morris, Ivi.

Donald Trump, contrasts with Beijing have become more and more tense, starting from what appears to be an incoming economic war.[29] The international trend aimed at creating and separating two opposite camps once again is having a strong incidence on Taiwan. On the economic side, the government is encouraging the trend of companies bringing back their factories to the island.[30] On the military side, the US is willing once again to sell weapons to the Army and Air Force. Besides, multiple supporting statements are coming from across the Pacific: the use of the name "Taiwan," the appellative "State" for Taiwan is appearing again, together with the ROC flag, in official events, statements of government institutions.[31]

All these moves are having a general impact on the whole nation, but in a special way on the young. The government is multiplying its efforts to lure young people into a greater personal commitment to supporting them, to the point of encouraging them to declare their availability to defend the state and to fight for defending it.[32]

The external threat from the PRC is a factor in the cohesion among young people. It represents a powerful call to face real life and to make choices accordingly. A factor pulling in the opposite direction is the vast range of opportunities open to university and postgraduate students to further their studies abroad. Besides the traditional destinations (US, UK, Europe) the exchange programs offered by Mainland China are an option, because of the job opportunities linked to them in such a huge economic environment.

A total of 31 incentives, including tax breaks and subsidized fees for those who

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29. Besides the tariffs the US imposed on Chinese goods, the restrictions for ZTE and Huawei on using US products, the lobbying to many states not to use Huawei for their G5 infrastructure, an important development is the frequent passage of US Navy ships, together with ships from allied countries, through the Taiwan Strait and in the South China Sea (the Spratly Islands) on which China claims sovereignty. On a recent passage, see: Idrees Ali, "Two US warships sail in disputed South China Sea" at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-military/two-us-warships-sail-in-disputed-south-china-sea-idUSKCN1SC085>.

30. "Another four Taiwanese companies have gained approval to return home under a government incentive program, bringing the total investments pledged by such firms to over NT$375 billion (US$11.90 billion) so far this year, the Ministry of Economic Affairs (MOEA) said Thursday." "Investment pledges by overseas Taiwan firms top NT$375 billion," *Focus Taiwan* at <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/aeco/201906140006.aspx>.

31. As an example, see the story of a young cadet who graduated in the USAFA class of 2019 and waved the ROC flag at the event, at which President Trump was present (the flag of the ROC was also exposed) at <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/aipl/201906020006.aspx>.

32. A recent poll (2018) showed that "among people 39 or younger, 65.5 percent support maintaining the cross-strait "status quo," 10.4 percent support unification and 23.5 percent support independence… among people 40 or older, support for these positions are 59.3 percent, 20.1 percent and 14.7 percent respectively. A total of 63.4 percent of respondents 39 or younger expressed a willingness to go to war should China declare war on Taiwan following a declaration of independence, while 32.6 percent were opposed… Should China preemptively attempt to annex Taiwan by force, the number of people 39 or younger willing to fight increased to 70.3 percent, while those unwilling decreased to 26.5 percent." Quoted in Nadia Tsao and Jonathan Chin, "Nation's youth favor pragmatism" *Taipei Times*, at <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2018/04/05/2003690713>. See also "Ko reelected Taipei Mayor, Ting Vows to Sue" at <http://focustaiwan.tw/news/aipl/201804190036.aspx>.

relocate, were launched to lure Taiwanese companies, skilled workers and pro-
fessionals across the strait. The measures also seek to encourage the growing
number of Taiwanese who graduate from mainland universities to seek employ-
ment there rather than returning home. This is bolstered by the relatively high
unemployment rate for university graduates in Taiwan, which in 2018 stood at 5
percent compared to 3.6 percent across the workforce.[33]

The government sees the move as aggressive, potentially draining Taiwan of its future
talents. In 2017, there were about 12,000 Taiwan students enrolled in Chinese Universi-
ties. Now, Chinese Universities report a fivefold increase in the number of applications
from Taiwan. Such an increase is also an additional factor in the decline in the number
of applications to Taiwanese Universities.

In reality, the different mindsets of Taiwanese people *vis-à-vis* the relationship with
the PRC are also visible among the young. No clear majority wants independence; no clear
majority wants unity, no clear majority is in favor of the *status quo*. In such a confused
situation, all outcomes become possible, especially given the high degree of interest and
participation in political issues.

Hong Kong Protests against the Extradition Law

Starting from 31 March, 2019, a wave of demonstrations has tried to stop the readings
and approval of an amendment to the *Fugitive Offenders Ordinance* and *Mutual Legal
Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation Ordinance*. This amendment "Would establish
a mechanism for case-by-case transfers of fugitives by the Chief Executive to any juris-
diction with which the city lacks a formal extradition treaty, including Mainland China."[34]

The protests, mainly pacific even though the police (accused of gratuitous brutality)
and government have tried to call them "riots," have escalated to an unprecedented size,
with more than a million people taking to the streets on 9 June,[35] and more than two
million on 16 June.[36]

The standoff is still going on, with Carrie Lam apologizing but not resigning, and not
accepting the requests of the protesters, postponing but not withdrawing "completely and

33. B. Halder, "China's New Weapon against Taiwan? Educating Its Best and Brightest" at <https://www.
ozy.com/acumen/chinas-new-weapon-against-taiwan-educating-its-best-and-brightest/94039>.

34. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019_Hong_Kong_anti-extradition_bill_protests>.

35. "CHRF convenor Jimmy Sham said that 1.03 million people attended the march, the largest protest
Hong Kong has seen since the 1997 handover, surpassing the turnout seen at mass rallies in support of the
Tiananmen protests of 1989 and July 1 demonstration of 2003. The police countered with an estimate of
270,000 at its peak. Evan Fowler of the Hong Kong Free Press noted that the police had 'become notorious for
using highly selective methods to significantly underreport numbers, but that the demonstration was 'beyond
doubt… the largest one-day protest in Hong Kong's history'," Ivi.

