



*Al Superiore Generale
Superior General*

**MESSAGE OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL
TO THE CAMILLIAN RELIGIOUS OF THE DELEGATION OF TAIWAN
ON THE OCCASION OF THE PASTORAL VISIT
(Taiwan–Lotung, 13-17 June 2018)**

‘As I turn my attention towards your People, which has distinguished itself among the other peoples of Asia for the splendour of its ancient civilization, with all its experience of wisdom, philosophy, art and science, I am pleased to note how, especially in recent times, it has also moved decisively towards achieving significant goals of socio-economic progress, attracting the interest of the entire world...In this context, in which you are called to live and work, I want to remind you of what Pope John Paul II emphasized so strongly and vigorously: **the new evangelization demands the proclamation of the Gospel to modern man, with a keen awareness that, just as during the first Christian millennium the Cross was planted in Europe and during the second in the American continent and in Africa, so during the third millennium a great harvest of faith will be reaped in the vast and vibrant Asian continent.**

“*Duc in altum*’ (Lk 5:4). These words ring out for us today, and they invite us to remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm and to look forward to the future with confidence: ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever’ (Heb 13:8)”. In China too the Church is called to be a witness of Christ, to look forward with hope, and – in proclaiming the Gospel – to measure up to the new challenges that the Chinese People must face’.

From the Letter of the Holy Father Benedict XVI to the bishops, priests, consecrated persons and lay faithful of the Catholic Church in the People’s Republic of China, 27 May 2007

*Esteemed Fr. Jojo Eloja, Provincial Superior of the Camillian Province of the Philippines,
Dear Fr. Giuseppe Didoné, Delegate of the Camillians in Taiwan,
Camillian confreres who live your Camillian consecration in Taiwan,
Health and peace!*

Our recent meeting of the Superior General and the members of the General Consulta with the major Superiors of the Order was a providential opportunity to return to the Island of Formosa/Taiwan and to encounter your fascinating personal history, your missionary commitment to evangelisation and to providing care, your concerns, and your dreams.

The basic theme that made us converge from all over the world to Taiwan – *together in Asia to learn about the past, to celebrate the present and to peer into the future, to re-motivate the Camillian missionary spirit* – can constitute a solid connecting thread by which to go back over the meaning and the value of the personal and community meetings that I had on 13-17 June 2018, together with Fr. Gianfranco Lunardon, the General Secretary of the Order.

I had already had an opportunity to meet you on two other occasions: *on 8-11 February 2015* together with Fr. Aristelo Miranda, a Filipino Camillian religious and the member of the General Consulta responsible for ministry, for our first pastoral visit; and *on 19-22 January 2017*, together with Fr. Gianfranco Lunardon, for the festive ceremony that inaugurated the new building dedicated to the Camillian missionary Br. Renato Marinello and commemorated the sixty-fifth anniversary of the arrival of the first Camillian missionaries in your nation (in 1952).

Learning about the past

The historical epopee of the presence of the Camillians in 'China' was brought to our thoughts and our hearts as soon as we landed in the middle of the morning at the airport of Taipei: the programme envisaged a visit to what the Camillians are doing in Makung on the Pescadores Islands, the islands of 'wind and sand', but we were immediately told that Fr. Antonio Didonè (aged 85) was by now near to death. Providentially, we arrived in Lotung in time to be able to say a prayer together with our confreres who were present and to impart a blessing at the bedside of Fr. Antonio: in the early afternoon he passed away at St. Mary' Hospital in Lotung.

The days that preceded the funeral, which was solemnly celebrated on Sunday 17 June, were full of statements of esteem and profound admiration for the person and the work of Fr. Antonio, and that of our Camillian religious, for the social and ecclesial fabric of the Taiwanese of that area, and for the long season of illness and suffering that marked him deeply during the last ten years of his life.

The funeral witnessed the choral participation of almost all the major Superiors of the Order and of other important personalities of the ecclesial, religious and political life of the country. Fr. Giuseppe Didonè, his brother, who was much moved, observed that: 'Fr. Antonio appears to have waited for our arrival to choose to leave for heaven'.

