Christ in Late Ming China (1)
The First Jesuits

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1. Introduction

We do not know when the Gospel of Christ arrived in China. The traditional tale that China had received the Gospel in apostolic times has been dismissed as a legend. Prof. Xie Bizhen has recently affirmed that we cannot be sure that this 'legendary' event never took place.[1] Whatever happened in the first century, there were no records of Christian life until the Christian faith arrived in China during the Tang dynasty (618-907) through the Nestorian missionaries (635).

Western Catholicism was brought to China for the first time in 1294, during the Yüan dynasty (1280-1368), by the Franciscan John of Montecorvino (1247-1328). His heroic mission had surprising success. However, when the foreign Yüan were driven from the Dragon Throne and the Ming (1368-1644) restored a Chinese dynasty, all the foreign elements allowed by the Yüan were no longer tolerated. Both Nestorians and Catholics disappeared.

Catholicism came back to China with the Jesuits in 1582. They thought they were the first Christian missionaries to arrive in China, and so did the contemporary Chinese. In an important sense they were both right. The Jesuits had to start from the beginning anyway,

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[1] B. Z. XIE, *Aleni's Contribution to the History of Christianity in China: The Nestorian Stele and Ancient Christian Tombs in Quanzhou, Fujian*, in *"Scholar from the West" Giulio Aleni S.J. (1582-1649) and the Dialogue between Christianity and China*, (edited by LAPIELLO, T., and MALEK, R.) Brescia-Sankt Augustin, 1997, pp. 403-416.

because there were no Christians, and neither the Europeans nor the Chinese had any memory of previous experiences. A study of Christology in China should therefore start with the Nestorian and Franciscan missions. Both, but especially the former, can provide the researcher with interesting materials.

I have chosen to concentrate on the first period of the modern mission, the Late Ming: from the arrival of Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607) to the work of Giulio Aleni (1582-1649), the missionary who wrote more extensively about Christ. The death of Aleni (1649) corresponds to the same period as that of the defeat of the Ming dynasty in Southern China, where Aleni worked.

2. The Christological Controversy

From the first half of the 17th century, the Jesuits were accused of casting aside Christ and concealing the event of the Crucifixion in their preaching in order not to hurt Chinese sensibilities. Such accusations played some part in the outcome of the Chinese Rites Controversy and in the suppression of the Society of Jesus itself (1773).

In recent years the same accusations have been leveled by authors like J. S. Cummins and especially J. Gernet. Gernet's book, which has been translated into the principal European languages and Chinese, has had a strong impact.[2] The recent debate demonstrates that the method the Jesuits used to preach Christ in China is still a subject that has important and interesting implications.

The polemics on the preaching of Christ started in Fujian in 1635 where Giulio Aleni was working. The Dominican friars raised questions about the Jesuits' method with an inquiry among the Jesuit missionaries and the converts. The following year, 1636, the reports (or *Informaciones*) of this investigation were sent to the friars' superiors in the Philippines.[3] The most serious charge was that the

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[2] J. S. CUMMINS, *A Question of Rites. Friar Domingo Navarrete and the Jesuits in China*, Aldershot, 1993, J. GERNET, *Chine et Christianisme*, Paris, 1982.

[3] The original text of the two *Informaciones* is in the Archives of the Holy Rosary Province in Avila. For a detailed presentation of these documents

Jesuits hid the Crucifix from public view and refrained from mentioning the Passion and Death of Christ. Moreover the friars questioned the use of the Cross by the Christian mandarin when in the course of their official duties, they had to perform acts of reverence. The accusation was made again by the Dominican Juan Batista Morales (1597-1664) in 1639. The Franciscan Antonio Caballero (†1669) denounced Matteo Ricci for writing about all the mysteries of Christ in his books except Christ's ignominious passion.[4]

It is worth noting that these accusations were generated not only by different missionary methods, but also by specific incidents between the Jesuits and the friars. The charge of not displaying the crucifix and keeping it out of the public eye even in the Jesuits' own houses, refers to an episode which took place in 1635, in Fuzhou (Fujian), between the Jesuit Ignacio Lobo (†1660) and the friars Morales and Francisco de la Madre de Dios Alameda (†1657). Lobo advised Morales not to display the cross on the door of his house that opened on to the street. But Alameda considered such advice "words entirely without foundation."[5] Another episode which occurred in 1637, led to the accusation that the Jesuits were placing the crucifix in the same position and honor as the image of the Emperor. In this instance, the friars were referring to the Jesuit chapel in their Beijing residence, visited by the two Franciscans Gaspar Alenda (†1642) and Francisco Alameda.