36. "'Almost 2 million plus 1 citizens', denoting the protester who died at the protest scene on the day
before, which set the record of the largest protest in Hong Kong history… Early in the afternoon, Radio
France Internationale reported that Stand News, an independent online news agency, used big data to predict
that at most 1.44 million would have participated in the protest," Ivi.

permanently" the amendment. A not immediately perceivable detail is that the law may apply to financial matters, as a result of which some have started moving their assets away from Hong Kong.[37]

> On 9 June, at least 29 rallies were held in 12 countries with protesters taking to the streets in cities around the world with a significant Hong Kong diaspora… On 12 June, representatives from 24 Taiwanese civic groups, including the Taiwan Association for Human Rights, protested outside Hong Kong's representative office in Taipei, shouting slogans such as "Taiwan supports Hong Kong." In Kaohsiung, around 150 Hong Kong students staged a sit-in protest requesting the Hong Kong government to withdraw the bill.[38]

Thousands of people also rallied in front of the Legislative Yuan in Taipei. Among the organizers was the Taiwan Youth Association for Democracy. The rally drew more than 10.000 people to the streets, braving the scorching heat.[39] Taiwan protests are a clear sign of the commitment people—and among them young people—show for justice and democratic freedom, in a special way when faced with the threat posed by China's way of conducting dialogue.[40]

Entering the Job Market

A number of low-level jobs remain and will remain rather stable. They are for young people with a relatively low schooling and come to them from their family business. Jobs in agriculture, in many kinds of services, in the myriad of little shops present everywhere will be available to the new generations, provided they like that kind of enterprise.

It is indeed a fact that many families would like their sons and daughters to improve their level of life. In this way, however, their job and the consequent income depend more and more on the general conditions of the (international) market. Taiwan does not have enough resources and must rely on the abilities of its people to create and export its products, often products of high technology. In this situation, international changes heavily affect the prospects for young people for finding jobs they like and give them enough resources for creating a family of their own.

The volatility of the situation is causing a continuous evolution in the kind of jobs offered, so that a long-term position is becoming more and more of a dream. Besides, the

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37. See: Staff, "Hong Kong Extradition Law Jolts Business Community," *Taipei Times* (15 June, 2019), 10; G. Torode, "Hong Kong Tycoons Start Moving Assets Offshore Over New Extradition Law," *Taipei Times* (17 June, 2019), 7.

38. See "2019 Hong Kong Anti-extradition Bill Protests" at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019_Hong_Kong_anti-extradition_bill_protests>.

39. A. Maxon, "Thousands Rally in Taipei to Support Hong Kong," *Taipei Times* (17 June, 2019), 1.

40. See: L. Lim, "Hong Kong is not China Yet, but that Feared Day is Coming Ever Nearer," *Taipei Times* (17 June, 2019), 7.

competition in every field compels practically all companies to demand additional hours of overtime work, thus further reducing young people's free time and opportunities for pursuing other interests.

The instability endured by young people in the early years of their career still accompanies them well into their thirties, until they may by chance get a favorable employment.

In these circumstances, it is easy to understand why many young people choose to further their studies abroad, where they hope to find stable and remunerative jobs.

Besides, they show a different approach to work and work ethics. They do not easily accept the traditional work culture of Taiwanese companies, where "Decision-making is concentrated at the top, absolute loyalty is expected from employees, and overtime work is obligatory."[41] They value the importance of keeping a proper balance between work and life, so that when the work conditions do not satisfy their expectations, they are more ready to find other jobs. They have grown up in a better environment than their predecessors. They see a fast-evolving world, the success of young tech entrepreneurs. They would like to emulate them. Since in the city many primary needs are easily met, since social media offer immediate answers to their questions, they become less patient. They desire fairness and transparency, therefore need explanations for the choices their bosses make.

> Alan McIvor, a recruiter at Bo Le Associates in Taipei, says that he often has difficulty filling positions with younger Taiwanese. In his experience, many of these prospective employees are unreliable, sometimes accepting an offer from a company and then changing their mind at the last minute. In addition, they often quit at the first signs of discomfort. "They won't do the long hours for low pay that's typical in Taiwanese companies," he says. "They have a low threshold for pain"… "They think primarily about their happiness in the short term…" 'They are less likely than older generations to stick with a job and hold out for a promotion and salary raise."[42]

It is true that Taiwan salaries are low, but the millennials are less willing to accept that. Another factor in the different approach of Taiwan millennials to the job market is the shortened military service.[43] This translates, at least among men, into a weaker sense of discipline and patience.

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41. M. Fulco, "The Challenge of Managing Taiwan's Millennnials" *Taiwan Business Topics*, at <https://topics.amcham.com.tw/2019/04/the-challenges-of-managing-taiwans-millennials/>.

42. Ivi.

43. "Among men, the reduction in the length and intensity of compulsory military service may have also affected their attitudes towards work. When Taiwan first implemented conscription for males 18 and older in 1951, two to three years of service was required. Now young men must complete just four months of training, and the government's goal is to institute an all-volunteer force. In McIvor's experience, manager-level candidates 40 and older, who typically would have done at least one year of compulsory military service, think the discipline they developed in the armed services makes them stronger. He says they show a greater willingness

The Taiwanese education system has its adverse influence too. It develops talents in mathematics and science, but does not cultivate "…the critical-thinking skills that employers increasingly need. The education system could benefit from adopting a more international outlook, such as through partnerships with foreign universities."[44] Among the effects of these shifts is also the inability of companies to cultivate talents, thus weakening their competitiveness in the global market.

YOUTH AND RELIGION

A special point, characteristic of our presentation of youth in Taiwan is the relationship of young people with religion.

> Religious freedom is constitutionally guaranteed in Taiwan and the country is host to a diverse range of religions—26 in total are officially recognized, but people are free to follow other religions if they choose. Government statistics show that Buddhism is the most popular religion, practiced by around 35.1% of Taiwanese, followed closely by Taoism (33.0%). Christianity and Yiguandao are the third and fourth most popular religions, followed by 3.9% and 3.5% respectively. Approximately 18.7% of Taiwanese are non-religious.[45]

Statistics like this, clear as they may be, do not show the real situation of religion in Chinese culture. A common saying recites: 三教合一 (*Sān jiào hé yī*): "The three teaching flow into one." This means that in Chinese culture "religious belonging" has a meaning that is different from what people in the West commonly understand.

to work their way up the ladder in an organization," Ivi.

44. Ivi.

45. See "Taiwan Population 2019" at <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/taiwan-population/>. "A 1996 report of the Interior Ministry offers very accurate information. The faithful registering with the various Buddhist associations totals 4.8 million people. The number of temples affiliated under the Taoist association's banner, and home for most folk religious practices, amounts to 8.292, with registered persons numbering 3.8 million. Among the recognized new religions, Yiguandao claims a membership of 942.000 persons. It is followed by Tiandejiao (200.000 followers) and Tiandijiao (roughly the same figure). Tiandejiao was founded in the Mainland in 1923 and legalized as a religion in Taiwan in 1989. Tiandijiao, founded by Li Yu-chieh in 1980, may be the fastest growing new religion in Taiwan. According to the same report, Catholic membership is 304.000 and the membership of the various Protestant denominations is 402.000. The Catholic Church and the main Protestant denominations have remained at a standstill in growth, or may even have experienced a slight decline, over the last twenty-five years. The above-mentioned figures cover only the religious movements legally recognized, and thus partly ignore the flourishing of movements and masters outside these official associations," in B. Vermander, "Christianity and the Taiwanese Religious Landscape," *The Way*, 1999/39: 130–31 at <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=Benoit+Vermander.+Christianity+and+the+Taiwanese+Religious+Landscape.+On%3A+The+Way%2C+39%2C+1999.+London+Society+of+Jesus.+pp.+129-139>. In the meantime, the number of Catholics has diminished to well under 200.000, while the number of Christians has grown, to the point that now (2019) Christians are a little more than 4% of the population ("Christianity in Taiwan" at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_Taiwan>).