Fr. Antonio Didonè represented in his intellectual, professional, spiritual, priestly and religious biography a possible summary of 'Camillian-ness' in Taiwan. Father Antonio was one of the pioneers of the Camillian mission in China. He had to do everything, perhaps 'doing violence' a little to his inclination for study, which, however, was of use to him in learning well the difficult language of this area, its nuances and its 'tones', which are mysterious for a Westerner.

Only an illness, which was faced up to with enormous courage, weakened this man, a Camillian religious and a medical doctor. Sent to Taiwan shortly after becoming a priest in the now distant year of 1958, he was soon sent back to Italy to study medicine in Padua. He graduated, specialised in paediatrics, and soon returned to work in St. Mary's Hospital. In a short time, he became its director and he held this position until he was transferred to Makung. For a dozen years, he held the post of Vice-Provincial, being the Superior of the missions in Taiwan and the Philippines.

Other events, anecdotes and Chinese 'good deeds' were narrated to us with understandable passion by Fr. Giovanni Rizzi, a Camillian religious aged ninety-two who has been a missionary in Taiwan for over fifty years, during the first morning of our meeting with the major Superiors of the Order. From the wells of his memory and his heart, Fr. Giovanni really encountered difficulty in selecting a 'few' things to tell us about: it is not difficult to summarise the many glories that have been achieved in Taiwan.

An extraordinary gallery of men, of consecrated men and consecrated women, whose faces and names have borne authentic witness to the gospel, to the Camillian charism, and to the Chinese mission, and in particular men religious of the Province of Lombardy and Veneto: the visionary dream of Fr. Alessandro Pedroni; the determination of Fr. Florindo Rubini; the intelligent boldness of Fr. Antonio Crotti; the rigorous generosity of Fr. Celestino Rizzi (who died on 13 September in Yunnan, China, at the age of only thirty-three); the fervour and the strenuous dedication to work and to caring for the sick and the poor of Fr. Angelo Pastro, Fr. Ernesto Valdesolo, Br. Marcello Caon, Br. Umberto Amici, Fr. Aldo Antonelli, Fr. Gino Melato, Br. Remo Casagrande, Br. Davide Giordan...; of 'great men of the Church' such as Msgr. Herech; women Ministers of the Sick and Samaritan lay people such as Dr. Jaanez.

Ling-Y- Hwei (Association for the Care of Souls and Bodies) was the name that the Camillians gave themselves in Chinese. In only five years they had built the house for religious (1947), took responsibility for the service of the local leper hospital (1948), and constructed the local Catholic hospital, dispensary and clinic (1950). Unfortunately, in 1952 all the European missionaries were expelled from China by the Communists. This was the painful event that offered the Camillian missionaries an opportunity to move on to the role of being missionaries in Thailand and the Island of Formosa/Taiwan, in particular with a group in the region of the Pescadores Islands (Makung) and a group of religious in

Lotung. It was at that moment that the creative and determined activity of the Camillians began: St. Mary's Hospital; activity for sick poor people, for people with handicaps, for elderly people on their own and for patients in sanatoria; the evangelisation of the district of Lotung; and parish activity with the local autochthonous people.

The words of Fr. Antonio Crotti, a pioneer of the Pescadores Islands, are the most noble summary there is of the Camillian spirit of that period and of today: 'the needs of these islands are great and urgent. We exploit our strength and our time to the utmost because life on the Pescadores is hard'. He took his courage in his hands. He created a complex of care, cultural and recreational works; he visited every inhabited island; he became aware of the needs of the fishermen and organised the construction of small ports; he opened mobile clinics; he took care of lepers and very poor families; and he built small chapels where he could. His plan to 'give a tabernacle to every island' became proverbial. He explained his mission made up of the gospel, charity and the promotion of human welfare: 'The task of a missionary is always and everywhere much greater than is commonly believed. This is strange: at times one has the impression that the religious goal is of secondary importance. It may be so. For that matter, nobody has ever cared for a sick person or given food to a hungry person in order to convert them. It would be illogical and unfair to act differently'.

