

## Documentation

### *Celebration of the Seventh Centenary of the Beginning of the Evangelization of China by Friar John of Montecorvino*

*A homily by Jozef Cardinal Tomko*

*Sent by Pope Nicholas IV on a long journey to the Great Khan, the Franciscan missionary, John of Montecorvino, labored in China from 1294 to 1328. The 700th anniversary of the beginning of Catholic evangelization in China, said Cardinal Tomko, "sets before us all the situations and problems which evangelization finds, not only in China, but also in the whole of Asia," as the Church prepares for the year 2000, the Great Jubilee of the Redemption. We have reproduced verbatim, section 2 of the Cardinal's homily which deals exclusively with the Church in Mainland China.*

## **2. Which Church Was Founded in China?**

The first question that is placed before us by the mission of John of Montecorvino in China concerns the characteristics of the Church: which message did he announce and which Church did he found?

There is no doubt that as a good Franciscan, he announced the Gospel and the Gospel pure and simple, "sine glossa, sine glossa," as the Father of his Order, St. Francis of Assisi would say, i.e., without affected interpretation and without human modification. He went to China "evangelizare Jesum Christum" (Gal. 1:6), to announce Jesus Christ, the Son of God, made



Man, the Word Incarnate, crucified and risen, ascended into heaven, King of the universe, Lord of history and judge of humanity. He announced the "unfathomable riches" of Christ, in a manner adapted to the Chinese culture without in the least modifying its message.

John of Montecorvino founded the true "Catholic" Church in China. His first community in Peking already lived in communion with other communities in the world and with Rome. The bonds of this young, and still quite small community, with the center of the Church, with the See of Peter, were profound. The fact that the Pope himself consecrated seven Bishops to ordain and help Fr. John, Archbishop of Khambaliq, (Peking) testifies to this. This small community, therefore was born and grew as "Catholic" and that is to say, united by the bonds of faith and communion with the other communities or particular Churches in the world, as well as with bonds of concrete communion with the Successor of Peter who is the visible Head of the Church instituted by Jesus Christ and founded on the Rock of Peter. The particular Church-community of Peking lived its "Catholicity" as a fact of faith.

According to the Catholic faith, "national" Churches, restricted to one country alone, do not exist; there are not Churches totally independent from other Catholic communities. All the particular Churches or Catholic communities scattered around the world have, by the will of their founder, Jesus Christ, a fundamental relationship of communion with the Successor of Peter, who is the foundation of unity and who from Rome presides over the universal agape. This essential relationship of communion, without which the Church does not exist in the fullest sense, in no way stifles the ministry of the Bishops in the particular Churches; but rather stimulates it and strengthens it.

The Church is Catholic, universal but it is not a federation of "national" Churches or of particular Churches (dioceses). Christ himself gave it the foundation of visible unity among the individual parts or dioceses built on the unique Rock of Peter. No human power can give the Church any other structure.

The first Archbishop of Khambaliq-Peking therefore gave a good foundation to the Church in China. It then grew with the same characteristics of true "Catholicism" which remain valid today and will remain so because they are of divine institution.

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