Jesuit Vice Superior Francisco Furtado (1587-1653) replied to the *Informaciones* and to Morales' charges with three documents: a letter to the General Superior in 1636, a reply to a letter sent by Morales to Manoel Dias (June 3, 1639), and a report for Pope Urban VIII in 1639.[6] Furtado admitted that the Jesuits did not give wide public display to the Crucifixion. They wanted to avoid the danger

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see F. MARGIOTTI, *L' Atteggiamento dei Francescani Spagnoli nella Questione dei Riti Cinesi*, in *Archivo Ibero-americano*, 38, 1978, pp. 126-137.

[4] In (edited by) VAN DEN WYNGAERT, A., *Sinica Francescana*, 8 vols, Quaracchi-Firenze, 1929-1936 2, p. 601.

[5] Quoted in G. H DUNNE, *Generation of Giants. The Story of the Jesuits in China in the Last Decades of the Ming Dynasty*, London, 1962, p. 279.

[6] The three documents are in the Roman Jesuit Archives. They are mentioned in DUNNE, *Generation of Giants*, pp. 269-280.

of exposing the Christian doctrine of the Crucifixion to ridicule, or letting the Cross be taken for something similar to a Taoist charm. This fear was certainly connected to the reaction of the eunuch Ma Tang when he came upon Ricci's crucifix in 1600. Ricci also explained on one occasion that a nude pictorial representation of Christ on the cross would certainly arouse indignation since a nude figure in art was forbidden by Chinese law.[7] On the other hand Furtado affirmed that all the Christians have a great devotion to the mystery of Christ's passion since

> we do not hide the mystery of the Passion from those worthy of being catechized.[8]

While the Jesuits were prudent in public, they did not hesitate to preach the Crucifixion to the converts in private.

The friars were not satisfied with the explanations and continued pressing the charges, especially through Domingo Navarrete (1618-1689). In the second half of the 17th century Navarrete played an important role in exporting the Chinese controversies to Europe.

The accusations that reached Rome and then Europe from the late 1630s had a strong impact. They received such wide acceptance that they became commonplace. For a long time the Jesuits had been accused of putting Christ aside, of being ashamed of the Cross of Christ. In other words, they were suspected of preaching a natural religion, not Jesus Christ, and in this way, compromising the integrity of the Catholic faith.

> As early as 1656, Blaise Pascal, with his Fifth Provincial Letter, contributed to the spread of the idea that "the Jesuits were systematically keeping the Cross from the Chinese so as not to scandalize them."[9]

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[7] R. R.COVELL, *Confucius, the Buddha, and Christ. A History of the Gospel in Chinese*, Maryknoll, 1986, p. 60.

[8] From the letter of Furtado of 1636, quoted by CUMMINS, *A Question of Rites*, p. 55.

[9] Quoted from J.S. CUMMINS, *Two Missionary Methods in China* , in *Archivo Ivero-americana*, 38, 1978, p. 95, see also p. 23 for a detailed account of Pascal's reaction.

One year later, in 1657, the Jesuit province of France received the following letter from Fr. Jacques Le Fevre:

> I cannot end without expressing to your reverence my astonishment at the report which some people have broadcast in Europe that our Fathers in China do not dare to preach Jesus crucified. It is true that to go out into the public places with a Crucifix in the hand would only expose our religion to the contempt of the gentiles; but after they have been instructed in the other mysteries, there is nothing that moves them as much as the passion of our Lord.[10]

The Jesuits Francesco Brancati (1607-1671) and Martino Martini (1614-1661), in the 1660s, also protested against what they called a calumny and a lie.

The 19th century Protestant missionaries in China expressed abhorrence for the Jesuit missionary strategy. In 1835 they described their missionary program as being antagonistic to that of the Jesuits:

> We must assume no other character than that of preachers of the Gospel, and resolve to know nothing except Christ and Him crucified.[11]

Gerald Brenan, an author of the present century, referred to

> the feats of those Jesuit missionaries of the seventeenth century who, the better to convert the Chinese, suppressed the story of the Crucifixion.[12]

Among the modern authors, Cummins and Gernet still hold the opinion that the Jesuits concealed the Christian character of Christianity.

I will try to answer the questions raised by the Christological controversy. These would be sample questions: Were the Jesuits really concealing the central Christian mystery of the suffering Christ? Were they ashamed of the Cross of Christ? Were they plac-

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[10] Quoted from DUNNE, *Generation of Giants*, p. 278.

[11] See a quotation in COVELL, *Confucius, the Buddha and Christ*, p. 69.

[12] G. BRENAN, *The Spanish Labyrinth*, New York, 1943, p. 326, quoted by DUNNE, *Generation of Giants*, p. 275.

ing Jesus in a second, discreet or better, humiliating place, beside or even behind pagan idols and beliefs? Were they preaching a natural religion?