Celebrating the present and peering into the future

This is the *Spirit* that has guided, accompanied and sustained you up to now.

It is certainly the case that this Spirit has had to come up against a multiplicity of *signs of the times* that have not been easy, and are still not easy, to discern and bear witness to in your daily lives and activities.

The society of Taiwan as a whole – as we were told by the highest political authorities of the nation, the Vice-President of the Republic and the Vice-President of the national parliamentary assembly – has for some years been undergoing a rapid social, economic, religious and cultural evolution that has brought about in people a paradigm change in understanding the meaning of life, of the family, of care and of relationships.

The transformations of the Church were well illustrated to us by the Archbishop of Taipei and by the *chargé d'affaires* (the nuncio) of the Holy See: the evangelisation of society and in particular of young people; persevering in inculturation and inter-religious empathy with other confessions and/or very old religious and spiritual philosophies; and nearness to the great continent of China and the sufferings and tensions that the Church communities are living there.

During the personal and community meetings that we had together you told us about the *ad-intra* challenges to always understanding the presence of the Camillians in Taiwan from its starting point:

- The two 'lungs' that have enabled your Delegation to breathe and to live have been – since the outset! – evangelisation (parishes-chapels) and care for sick people (hospitals, clinics...). The proclaiming of the gospel and intensive and lasting care for the autochthonous people of the mountains has been a determining factor in the promotion of human welfare and the appreciation of the dignity of these people and the social communities to which they belong. Care for sick people in a hospital setting and then the care given to disabled young people with handicaps, poor elderly people, and now people with Alzheimer's disease, are a testimony to your belief that 'the rights of the weak are not weak rights'; indeed, they are worthy of defence and stewardship.
- These two charismatic 'lungs' today deserve to be more greatly integrated into the experience of your Delegation in order to avoid them becoming the exclusive heritage of some and not of others; in order to create new synergies; and also in order to involve new generations of Camillians who can 'use' these strong charismatic experiences as a gymnasium in which to exercise themselves in their consecration.

- The progressive internationalisation – multiculturalism – of the Camillian communities that summarise the lives and the work of Camillian religious who are Taiwanese, Chinese, Malayan, Italian, Filipino or Vietnamese is a ‘phenomenon’ that has to be attentively and wisely accompanied and assessed, through an intensification of spiritual and community life in a shared form as well.
- Being consecrated Catholic Christians in a context where the majority of people are not Christian or anyway have different beliefs is a challenge not only for your own personal vocations but also for promotional witness to the Camillian vocation. Although you are ministers of a charism – the Camillian charism – which is simple and transparent and which has a great social impact, the lack of vocations, which in your Taiwanese and Chinese contexts has increasingly become a constant factor over recent decades, raises with concern the subject of the continuity of our existence. In our personal meetings, and in our more formal meetings, in all of you there emerged a realistic concern about the fading of Camillian vocations. The wish to extend the animation and promotion of vocations for young people beyond your national borders towards Singapore, Hong Kong, Macao...seems to us to be very promising: this is a new project, however, that will take you back to the spirit of the origins of the presence of the Camillians in Asia.
- The creation of a ‘very important’ past which bears the deep marks of Italian missionaries whose age is advancing but whose personal histories are full of great impetus and still the bearers of great dreams – recently the six Italian religious in Taiwan were officially granted Taiwanese citizenship by the government of Taipei.
- A necessary re-understanding of works and institutions (starting with St. Mary’s Hospital in Lotung which is the custodian of a great deal of Camillian and Samaritan charity) that moves from a family-community outlook to an organisational dimension that is transparent, and in line with what is laid down in the government’s directives, in order to be able to assure continuity and the transmission of the Camillian ‘good inheritance’.
- The management of works in increasingly professional forms and suited to the standards required by the modern idea of medicine, care and administration, brings with it the need not only to train certain religious at a technical level: as regards ordinary administration this requires increasing personal dialogue, debate at the level of planning, and a community-level sharing of the mission and vision of your institutions. Frequent community meetings in order to present the state of projects, to provide reports on how works are progressing...is the simplest way by which to make everyone participants in the situation as it stands as regards management, even if because of age or other reasons the religious are no longer directly involved in them. In addition, it is the simplest way by which to see ahead of time criticisms, malevolent observations, suspicions and things like that.
- Your Delegation has an enormous social responsibility (and this was recognised implicitly by the vast and emotional presence of people at the funeral of Fr. Antonio Didonè and explicitly by the highest exponents of the civil, political and ecclesial societies of the nation) with its own parishes and churches, hospitals, clinics, centres for disabled people and elderly people, educational and training institutions for young people in various areas (the school for nurses, of very high quality, which enjoys an excellent reputation and has over three thousand students; the folkloristic and educational centre, *Lanyang Youth Catholic Center*, founded and accompanied by Fr. Giancarlo Michelini), and the future centre to help and treat patients with Alzheimer’s disease, whose first corner stone was blessed in the presence of the Vice-President of Taiwan. This responsibility emerges at a time when – and this is an irony of destiny – the number of religious is decreasing, your human resources are on a downward trend, and the government is asking you to break down this great economic, historical and charismatic heritage into different juridical and legal entities. These few elements highlight