First, the three main "religions" (Folk Religion, Buddhism, Confucianism) foster three different belonging patterns. Belonging to folk religion begins, in a rather automatic way, with birth. There is no need of any choice. It is a given, it is traditional, in the same way as learning one's mother idiom. The feeling first, then the choice of belonging grow with time and age. It always remains, however, more a traditional characteristic than a personal choice. Folk religion is not missionary, in the same way as racial and cultural belonging are not items for outsiders to pick up.

To be a Buddhist, or a member of the new religious, is different: it involves a choice, therefore a sort of faith. Such faith however has a doctrine, rather than a personal entity, as its object. In any case, figures such as Guan Yin Pu Sa, Di Zang Pu Sa, Matreya Buddha, are there, but just in order to go beyond them towards the perfect transparency of the doctrinal system.

In turn, Confucianism presents yet another different pattern. Since Confucianism is a set of doctrines concerning ethics, family, social and political life, it is debatable whether to call it a religion. In any case, Confucian temples exist, therefore a ritual. However, Confucian rituals celebrate an enhancing, a ritualization of social life, rather than any creed involving transcending entities.

Second, it is common for many people to pass from a temple to another, according to the different needs they face. In other terms, according to Chinese tradition, a "religious belonging" is not exclusive, because what Chinese people look for when getting closer to religious beliefs and rituals are solutions to problems otherwise impossible or difficult to solve. Personal advantage is the drive behind many forms of traditional religious behavior.

In this context, when facing the relationship between young people and religion, a key problem is how religious traditions become part of their inner world, how they influence their interpretation of their lives and their great and small decisions. In a word, the key problem is the transmission of religious belonging and faith.

Folk Religion

Sons and daughters of families practicing traditional Chinese religion do not have a clear perception of religious belonging. If somebody asks them to which religion they belong, they answer by talking about the religion of their own families. If somebody asks them in whom they believe, they do not know how to answer. For present-day teenagers, religion is something accidental; they place themselves in line with the beliefs of their families.

Generally, temples do not run schools; therefore, there is no institutional opportunity for transmitting folk religion traditions. Young people learn about such traditions occasionally: when they go to the temple with their relatives during major feasts, or when their relatives explain them the reasons for rites and customs.

However, after senior high school, they may start reflecting whether and in whom or in what they really believe. During their university and postgraduate studies, they may look for and investigate about other religions. The same happens when they start working.

As an example, among the young baptized of this year, about half came from the traditional religion. Before, during junior high school years, they went with their families to prostrate in the temples, but without believing too much. Growing up, they realize that the revered gods do not protect them. Their offerings too do not protect them. Then they begin to wonder why they need to offer so much money and why, in order to believe, it is necessary to spend so much, continually bring offerings and gifts. Are there other ways? For those who come from traditional religion, it is easy to reach Jesus. Besides, many children and young people now tend to think in a Western way. When they come to know Jesus, their readiness to believe is rather strong. Because of this, they can enter the Catholic faith.

However, this is a small fraction. Folk religions feasts are major events, with rich programs, involving colorful processions and crowds of people. Among the staff working during these events, young people are numerous. They may figure as dancers who impersonate gods and spirits, in splendid attires. This is a way too in which young people receive their religious tradition and make it their own. For their services, they receive money, but the deep involvement required to perform their roles instils in them such kind of beliefs, in a slow, natural and progressive way. On the other side, some of these young people may easily become school dropouts and find themselves in need of a job. They become easy prey of drug trafficking and of groups that teach them negative behavior, by associating them to their shady business, such as the many ways of cheating people. Temples have money, because of the many offerings they receive.[46] Under the wings of temples, young people may find the money and protection they need. Unfortunately, temples are also places where local mafias find shelter for their activities; they also invest part of their profits there. Young people can easily be lured into their schemes. Among the underage offenders in Taipei Detention Center,[47] 70% has made use of drugs; 90% of them return to prison again.

46. "Roughly speaking, it can be estimated that Taiwan had around 4.000 temples in 1960 and has well over 15.000 today. The accumulation of wealth has made places of worship bigger and even more richly adorned. The building of temples and their ornamentation now represents huge business. Generally speaking, the amount of money going into religious activities, as well as the appropriateness (or otherwise) of its use gives rise to a growing concern Some religious leaders, such as the respected Master Cheng-yan, have openly expressed their fear that this may generate a moral and cultural crisis within the various religious communities. Everything, it seems, induces Taiwanese people to invest more and more in religious practices, goods and proselytizing activities," in B. Vermander, "Christianity and the Taiwanese Religious Landscape," in *The Way*, op. cit. And further: "Recently, the astonishing growth and multiplication of Tibetan Buddhist groups have drawn concern and sometimes criticisms from other denominations. Most of the criticisms may be biased. However, they make a common point. They all relate the growth of Tibetan Buddhist practices to the consumerist attitude of Talwanese people towards religious phenomena. The "religious goods" offered in this case are: esoteric knowledge supposedly deeper than that possessed by other Buddhist schools, practices leading to enlightenment and salvation that can be learned in a quick and safe way and, finally, religious exoticism. In fact, one can overhear Tibetan masters expressing the same kind of concern," Ivi.

47. The total number of inmates is around 3000 (3022 at the end of 2018). Out of them 238 (8.4%) are under 24. See "Menerima Proses Pelayanan" at <http://www.tpd.moj.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=221182&Ct-

However, in the recent past, temples too "Have also extended their reach into social services currently operating a total of 20 hospitals and clinics as well as 180 schools ranging from kindergarten to University."[48]

Buddhism

For young people coming from Buddhist families, things are different. Those families encourage and support the faith of their sons and daughters; they consider this an important matter. They may send them to Buddhist schools, where every day there are mandatory prayers before meals and there is only vegetarian food. According to the law of the state, schools should not give any clear religious formation to their students, but the power of the Buddhists in Taiwanese society is considerable, therefore they feel sure of not incurring any sanction because of this. In general, given the importance of Buddhism in Taiwan, the issue of Buddhist education has many implications.