3. The kerygmatic preaching of Ruggieri and the earlier Ricci

When the first two Jesuits entered China (1582), they did not have a specific plan on how to present Christology. They dressed as Buddhist monks, a clear sign that they intended their mission to be a religious one, but they did not adopt the street preaching method.

In the first catechism that they produced, *The True Record of the Lord of Heaven* (*Tianzhu Shilu Jengwen*), 1584[13] Ruggieri is the main author. The series of the Articles of faith are interrupted by two objections raised by an anonymous interlocutor. It is worth noticing that the interruption occurs at the Article of the Passion of Jesus. How can the Lord of Heaven possibly be killed by men? Did God die with Jesus? The insertion of these two questions is a sign that from the very beginning of the China Mission, the presentation of the Crucifixion met some objections and needed extra explanation. On the other hand, they did not avoid the problem, rather they dealt with it in particular depth.

Ruggieri, with this work, gives an excellent account of the core of the Christian doctrine. He was a preacher of the kerygma, and was not intimidated by the difficulties regarding the acceptance of

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[13] See the critical studies and translations based on the first two editions (1584-1585), that can be found in three articles by P. D'ELIA: *Il Domma Cattolico Integralmente Presentato da Matteo Ricci ai Letterati della Cina, in La Civiltà Cattolica*, 2, 1935, pp. 35-53; *Quadro Storico-sinologico del Primo Libro di Dottrina Cristiana in Cinese*, in *Archivium Historicum S. I.* 3, 1934, pp. 193-222; *Prima Introduzione della Filosofia Scolastica in Cina (1584-1603)* in *The Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology,* in *Academia Sinica*, 28, 1956, pp. 141-197. I have collated D'Elia's studies with a later edition of the *Catechism* of Ruggieri, published in WU XIANG XIANG, and FANG HAO, *Tianzhujiao Dongchuan Wenxian Xubian*, 3 vols, Taipei, 1966 (from now on *TZJDCWXXB*), 2, pp. 755-838, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (from now on *BAV*), *Borgia Cinese*, 324 (1), under a different title: *The True Record of the Holy Catholic Religion* (*Tianzhu Shengjiao Shilu*).

Christ. Ruggieri's subsequent Poems will provide further evidence of his kerygmatic approach.

The existence of *Chinese Poems* written by Michele Ruggieri came to light only in 1993, thanks to Albert Chan.[14] It may be a surprise that the author is Ruggieri himself, known for his imperfect mastery of the Chinese language. However, Chan proves beyond any doubt that the author is indeed Ruggieri. The time of composition must have been between 1582 and 1588. The literati in China learned poetry and claimed to be poets of some sort, often taking part in poetry contests. Ruggieri, eager to find acceptance among the literati, was motivated to do the same. It is very interesting to note that there are several and substantial references to Christ. The longest collection of 12 poems, entitled *On the birthday of God,* gives a rather extensive presentation of the mysteries of Jesus' life, including the Incarnation, Passion, Crucifixion and Redemption. This is much more noteworthy since the audience of the poems were the literati themselves, probably gathered in one of their intellectual meetings or poetry contests.

From the reading of the poems one notices that Ruggieri has no inhibitions in presenting the contents of his message. He is not intimidated by the literati's possible refusal of his Christian message or of his missionary identity. Again, evidently Ruggieri was an uncompromising preacher of the Christian kerygma, especially of the doctrine of the Incarnation, Crucifixion and Redemption. One notices that the Resurrection is not mentioned. Redemption seems to be the fruit only of the suffering and Crucifixion of Jesus. He was open to accommodation, but in an explicit Pauline sense:

> ... in short, we have become Chinese, ut Christo Sinas lucrifaciamus (so that we may gain China to Christ)[15]

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[14] A. CHAN, *Michele Ruggieri, S.J. (1543-1607) and his Chinese Poems,* in *Monumenta Serica,* 41, 1993, pp. 129-176. This extremely interesting study contains an introduction (pp. 129-139), the Chinese text (pp. 140-157), and the English translation (pp. 158-172).

[15] From a letter that Ruggieri wrote in February 1583, P. TACCHI VENTURI, *Opere Storiche del P. Matteo Ricci S. J.*, 2 vols, Macerata, 1911-1913, 2, p. 416. I have borrowed the translation from M. HOWARD RIENSTRA, *Jesuits' letters from China 1583-84*, Minneapolis 1986, p. 37.

If Ruggieri, whose Catechism was written in collaboration with Ricci, was ostentatiously clear about being a missionary of Christ the same should be said for Ricci.