the need for an increasing community approach marked by dialogue and cooperation with the leadership of your Delegation and the Province.

Re-motiving the Camillian missionary spirit

In today's world, which is increasingly global, we interact with many different people who come from cultures that are different from each other. Until a short time ago, unity was said to be possible only through processes that involved uniformity. The natural approach, instead, is that of constructing unity amidst cultural diversity. In a world scenario that is becoming increasingly intercultural, the institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life have the special mission of being witnesses to unity and fraternity in front of the world in order to offer a *renewed quality of life and human relations*, both of which are experienced within communities, and with people, in their own mission. For this to happen, we need formation to achieve intercultural intelligence and skills and to develop a new ability and capacity for dialogue. The pathway of formation of consecrated life needs to integrate this aspect into the training of its members for an intercultural and incultured fraternal life in order to contribute in an effective way to the process of the new evangelisation.

The very incarnation of Jesus the Word was a cultural event. Interculturality is the encounter between the salvific message of Jesus and the multiplicity of cultures. An authentic inculturation of Christian faith is based upon the mystery of the incarnation. Inculturation begins when we encounter the living Christ in the other and ends when we behold the resuscitated Christ. An intercultural style of life is the future of consecrated life. If our communities do not become intercultural, we will not survive. But the question is the following: how can we construct this new culture and spirit of intercultural relations?

Interculturality does not mean the loss or the dilution of one's own personal and cultural identity. Rather, it brings with it the need for an openness towards the other who is 'diverse and different'. This process requires intercultural education, clear communication, and the integration of the outlook of the other into our vision (the exercise of walking in the shoes of the other).

Rather than being afraid, we should be happy about the beauty of the multi-coloured face of our Order. Perhaps we are only at the beginning of the journey of the construction of a new and unpredictable future, within which we can be led only by the Spirit of the Lord.

This is a challenge that must be addressed through a dynamic that is increasingly sensitive to inculturation. This is very important above all for the new generation of Camillans who come to Taiwan from various other nations and cultures and need to be understood in the context of their own cultural values.


In conclusion, I would like to thank you from the depths of my heart for the splendid hospitality that you gave to us in your lives and your community. We really felt at home in your home.

May the Lord, the compassionate Samaritan, always be your guide, and may St. Camillus our father, the source and inspiration of our charism, protect you all!

Rome, 29 June 2018
 The Solemnity of St. Peter and St. Paul



Fr. Gianfranco LUNARDON
 General Secretary



Fr. Leocir PESSINI
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