> The issues involved in Buddhist education are complex and operate at a variety of levels and in a variety of educational settings… At the most basic level, I feel that Buddhists are motivated to set up their own educational enterprises because they are alienated by a public school system they see as inimical to the religious outlook generally, and to Buddhism in particular, and which produces graduates who reject religion in favor of an entirely secular worldview. This feeling leads many to dream of a system of private schools, which can provide a complete education from kindergarten through graduate school based on Buddhist principles and produce educated people dedicated to spreading the dharma at home and abroad. Another expression of this alienation has been efforts on the part of teachers and activists to reform the public school system so as to include some level of religious studies within the regular curriculum.[49]

Progress has been made from the time of this assessment, more than 20 years ago. At present, not only "Almost all universities in Taiwan have Buddhist associations on campus,"[50] but also there are ten Buddhist universities on the island,[51] in addition to centers for Buddhist Studies in some major universities.[52]

Node=30098&mp=170>.

48. C. K. Tong, *Rationalizing Religion. Religious Conversion, Revivalism and Competition in Singapore Society* (Leiden Boston: Brill, 2007), 287.

49. C. B. Jones, *Buddhism in Taiwan: a Historical Survey* (Dissertation, University of Virginia, 1996) 449–50 at <http://buddhism.lib.ntu.edu.tw/museum/TAIWAN/md/bit/bit-401.htm>.

50. G. Hsiang, "Buddhism in Taiwan (Part 1)" at <http://www.dharmadrum.org/content/news/view.aspx?sn=380>.

51. See "List of Buddhist Universities and Colleges" at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Buddhist_universities_and_colleges#Taiwan>.

52. Such as the one established in the National Taiwan University (<http://ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/>), or the Chengchi Buddhist Philosophy Forum in Chengchi University (<http://buddhica.nccu.edu.tw/?page=1262>).

Different Buddhist groups have also created television networks, through which they share their faith and activities. The most important of them is Da Ai Television, established in 1995 by the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation.[53]

Buddhist followers generally belong to the upper social strata. Their religious convictions have led them to set up an educational network that provides the young generations with an extensive net of study opportunities, characterized not only by Buddhist religious belief but also by high academic standards.

Other Religions

In the same way as Buddhism, other religions (such as *Tian De Jiao* and *Tian Di Jiao*), which bring together various syntheses of dogmas, rituals and practices taken from traditional religion, run educational structures. They consider this activity as an important way to ensure their own future. The case of 一貫道 (*Yīguàn Dào*) presents some special features.

> In the period of rapid economic growth of Taiwan, starting in the 1960s and proceeding through the 1980s and 1990s, Yiguandao spread its influence by entering business and industrial development. Many members became important businessmen; for instance, Zhang Rongfa, the founder of the Evergreen Marine Corporation, was the chief initiator of a Yiguandao subdivision and in the 1990s almost all the managers of his corporation were Yiguandao members. The same strategy of "combining missionary work and business" facilitates the development of Yiguandao in mainland China, where Yiguandao businessmen began reestablishing the religion since the 1980s by means of investment. Another means by which Yiguandao expanded in Taiwan was that of charity.[54]

Although Yiguandao is rather secretive to both outsiders and partially even to insiders, it is logical to think that it has formation activities. Indeed, a researcher reports about her fieldwork:

> From September 21–27, 2002, I had lived in *Shenwei Tiantaishan*, a huge Yiguan Dao temple, which was still under construction at the time. There, I worked as a volunteer and lived together with the sectarians, participating in and observing the sectarians' activities. During the daytime, I worked with the volunteers and had chats with the potential interviewees. At night, I attended the Yiguan Dao congregation and interviewed the sectarians after that. In the following two months, I also attended some seminars and research courses, which were

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53. Founded by Dharma Master Cheng Yen in 1966, it has more than 10 million members all over the world, in 47 countries. See "Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation" at <http://tw.tzuchi.org/en/>.

54. See "Yiguandao" at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yiguandao>.

respectively designed for children, young college students, and veteran Yiguan Dao sectarians.[55]

Temples, rather than open schools, are the venues of Yiguandao educational activities. In the meantime, the Liu Gui University was founded, becoming a full-fledged education hub, with schools covering all levels of primary education, offering courses designed in conformity with the doctrines of Yiguandao and acknowledged by the Ministry of Education.[56]

Nevertheless, it seems that the high degree of commitment needed to follow the Yiguandao makes this religion, which verges on sectarianism, not particularly palatable to young people.[57] Besides temples, houses are the places where adherents gather, and mothers and grandmothers are the main figures who introduce their children into the Yiguandao creed. Their formation takes place mainly through prayer, which forms positive and faithful people. However, not many young people are prepared to continue in the faith of their families, though to leave Yiguandao is not easy either. A combination of magic spells and of economic pressure heaped on those who would leave does not encourage them to go their way.

Christian Churches

In order to introduce the challenges of Christian denominations working with young people, two remarks may be useful.

A first remark is to notice the proportionally huge commitment of the different Churches, from the beginning of their presence in Taiwan,[58] for social service and for education, especially when compared with what other religions did.[59] At present, in

55. Y. Lu, *The Transformation of Yiguan Dao in Taiwan: Adapting to a Changing Religious Economy* (Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth: Lexington Books, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, 2008), 13.

56. Yiguan Dao is moving towards being a church-like organization, with professional cadres. "Since the 1980s, some divisions of Yiguan Dao have begun to establish a professionalized clergy. For example, *Fayi Chongde*, the largest division of Yiguan Dao, had hundreds of devout believers who made a vow of celibacy (*Qingxiu*). Led by Chen, a female celibate, the division encouraged young sectarians to be celibate by means of spirit possession and spirit writing… The division produced a large number of revelations revealing the shortcomings of marriage and stressing that being a celibate is religiously and morally superior to the laity… Being affected by the 'miracles' of spirit possession, many young sectarians in the 1970s became celibates, most of whom were college students… Today, most of these celibates have been promoted as initiators, occupying most of the important positions of *Fayi Chongde* and making a living by managing the religious staff. These celibates are now typically professional ecclesiastics," in Y. Lu, *The Transformation of Yiguan Dao in Taiwan*, op. cit., 164.

57. In order to cater for the needs of young people, a Yiguandao Cultural Center in Yong He (New Taipei City), is staging activities such as dance and music performances, which attract them and offer opportunities to give them formation.

58. For a succinct presentation of Christianity in Taiwan, see: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_Taiwan>.