In 1935 Pasquale D'Elia found an important manuscript by Ricci.[16] The document is a Chinese-Portuguese dictionary, with the first systematic attempt at the romanization of the Chinese language. Ricci wrote this document during his first years in Mainland China (Zhaoqing 1583-1586). The text in question was probably written in 1585. It also contains, in the first nine pages, a sort of memory guide in Chinese for Ricci's own use. It summarizes the topics he discussed with the literati visitors. The text (that I call *Catechetic Conversations*) is particularly interesting for it provides the contents of Ricci's conversations during the first period of his Chinese mission.

This manuscript was not for publication. It was never published and is still rather unknown. However it is a rare example of mission in action in the earliest years. Here we have a sort of expanded outline for the personal use of the author, a typical conversation held by the missionaries with the literati.

Ricci appears in agreement with Ruggieri's presentation of the Christian doctrine. The part devoted to the mystery of Christ in the *Catechetic Conversations* is very long, almost half the entire text. The salvific role of Jesus, through his Passion and Resurrection, is particularly and decisively affirmed. Ricci talks about being a priest and a missionary, successor of the first disciples of Jesus. He mentions his long, dangerous and tiring trips as proof of his sincerity and commitment to the mission. He shows great respect and admiration for Chinese civilization, in a way that does not seem simply a *captatio benevolentiae*, but rather a sincere love for his new homeland. The literati are treated with respect but not servility. Ricci does not seem intimidated by their knowledge or power. He praised the lite-

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It is worth noting that when the letter was first published in Europe in 1586, this passage was omitted. The explicit statement of the practice of accommodation was thought to be too strong for a European audience in 1586.

[16] It was found in the archives of the Society of Jesus in Rome, D'ELIA, *Il Domma Cattolico,* pp. 43-53. D'Elia translated the text literally into Italian and I refer to it for my version in English. See also, *Decouverte d'un Important Manuscript de Matthieu Ricci,* in *Bulletin Catholique de Pekin*, 1935, pp. 548-553 .

rati's extensive learning, but clearly affirmed they must accept Christianity to be saved. Finally he strongly expresses his desire to preach the Gospel for the salvation of the Chinese.

The text, which has a clear kerygmatic character, was not merely for the Christians, who were only a few in number, but for the literati themselves. Therefore, the literati in the first years of the mission were also the addressees of Ricci's kerygmatic preaching.[17]

4. Ricci's turning point: a new missionary strategy

Ruggieri seemed to be satisfied with the progress of the mission, but Ricci was not. He noted that the mission was still at the mercy of the vacillating attitude of local officials. As long as Christianity remained an outsider in Chinese society, there would be no secure future for the mission. Ricci intuited that the right to stay in China should not be pursued merely through political tolerance, but by winning the respect of the country's leaders, the Confucian-scholar class.

Moreover, in Ricci's eyes, the identification with the Buddhists proved to be a source of confusion and ambiguity. The many external similarities (vestments, shaven head, celibacy, fasting, residence outside the cities, origin from the West, etc.) confused the people: to them, the missionaries were a new form of Buddhism. The missionaries saw Buddhism as the main rival of Christianity, since some of the Buddhist doctrines were similar to the Christian ones, such as Paradise and hell, and Buddhism's religious character seemed to be able to satisfy those searching for spiritual fulfillment.

5. Christology in the catechisms

From the beginning of the 1590s, Ricci, still sincerely committed to the cause of the Gospel, used care in the presentation of Christ, especially Christ crucified. He adopted a two-fold approach: the apologetic method, with the indirect apostolate and publishing

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[17] This fact should be borne in mind when evaluating the accusation that Ricci deceived the literati about the Christian character of the Christian religion.

catechisms; and the religious formation of catechumens and new Christians with the booklets of the *doctrina christiana*. In preaching about Christ, he applied the trial-and-error method. His experience showed that a premature explanation of Christ's passion and death would prevent, instead of favour, conversions.

Some of the practices started by Ricci himself as Superior of the mission find their explanations within this context. The Jesuits did not leave the crucifix on the altar after the Mass, so as not to expose it to the eyes of pagans who might enter the Church. To the pagans they did not talk about Christ's death on the Cross. To the catechumens they talked about this only when they had decided to enter the Church.

Preaching openly about sensitive subjects like the crucifixion would only increase unnecessary opposition, put the Christian faith to the contempt of the pagans, disturbing instead of drawing the minds of those interested in or simply curious about the missionaries' message. Therefore some limitations were a sort of self-imposed prudence and caution.