59. We may say that Christians opened a way that other religions learnt to follow. A key figure fostering such a development was the Venerable Tai Xu (1889–1947), who advocated bringing back Buddhism to the human world. See: D. Long, "Humanistic Buddhism From Venerable Tai Xu to Grand Master Hsing Yun," in

Taiwan there are 10 Christian Universities (among which 3 are Catholic) and 18 Seminaries for the formation of Church ministers.[60] According to the Taiwan Catholic Church Directory 2017, in Taiwan there are 6 Colleges and Universities, serving 61.679 persons, 129 kindergartens, serving 14.385 persons, 11 primary schools serving 6.519 persons, 29 junior and senior high schools, serving 52.102 persons.[61] Together with health and welfare centers, such institutions have been and still are the most important instrument for the spreading of Christian faith. However, this also means that, especially among Catholics, other ways of expanding faith (such as traditional and social media) are not so developed. There is a Christian television network, Good TV,[62] while a Catholic television is still in the making, even though the Jesuits were the first to ask for broadcasting permission, 60 years ago.

The second set of remarks: when seen in the context of the Taiwanese religious landscape, Christianity immediately shows how small and weak is its presence. It has a strong point in that it is the religion (at least historically) of the West, the place from which comes the market culture presently invading the world. In contrast, its weaknesses (at least from a sociological and a marketing point of view) are many. As an example, while in Taiwan religious nomadism is common, Christian faith is exclusive, in that it proclaims Jesus as the only Savior. Then, it clearly distinguishes between the spiritual happiness promised as the result of adhering to it and any other material advantage that faith may bring about. This squarely goes counter to the common view of religion as an investment in view of greater advantages, measured in material terms. Its (Western) theoretical background too is very different from the local vision of the world, of the human person, of human relationships. With these premises, the fact that in Taiwan the Christian presence is above 4% is a miracle in itself. When going into detail, however, other weak points appear which, although being typical of different denominations, nevertheless exert some influence on the entire sector, at least at the level of image.

As an example, Protestants in general appear to the Taiwanese as too immediate, straight and "pushy" in inviting conversion. As consequence, some prefer the Catholics, because they do not force their way into their minds and let their convictions evolve freely, without any external pressure. Others, for fear of feeling too much pressure, keep a distance from every Christian presence, without distinction.

Besides, the very presence of many denominations, who claim for themselves the name of Churches, while sometimes not even being Christian, adds to the confusion.

Hsi Lai Journal of Humanistic Buddhism, 2000/1: 53–84.

60. See "Christianity in Taiwan" at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_Taiwan>.

61. Catholic Taiwan Regional Bishops Conference, *Taiwan Catholic Church Directory 2017* (Taipei, 2017), 79.

62. See "Good TV-首頁" at <https://www.goodtv.tv/>. The Bread of Life Church too is active in the broadcasting sector. See "Bread of Life Church" at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bread_of_Life_Church>. The Catholic Radio is *Radio Veritas*, a branch of Philippine Radio Veritas, which broadcasts in Taiwan and towards China Mainland (see "Rveritas-asia" at <http://www.rveritas-asia.org/>). Other Churches have their radios too.

Another weak point is a sort of (perceived) lack of spirit of personal initiative, especially among the Catholics, whereas, according to Chinese tradition, religion is a personal enterprise. Everybody can start a temple, found a monastery, create some sort of new doctrine and attract people. This fact too means people are not attracted to associating with a place that does not offer interesting activities and does not grow in attendance or importance.

Furthermore, Christian presence in Taiwan hinges—as is traditional—on parishes, which for the main part are small and scattered; they resemble the local temples of traditional religion. However, those temples can always count on a great number of people who occasionally may visit them while this is not the case, for example, of Catholic Churches. Instead, the centers of activity of Buddhism, or of Yiguandao, or of similar religions, are large if not huge structures, with hundreds of people present and great attractiveness.

On top of all this, especially among Catholics, everybody respects other people's freedom in believing, to the point that there is no courage of witnessing to the truth, even among fellow believers. While, on the other side, all kinds of different proposals compete for attention and drive people and especially young people into following their credos, without due respect for a proper discernment.

All these causes make the transmission of Christian faith a difficult process, especially among Catholics.

Other Christian denominations can count on a missionary spirit that is widespread; it is easy to see young Christians start Bible sharing groups on their own initiative, without waiting for instruction from above. Catholic young people, on the other hand, are rather passive, because this is what they have learnt. Even when asking for the opposite, the subliminal message pastoral operators silently convey to everybody is that they should just follow. Creativity, spirit of enterprise, the exploration of new ways are not everywhere given an enthusiastic welcome.

An Experience from a Parish in Taipei City[63] and its Aftermath

"Among teenagers, in the last 10 years there has been a great evolution and change. In the past, there was greater poverty, for which parishes tried to make up, in some way. A notable example was the Holy Rosary Parish in Tong Hua Jie (通化街聖玫瑰堂), Taipei City. After school, teenagers gathered in the premises of the parish and attended after-school lessons, after which there was a moment of prayer, then, they went back home. That time, young people were also more numerous, they were the Baby-Boomers of the 1990–1995

years, attending high schools. Non-Christian friends were also invited. In this way, youth ministry and apostolate took place together.

Unfortunately, these young people went to the US and Canada for their graduate and post-graduate studies and did not return to Taiwan. Ten years ago, in the parish there were 15/20 young people. Those born in the 90s were a greater number. There was a stable group. At the center, there was Msgr. Wang (王振華蒙席), who at that time was in his 70s. Msgr. Wang was always present; when he could not be there, he used to put somebody in charge of the meeting. With him, there always was a guide. During that time, cram schools were already multiplying in the city; it was not necessary any more to go to the parish to review lessons, but the parish still retained its attractions: after school-related activities, there was Bible reading, there was life sharing.

Every time, we were to answer three questions: "This week, which was your most happy moment? Which was your most unhappy moment? This week, which was the most intimate moment with the Lord?" This compelled, in a way, every teenager to think about his or her relationship with the Lord and propose to be closer to the Lord, so as, to have something to share in the next meeting. This helped our faith. Msgr. Wang asked us also to sing. Every time, after Mass, nobody was allowed to go home. Every week we learnt a new song. As teenagers, our ideas about God were not really clear; we understood little about theology; but singing together taught us theology. Songs were beautiful and by singing, we learnt their theological content and made it our own. There was not much need of teaching; furthermore, our meetings became prayer meetings. We had Taizé-style prayer; we had adoration; we had Bible reading, meditation, contemplation; we prayed the Way of the Cross… We even had Rosary prayer all the night long. For teenagers, spending the night in church, not sleeping and praying Rosary was a special and positive experience. It was exciting, because usually we do not do this, neither do we usually pray the Rosary. Those moments, spending the night together with our Lady, praying and singing, conveyed us the feeling that praying is something good and positive. The parish priest was always present and this gave us a feeling of protection. This experience has left its mark. Even today, those young people who took part keep their faith, live a life of faith and prayer and help in the parish.