These limitations were intended to be temporary and did not always apply, as we will see later. Other missionaries, disagreeing with Ricci, practiced an open preaching. Starting from 1619, the Jesuits had images and accounts of the Passion printed and put into circulation. It is obvious that they could have reached the hands of non-believers.

Ricci's Cathechism, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven,* 1604, (*Tianzhu Shiyi*),[18] is probably the most influential book in the history of Christianity in China. Ricci presented Christ only in the eighth and last chapter, omitting His Passion and death: a fact that drew much adverse criticism from Catholic and Protestant missionaries and theologians.[19] It seems, however, that Ricci had foreseen the objection:

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[18] *Tianzhu Shiyi* (*True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*): (edited by) D. LANCASHIRE, *MATTEO RICCI S. J. The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven, (T'ien-chu Shih-i);* Translated, with Introduction and Notes by D. Lancashire and P. K. C. Hu, Taipei-Paris-Hong Kong, 1985, (Chinese text and English translation).

[19] Some of the criticisms are just false: "Ricci limited himself to teaching pure deism. He mentioned neither the Trinity, nor the Incarnation, nor the

> This catechism - he wrote - does not treat all the mysteries of our holy faith, which need be explained only to catechumens and Christians, but only certain principles, especially those that can be proved and understood with the light of natural reason. Thus it can be of service both to Christians and to non-Christians and can be understood in those remote regions which our Fathers cannot immediately reach, preparing the way for those other mysteries which depend upon faith and revealed wisdom... Towards the end it explains something about the coming of Christ our Redeemer into the world to save and teach men, and it urges the Chinese to seek from the Fathers the true doctrine which is taught in greater detail in other books[20]

It is evident that the Christology expressed in his *Catechism*, although it was not without consistency, did not represent Ricci's Christological preaching as a whole. In these passages Christ is presented as having two main characteristics: He is a teacher and He performed miracles showing His divine power.[21] Christ as a teacher was certainly going to be appreciated by Confucian scholars. It seems, in fact, that teaching was the principal task of Jesus on earth.

The teaching of Jesus is, for Ricci, the basis of Western civilization. This seems to infer a comparison between Jesus and Confucius, the latter being the basis of Chinese civilization. The comparison between Jesus and Confucius is not developed further. Instead Ricci makes it clear that Christ is above any king, teacher or saint. Ricci consciously avoids the danger of presenting Jesus as a Confu-

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Redemption. It is probable that his Chinese friends saw in it only a special kind of Buddhism." Quoted from A. REVILLE, La Religion Chinoise, Paris 1889, p. 669, by DUNNE, *Generation of Giants*, p. 96. In fact Ricci did talk about Incarnation. He also talks about the necessity of baptism and of the Church for salvation: RICCI, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, pp. 455-456. All through the book there are many and harsh attacks on Buddhism: it is certainly impossible for anybody to mistake Ricci for a Buddhist after reading the book.

[20] P. D'ELIA, *Fonti Ricciane. (Storia dell'Introduzione del Cristianesimo in Cina)*, 3 vols, Rome, 1942-1949, 2, pp. 292-293. I have borrowed the English translation from DUNNE, *Generation of Giants*, pp. 96-97.

[21] According to J. SHIH, *Le Père Ruggieri et le Problème de L'Evangélisation en Chine*, Rome, 1964, p. 63, Christ is merely presented as the divine legate. Ricci, however, did not use this expression.

cian scholar or merely as a saint. *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*'s Christology may be incomplete, but certainly not manipulated.

Ricci's purpose was to lead his listeners gradually to the discovery of Christ. The knowledge of Christ was intended to be the natural conclusion of an intellectual and personal itinerary in search of the truth. The person in search of this truth should have first shown a genuine spiritual motivation: only under such conditions could one have been ready to accept such a novelty as the mystery of Christ.

Christ would be accepted by the Chinese only when He appeared to them not as a foreigner, but as somebody already mysteriously present in the noble Chinese civilization. In order to reach this goal, the missionaries had first to unveil the elements of *preparatio evangelica.*

Christ was, in Ricci's method, the point of arrival and not the start. In this attitude, we certainly find something similar to the arcane procedure of the primitive Church. The Church that Ricci himself founded was somehow a 'primitive Church.'

The *arcana* procedure can be also found in João Soerio (1572-1607)'s *Compendium of the Doctrine of the Lord of Heaven* (*Tianzhu Shengjiao Yueyen*), published in 1601.[22] This text said that among the things required for salvation, are knowledge and faith in the things of God. What these things of God are is not explained. Soerio seems to introduce here the discipline of the arcane:

> These things are not difficult to practice, but, for the moment it is not opportune to explain them. For those who want to learn them, they must seriously meditate on the preceding pages, and must sincerely want to observe them, and then they can continue in learning the rest.[23]

These words give the idea of how the Jesuits used the arcane methodology. Soerio must be referring here to the mystery of the Trinity, to the Incarnation and Redemption, to the sacraments and

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[22] H. VERHAEREN, *Nos Anciens Catéchismes. B. T'ien Tchou Cheng Kiao Yao Yen, du P. Soerio. Théodicée et Morale Naturelles à l'Usage des Aspirants Catéchumènes, in Bulletin Catholique de Pékin*, pp. 287-290.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 289.

the commandments of the Church. The sections of the Christian doctrine not included are not denied. They are simply postponed, after advising the readers that they exist and are not difficult. After deep meditation, they are available to those who want to proceed in learning the new religion. It sounds like a discreet invitation to foster the desire to enter the Church as a full member.

6. The Christology of the Christian doctrine

The second aspect of Ricci's missionary method was religious teaching through the doctrina Christiana. In the same year (1604), Ricci published both the *catechism* and the *doctrina Christiana*. This fact should be stressed since in the literature on the China Mission there is little mention of this work by Ricci. All the main articles of the dogma were part of the instruction of the neophytes: the doctrine of the Trinity, the Incarnation, Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus, the necessity of baptism and of the Church for salvation, the sacraments and the last things. The first Chinese Christians also learned the Decalogue, the Creed and the most common Christian prayers. Only the five commandments of the Church were not yet introduced by Ricci. He might have thought that it was too early: there were only just over 500 Catholics in China and no ecclesiastical organization.[24]

Missionaries such as Nicolò Longobardo (1566-1655) and Alfonso Vagnoni (1566-1640) were dedicated to the direct teaching of the doctrina Christiana. Several Jesuits published one or more booklets. In these booklets the Catholic doctrine is presented in a traditional way, following the outline of the European models: the *Little Catechism* and *Great Catechism* of Robert Bellarmine, the *Catechism* of Peter Canisius, Marc Jorge's *Cartilha* and the *Catechismo Romano,* the fruit of the Council of Trent.

The missionaries' booklets are a fine example of the Jesuits' distinction between *catechism* and *doctrina Christiana.* These publications promoted a Christian life strongly based on solid doctrinal

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[24] See J. JENNES, *Four Century of Catechetics in China. Historical Evolution of Apologetics and Catechetics in the Catholic Mission of China from 16th Century until 1940,* Taipei, 1975, p. 30.

and spiritual foundations: the knowledge of the person and mysteries of Jesus, personal and conscious faith, moral life founded on the Beatitudes and the Ten Commandments, prayer and liturgical participation.

Fr. Vagnoni wrote something like 18 works, most of them of a moral and doctrinal nature. According to Bernard,[25] in 1610 Vagnoni wrote a book entitled *On the Mysteries of Incarnation, of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ Our Lord and Redeemer.* But I have no other information on this book.[26]

Fr. Longobardo, the champion of the direct apostolate, published several religious works, although none seems to have a direct Christological interest. In 1602, Longobardo published the first Christian prayer-book, the *Daily Exercise of the Holy Religion* (*Shengjiao Rike*).[27] The booklet includes prayers of Jesuit inspiration and others related to Jesus: the prayer of the *Five Wounds of Christ*, the *Agnus Dei*, the *Angelus*, the *Litany of the Holy Virgin* and of *All the Saints*, the instruction of the essential truths for the salvation and the *Rosary of Jesus Christ*.

Diego De Pantoja (1571-1618) was one of Ricci's most important collaborators. Three of Pantoja's works were collected and published after his death under the title of *Posthumous Collection of the Writings of Dr. Pantoja*.[28] The largest part of the Collection is devoted to the explanation of the *Symbolum* which gives a long and complete account of the events of the Passion of Jesus and of the doctrine of Redemption. This is all the more remarkable when one

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[25] H. BERNARD, *Les Adaptationes Chinoises d'Ouvrages Européens: Bibliographique Chronologique (depuis la Venue des Portugais à Canton jusqu' à la Mission Française de Pékin)*, in *Monumenta Serica*, X, 1945, pp. 1-57, 309-388 (from now on *Les Adaptations*), pp. 329.

[26] Bernard gives only the French title of the book, without the Chinese one, *ibid.* This may mean that the book was not written in Chinese.

[27] *BAV*, *Borgia Cinese*, 347 (13). See JENNES, *Four Century of Catechetics*, p. 24.