After '95, births fell. The difficulties in doing catechism began. Each family had only one child and this created difficulties in living an experience of faith together with companions.

We gathered them together and followed them, but they felt prayer and Bible-reading as something boring. Growth in faith in adolescence has a relationship with the family. If there are several children, they can live their faith experience together. Now, with only one child, families pay more attention to their studies, they tell their children that, in order to study, they may not go to Mass. In this way, the transmission of faith is discontinued. We tell the parents that, if the exams are a great challenge for the child, it is all the more necessary to come to church to feel that in this challenge the Lord is with them.

This will help in the following challenges: if the boy or girl has learnt to seek the help of God, he or she will live those challenges in an attitude of faith; otherwise he will live them alone without seeking the closeness of God. The change in mentality of families and the burden of schoolwork are reasons for this decline in the life of faith among adolescents.

Now in the small parishes there are one or two teenagers. Who accompanies them? They see that there are only elderly people, they are not encouraged to come.

Thus, faith for them is reduced to summer or winter school camps, a limited group experience in some special times only, without a continuous personal approach. Their faith becomes a different experience.

Another phenomenon is: young people slowly disappearing from the parishes. Priests are too busy. Many groups and activities need their presence: *Legio Mariae*, biblical groups, catechumenates, distribution of communion… They have no time to look for the faithful who are no longer coming. Besides… priests too must rest. In the end, the time to look for these people becomes very short.

Msgr. Wang did differently: up to 86 years old he used to go by bicycle to find the faithful, ask why they had not come to Mass: perhaps too many commitments, perhaps they were sick... so on the following Sunday they would certainly come to Mass. He carried the Eucharist with him if somebody was sick. Thus, each one was sure that the parish priest knew the, personally, took care of them, just like the Good Shepherd. Like any other priest, he too had many things to do; he was busy but did not get too tired: he prepared some committed faithful, for the catechism and the catechumenate. Till now, after his retirement (around 3 years ago), there are ten teachers for the catechumenate. They are a group that organizes and prepares lessons. He had the wise idea of attracting people by putting some famous people in the front row, for example Ou Jin De.[64] He was always present, however, and everyone knew it, so that they had a sense of assuredness. Msgr. Wang managed to organize missionary work by distinguishing tasks and finding a balance. Everyone in the parish had some task and therefore they felt committed to coming, or they were looking for someone to replace them.

Everyone felt they had responsibility: through responsibility in the parish, they felt the responsibility towards God and therefore committed themselves to announcing the Gospel. Personally, I studied theology because in the parish I met some young people and with them we worked for the youngest, we did school camps for children, even non-Christians. Many non-Christians participated and felt that God is not bad. They asked how to join the Catholic Church. We need the catechumenate, but seeing that in the parishes close to their homes most of the faithful attending were old people, they did not feel like participating. In my first experience as an assistant in a catechumenate course, I continually thought that it takes young people to talk to young people about the Gospel.

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64. Former President of Taiwan High Speed Rail Consortium, vice mayor of Taipei together with Ma Ying Jiu (1998–2006). Ma Ying Jiu later became President of Taiwan (2008–2016).

Their experiences and their language are closer to young people. So we can share experiences with people of all ages who talk to people of the same age. But at the moment in Taipei we have no way to convey our experience, our method to many.

So, I had the hope that there could be one day a catechumenate for young people; in view of this I joined the Evangelizers Course at the Fu Jen Catholic Faculty of Theology.

So they invited me to catechumenate courses for the young people. A person, who had been interested for 20 years but had not found the right way, participated and was baptized. He said that half of himself was Catholic but he had not found a way until then.

I asked for some rooms to borrow from a church and opened a youth catechumenate. The first year, six people attended; four of them received baptism. The second year I went to work in the Archdiocese Curia. There, I realized that we have many spaces. I asked the Archbishop and last year we opened a catechumenate for young people in the Curia, in the evening. There were 10 participants, and—surprise!—14 people received baptism (some joined from elsewhere). Originally, they were 15, but the last week, a young man said that he preferred to wait and accompany his wife to baptism, redo the catechumenate together with her and receive baptism together. In doing this activity, I saw that those who ask for the course are young people who are entering society. They are between 25 and 35. Why did they spontaneously come? Because they sought God by themselves and found us here.

We have seen that, when entering the life of society, after their studies (23–25 years), they may encounter some difficulties. In these moments, they may recall the times in which they attended some Catholic school, when they sang some holy songs, recited some prayers. They may recall that Sisters told them that they could pray; the seed sown then starts growing, they begin to look for… Besides, there are some of these young people who, in their workplace, may encounter a Christian colleague who shares something of his faith with them. If these Catholic colleagues enter into a one-to-one witness and share the Gospel, they can transmit the faith."[65]

Transmission of Faith among the Catholics

Miss Chen points out to several factors that hamper the transmission of Christian faith to young generations. This is true for all religions, but among Catholics the problem seems even bigger.

"Among young people, faith is increasingly confused. Years ago, they could say what they believed in, and their scale of values corresponded to their faith. Now there are many temptations, faith becomes dull; they do not know how to get inside faith, inside a group of faithful; they do not know how to keep faith either. For this reason, after a while they consider faith as indifferent."[66]

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65. Interview to Miss Chen.
66. Interview to Miss Chen.

Aside from this general background, an additional reason for weakness is the way families deal with the formation of their sons and daughters.

Young people are in need of discovering themselves. They try to discover their own value, to be valued for what they are, but society (and by reflex families) do not help them. They measure value on the basis of school grades. This becomes also a family problem. If a family makes value coincide with the grades, the son and daughter will think of him/ herself accordingly. Instead, if we say that our value is in our being children of God, then things change. If the only valuable thing is money, then you have some consequences; if instead value resides in giving hope, or in service, or in union with God, then everything is different.

Boys and girls are under great pressure, also because they are very lonely. Mental illnesses among young people, and among young people entering society, are growing. This year many young people joined the catechumenate, but more than half of them have mental and psychological problems: they take medicines, they see the psychiatrist.

There is a growing need for spiritual aid. Young people are in search of their own value, they hope to be recognized, valued, but often do not succeed in receiving such feedback. This is why they ask themselves what their commitment is for. If they have a faith, they discover their value in God. Their spiritual growth is different."

They should be given an opportunity, but at this point parents are the problem. They should receive formation. Somebody should have the opportunity of telling them that if their children come to church their grades will not get worse and in addition, they will learn how to turn to the Lord when difficulties surface. Unfortunately, such people and such opportunities are few and far between.

Besides, a rather new reason makes Catholic activities even less attractive than they used to be. Smartphones are creating new patterns of satisfaction. They make the traditional way of running activities for youth obsolete. In the camps, they find that talking, sharing, is boring… they prefer to play with their mobile phones. Now they watch movies, on Youtube, Tiktok: they are very short, they are ridiculous or a little crazy. Young people find them interesting. The smartphone has already changed the order of their lives. It is no longer a tool, it generates dependence, as in drugs. It affects the brain, the hormones that cause pleasure.[67] For this reason, the activities of the camps offer a much

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67. "Responsible for the 'digital world' dependency mechanism is dopamine, a substance produced by our brains that gives us immediate gratification and that leads us to look for more. This characteristic of our brain is the basis of all addictions, which follow a model clearly visible in gambling: every time we 'win' (a new notification), our brain produces dopamine and makes us wait for a new one gratification, because we feel considered. Every time we 'lose' (no new notification) our brain leads us to reiterate the action (check the mail again, update Facebook, turn on the screen of our smartphone, all mechanisms that also physically remind you of relaunching in a game machine) in the hope of obtaining gratification. The intermittent variable rewards, this is the name of the mechanism, creates expectation and are the dynamics, through the flashy notifications with which we are 'bombarded', which is at the heart of platforms and digital tools. So, for example, when a notification appears on Facebook with a new 'like', our brain produces a dopamine dis-

poorer sense of pleasure, compared with what the smartphone can offer. There is a physical change. It affects learning, the ability to make friends... So the vicious circle is created, from the perception of too great a pressure to the quest of too frequent gratifications. In the end, they end up taking medicines.

Those who enter society face a different kind of challenge: overtime work, tiredness, no time for Mass and religious activities...

"Jobs are there for young people, but with very low salaries. For those under 30, the salary is low because people think that they are not yet mature enough. But in Taipei life is expensive, therefore young people need to look for a part-time job. This has consequences for the time they can devote to the Church. On Sundays, they are tired and would like to rest; but the Masses are very early, so they do not come. That is why their attendance is so low. There are attempts at adapting the time and style of at least some Masses to their needs, but it is a slow process. To all this, one can add another reason of weakness: those who institutionally have the opportunity and should propose the gospel and its values do not show great courage. Just one example.

The other Churches have fewer schools than the Catholics, but inside their building images of Jesus are numerous. In Aletheia University (真理大學 Zhēnlǐ Dàxué, a Christian University in Dan Shui, north of Taipei), in the dormitories, from 9.00 to 9.30 PM the broadcasting system airs prayers, short meditations or comments on events in all the rooms; there is a song, a good-night wish. During the year, not too many people listen attentively, but near the exams the index of listening is noticeably higher.

In the dormitories of Fu Jen Catholic University this is not done. Only, at 9.00 PM, there is the possibility of a group prayer, led by a Sister. The attendance is free, therefore only a few participate and understand. There are only Catholics taking part and with time they grow fewer and fewer."[68]

Still There Are Ways

Miss Chen reports a method they used during her years of study as an evangelizer.

"We used the 'one brings one' method. We tried it in my parish. With the support of Msgr. Wang, the then parish priest, with a core group for some months we first reviewed our addresses and information about those living around the parish. Then, we formed

charge that makes us feel a very short sensation of pleasure and leads us to feel the desire to check again, in the unconscious hope of receiving new rewards and have that feeling again. It is the same when we receive a WhatsApp notification. To activate this mental configuration, social networks wisely mix interesting things and things that are not, in order to keep us pinned to the screen and involve us as much as possible. The reason is easy: in the 'attention economy', the more time we spend on these services, the more data can be collected about us and therefore the greater the possibility of exposing ourselves to targeted advertisements, which are the true soul of Facebook & Co. To give an idea, every extra minute we spend on Facebook is worth for the American company 17 billion dollars," D. Baudino, "Smartphone e nuove dipendenze," *Città Nuova*, 8 Novembre 2018 (the English translation from the Italian is ours).

68. Interview to Miss Chen.

leaders, 25 small groups, each one with a group leader. They visited all the families in the parish, talked to them, in order to update the information at our disposal. Then we invited them to an evangelization meeting and we explained how to approach other family members, or friends and invite them to participate to our activity: to visit the parish church and premises, to introduce the catechumenate group to them. Of the 250 members of the parish community, 213 came to the meeting. Really a lot. Practically, all came. Some returned after years, and learnt how they could do some evangelization.

The following week, around 80 people came to visit our parish. Not the parish priest, not the group leaders were their guides, but the faithful, young people, couples. Each was responsible for some part of the visit. In this way, those who came could see that in the parish there were young people, there were young families.

Then there was a little refreshment with some drinks and snacks, then there was an exchange of information. Finally, we invited them to another meeting the following week, a kind of introduction to the catechumenate. More than thirty non-Christians came the first time; then less and less, till when the number remained stable. After two years, around twenty people were baptized. Key to the success of such actions is the support of the leaders, parish priests in a special way. In another place, where the parish priest did not really follow the activity, the result was obviously smaller.

While, especially among Catholics, such initiatives sound rather new, they are already traditional among other Christian Churches and new religions. They point to a general need of reviewing the Catholic approach to mission, especially towards the young generations."

A CONCLUSION

As in other societies in Asia, Taiwan too shows a high degree of complexity and dynamics of evolution that require constant attention and the ability to enter into new patterns of thinking and of planning, more responsive to the actual trends.

The above random-style survey of the youth world in Taiwan has no pretense of being exhaustive: aside from what is reported in the media (who follow their own agenda which therefore appears as the mainstream tendency), there are many different "niche" youth environments which the media do not cover. Nevertheless, such environments exercise their influence on individual young persons and, as a collective situation, on the whole of the society. Groups such as young students coming from abroad, or Indigenous youth communities of different ethnic groups; or the soon-coming-to-age sons and daughters of foreign mothers (and fathers), even of young foreign workers: they belong to Taiwan social landscape and contribute in shaping it.