[28] P. D'ELIA, *La Passione di Gesù Cristo in un' Opera Cinese del 1608-1610*, in *Archivum Historicum Societatis Jesu*, 22, 1953, pp. 276-278, pp. 276-305. In this article D'Elia translated (into Italian) all the passages referring to Christ, and also published the original Chinese version of the same passages.

considers this was written during the time of Ricci, the first period of the Jesuit China mission.

De Pantoja had a special interest in the Passion of Jesus. In 1617 another work of his was published: *The Recitation of the Passion of the Savior.*[29] Chinese Catholics recited this Chinese version of the Passion during Holy Week, up to the middle of the 20th century.

De Pantoja declares, at the very beginning of the book, that the preaching of the Passion is the main reason for the arrival of the missionaries. Moreover there is a continuous insistence on the salvific value of the Passion of Jesus. The Resurrection of Christ is hardly mentioned. The center of the Christian faith is the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The Passion itself is narrated in a simple and understandable style. The narration of the Passion included not only the information provided by the four Gospels, but also the traditional and devotional elements dear to the faithful. Such a realistic and detailed description of the Passion would certainly have moved the readers emotionally to feel compassion for the person of Jesus. Jesus is pointed out as a model and Savior not because of His glory and power, but for His suffering and humiliation.

The questions concerning the theology of the Passion clearly belong to the traditional apologetic explanation of the doctrine of Redemption. The questions do not have a direct reference to specific Chinese objections to the event of the Passion. Aleni would be the first to acknowledge the typical Chinese objections to the Christological doctrine and include them in his books. There is an explicit reference to the Chinese mentality, however, by mentioning the virtue of filial piety. De Pantoja does not seem aware of any particular difficulty aroused by Chinese sensibility.

In 1636 Manoel Dias (the Younger, 1574-1659) wrote the *Commentaries on the Gospel (Shengjing Zhenjiao)*, 1636.[30] The voluminous *Commentaries*, first published in Hangzhou, in an edition of 15 *juan*, were reprinted several times, and recently (1972) in three volumes. These are commentaries on the Sundays' and Feast

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[29] *Les Adaptations*, p. 333.

[30] *BAV, Borgia Cinese*, 338 (1-8), published in *TZJDCWXXB*, vols. 4. 5. 6.

days' Gospels, according to the liturgical calendar. Apparently they are an adaptation of a work by Sebastian Barradas, S.J. (1542-1615).

7. Christ in the first piece of the Christian Art in Modern China

João da Rocha's (1563-1623) *Introduction to the Christian Doctrine (Tianzhu Shengjiao Qimeng)*,[31] a translation of the *Cartilha* by Marc Jorge, published in 1619, does not present any significant elements of adaptation. However, one notices that prominent space has been given to the doctrine on Christ. The mystery of Redemption is centered in the Passion of Jesus. The book is striking for its length and the richness with which the doctrine is presented. For the few thousand Chinese Christians of the late Ming, this was certainly a demanding text.

Da Rocha deserves to be remembered for the publication of *The Method of Saying the Rosary (Song Nianzhu Guicheng)*.[32] The first book, completely given over to devotion to Mary and to the practice of the Rosary, appeared in 1619, only 37 years after the arrival of Ricci. It is a sign of a notable maturity of the spiritual life of the first Chinese Christian communities. *The Method of the Rosary* certainly contributed, in an early phase of the Jesuits' mission, to the comprehensive knowledge of the mystery of Salvation. The main protagonist of the mysteries of the Rosary illustrated by Da Rocha is Jesus, frequently presented as a model of filial piety. His name, the events of His life, His example, His sufferings and Resurrection are constantly at the heart of the meditation proposed to the disciple. This booklet, through the texts, the prayers and the images, was a great help to foster devotion to the person of Jesus, something the Jesuits vigorously promoted among the Chinese Christians. The great importance of the book lies, however, in the images, which are the first major example of the adaptation of Christian art to China.

The European text that Da Rocha had as inspiration and model was a well-known work among the Jesuits of the late 16th and 17th centuries: the *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines* by Jerome Nadal

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[31] *Les Adaptations*, p. 312, n. 91, and p. 335.

[32] I refer to the copy in *BAV, Barberini Oientale*, 132, of which I possess a microfilm.

(1507-1580), one of the first disciples and closest collaborators of St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556).

Da Rocha entrusted Dong Jichang (1555-1636), one of the greatest painters and art theoreticians of the time, or one of his students, to make the engravings on woodblocks, for the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary, using Nadal's *Imagines* as a basic model.

With their wonderful artistic mastery and especially by the great originality of interpretation, the engravings printed by Da Rocha are indeed impressive. The Chinese reader would easily be familiar with the style of these representations whose contents were so new. The scenes taking on Chinese characteristics are completely animated. The facial features of all the figures (including Jesus, Mary and the Apostles), the vestments and ornaments, the buildings and the depiction of the other architectural elements; the gardens, the landscapes and the scenery are totally Chinese.