When speaking about young people, two types of voices overlap each other: the voice of the young depicting and interpreting their own lives and the voice of those who analyze and comment on them. Generally, the voice of others is louder than the voice of the

young themselves. In a sense, such voices inevitably confine the talk of the young inside their environment. Young people just talk and have an audience among themselves. In this way, they shape a world of thoughts and values, even a linguistic world, that largely escapes the attention of older people. This may create surprises in the future: it might happen that young people will be not interested in scientific research, or in expanding the market, or in creating startups. They might look for and pursue ideals that are different from older generations. After all, pursuit of material welfare is not the main human need, even if it is necessary. Young people might get sick and tired of the ideals of the current ruling generation and try to find ways to stop the crazy rush of the present world towards ecological collapse.

When following the passage of a young human being through the different stages of his/her growth toward adulthood (which is the approach of the present contribution) it is possible to notice that a key point is the amount of personalized attention, care, respect, 'love' these young human beings receive. It would seem that such a personalized and personalizing attitude is a decisive factor. To the degree to which young people experience this, they (their lives, their existence as human beings) are "built up" or "spoiled."

They need the time of their parents, quality time, a time of the heart: time to play with them; time for listening to what they experience during their school days; time to talk with them about the meaning of life, their spiritual world; time to tell the stories of ancestors…

They need the time of their teachers: a quality time in which to train them not only in the different subjects of school programs, but into discovering and enjoying the beauty of a cultural tradition, into discovering and enjoying their own inner richness…

They need the time of their friends: a quality time in which to experience their abilities and learn to create constructive relationships, friendships that can accompany them all through their lives.

It seems that the trend is going in an opposite direction: silent yet irresistible voices force them into amusing themselves with things, with plans, with objects to manipulate and use in view of advantage and profit… They are required to become solitary beings, prey to induced daytime dreams of power, success, pleasure, acknowledgment by other people… All of these are valid purposes but unfortunately miss the true source of happiness: reciprocity in giving and receiving the gift of humanity. Yet, those young existences that in the future will come to the forefront of society are still seeking for something like this. They do not easily find it. They constantly report that they received so little love in their prime years and sadly carry with them incurable wounds.

Paradoxically, the relative isolation within their world to which the words of others send them may also bring some hope: the hope that the fresh way of being humans they vaguely feel may silently surface and become a new paradigm, a mainstream way of living. In any case, for those who venture in the task of announcing Christ to young people, the way is clear. The results speak with irrefutable evidence.

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Conclusion

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Much of the existent literature on youth in Asia has been produced in the fields of politics, economics, sociology, psychology, and anthropology, but very little attention, it seems to us, has been devoted to examine the youth's situation from a religious and spiritual point of view. Moreover, almost all those studies reached the same conclusions or yielded the same set of answers.

The people in charge, or those who exercise their authority in society, would like the youth to follow the tradition of their fathers, and to introduce only those few elements felt strictly necessary to keep in touch with the times. And yet, the same youth are deprived of the very means necessary to change their lives and to follow their inspirations and dreams. The professionals expect them to behave in an adult and responsible way. And yet, they are kept away from decision making and fed with computer games so as to win only virtual fights, but not the battles that really count. They allow them to have as many FB contacts as possible so that they can form invisible communities of friends or haters, but at the same time they are the ones who control the social media

and impose on the youth their own ideas and modes of behavior. They solicit what they want, but hardly allow the youth to speak their minds and freely express their innermost feelings. They expect them to form families, to have children, to contribute with their work to society; however, these expectations are improbable and unattainable since the youth suffer from high levels of unemployment, starvation wages, and social duties which they fall short of accomplishing. People in charge of societies want the youth to become leaders and to take as much responsibility as possible, but they do not set an example or become role models so that the youth can imitate or be inspired by them.

Asian societies are at the moment trying to maintain or defend the status quo, holding on to an idea of society which is imploding from within and shaken from the outside by the impersonal forces of globalization and economic liberalism. And instead of trusting the youth, instead of allowing them to take control of the communities in which they live, the so-called authorities behave as if they will forever impose their truths and rules on them, as if they will forever be around to prevent any transformation in society to take place. But change is something the youth will inevitably achieve; for in the end, if history teaches us anything, is that they will succeed in shaping a society according to their dreams and needs, exactly as their fathers did with their older generations. It is just a matter of coming to terms with the fact that it will eventually happen regardless of all the obstacles set against today's youth. A wiser approach to this issue, therefore, would be to encourage the younger generation to follow their dreams by giving them all the means to realize them, as well as all the chances they deserve to make and correct their own mistakes.

As we persevere, we cannot fail but notice that the same patterns and relationships here discussed seem to be replicated in a small scale within the dynamics of the Church: the Church to which the young people in Asia feel very much attracted to and yet, somehow, find themselves marginalized, or even forgotten, by the existent management system set in place and operating inside the Church itself. Our study, for example, has ascertained that while young people express the desire to bring about new relationships and ties within the community based more on trust and merit, rather than on rank and power, they are prevented from doing so by the very dynamics that regulate (or even dominate) the community. The youth, who are searching not only for innovative expressions of worship but also for a more sincere and significant relationship with their spiritual leaders, find themselves trapped in a traditional religious system which, more often than not, is insensitive to alternative expressions of praying, and which feels unable to provide them with appropriate spiritual support.

The youth who hope to contribute to the life of the community and share their energy to build a safer spiritual haven for they peers, soon discover that the community they belong to is struggling to make sense not only of this ever-changing world, but also of its own identity and existence. In this sense, one could say that what the youth are really longing for is a much deeper spiritual experience rather than a set of prearranged and

conventional religious teachings. The youth are here called to mediate between the old and the new through their commitment, patience, endurance, and faith, knowing that what is at stake is a real encounter with the person of Jesus Christ who always listens to them and invites them to follow him.

This invitation is open not only to those who are already affiliated to a Church, but also to all those who know next to nothing about the message of Jesus. For, in the end, we believe that if the Church is going to be meaningful to humankind, especially to the youth, it will be only through that kind of love and hope which the Church must always bear witness to by her very vocation. For either the Church is a youthful and dynamic reality, or it will not be a Church at all.

> *Dear young people, my joyful hope is to see you keep running the race before you,*
> *outstripping all those who are slow or fearful.*
> *Keep running, attracted by the face of Christ…*
> *May the Holy Spirit urge you on as you run this race.*
> *The Church needs your momentum, your intuition, your faith.*
> *We need them!*
> *And when you arrive where we have not yet reached,*
> *have the patience to wait for us.*
>
> Francis, *Christus Vivit, § 299*

Youth Insight

Dear young people, my joyful hope is to see you keep running the race before you, outstripping all those who are slow or fearful. Keep running, attracted by the face of Christ… May the Holy Spirit urge you on as you run this race. The Church needs your momentum, your intuition, your faith. We need them! And when you arrive where we have not yet reached, have the patience to wait for us — Francis, *Christus Vivit*