Moreover, the same composition of each scene is re-interpreted in a Chinese perspective, reducing, for example, the contents of the picture to a single scene. The illustrations perfectly reproduce the style of Dong Jichang who conceived painting as the expression of a person's interior being. In his pictures he included only the essential motifs, leaving much empty space around the main scene. The empty space was not simply a void to emphasize the relief of the single main motif, but also a sign of the presence of the divinity.

A fine example of what we are saying here is the scene of the crucifixion. In this scene the Chinese artist merged two of Nadal's illustrations into one, and the result is dramatic. On the bare mountain background (in place of the city of Jerusalem) the cross emerges with greater relief. The crosses of the two thieves are also omitted. The single cross on which Jesus is nailed, is dramatically suspended between earth and heaven, isolated in a terrible loneliness that seems to have only God as witness. Here and there, small groups of figures around the cross suggest the cruelty and indifference of the soldiers who tortured and killed Jesus, the cold apathy of those in power who condemned him and, finally the impotent piety and grief of the women. The result is an image with a powerful emotional impact, a deeply Chinese interpretation of the Passion of the Lord. Here there is powerful evidence of how, even in an early period of the China mission, the Chinese spirit was able to assimilate

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and express the mysteries of Jesus' life and the Passion in particular.[33] Christ, in Da Rocha' s pictures, has Chinese features and is situated within a characteristically Chinese environment.

Giulio Aleni's *Illustrated Life of the Lord of Heaven (Tianzhou Jiangsheng Chuxiang Jingjie)*,[34] was published in Fuzhou in 1637, seventeen years after Da Rocha's *Method of the Rosary.*

Aleni had published the eight *juan* of *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ, (Tianzhu Jiangsheng Yanxing Jilüe*, only two years before. *The Illustrated Life of the Lord of Heaven* was conceived as a completion of the previous work. I believe this project is the real masterpiece of Aleni's missionary apostolate. For the first time, thanks to Aleni, the Chinese were able to read the words of Jesus in their own language, and also to see the principal events of His life in pictures. In the introduction Aleni stated that we can only depend upon pictures to imagine the spiritual Lord of Heaven. The Christians were taught, by Aleni, not simply to read and know the Gospel, but also to deeply meditate on it according to the Jesuit spirituality. This monumental work certainly took a great deal of Aleni's energy and time in the 1630s. This work, however, made him one of the most outstanding missionaries of the Jesuit China mission.

When one compares Da Rocha and Aleni's works, it is certainly surprising that Aleni did not continue, as we might expect, in the same line of adaptation.[35] Aleni rejected the simplification and ad-

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[33] For an artistic analysis of Da Rocha's illustrations I consulted expert Chinese friends. See also the two papers of P. D'ELIA, *L'Origine dell'Arte Cristiana in Cina, (1583-1640), Roma, 1939, pp. 75-77 and Missionari Artisti in Cina*, in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 1, 1939, pp. 130-132. In his analysis D'Elia wants simply to demonstrate that the adaptation to the Chinese style was impressive and almost total. A. BUJATTI, *Incisori e Artigiani Cinesi Presero a Modello le Xilografie Cinquecentesche di Geronimo Nadal*, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 29, July 1994; P. RHEINBAY, *Nadal's Religious Iconography*, in *Scholar from the West*, pp. 328-331.

[34] *BAV* possesses the most ancient editions of the book. The most ancient is in *Barberini Orientale* III, 134 (1). It is a complete edition, with 55 images plus the images of Jesus the King and the plan of Jerusalem.

[35] For the'artistic' evaluation of Aleni's engravings, I again consulted expert Chinese friends; moreover I consulted the study of J. DEHERGNE,

aptation of Da Rocha and chose a more faithful reproduction of Nadal's original. This would have been the first complete pictorial account of the mysteries of the time of Jesus in China. For such an important apostolic and catechetical book, some thought a version

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Une Vie Illustrée de Notre-Seigneur au Temps des Ming, in *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionwissenschaft*, 14, 1958, pp. 103-115.

closer to the European original might have been more suitable. Da Rocha's text was a devotional booklet for meditating the rosary, while Aleni's work was to become a fundamental cornerstone in the evangelization of China, as its numerous editions, up to the present century, attest.

Aleni, however, did not simply copy the European model. There are several significant changes in Chinese style. In an early copy kept in Madrid[36] I was able to consult personally,[37] there is a noteworthy difference from all other editions. After the normal series of the 56 pictures there is another one at the end. The crucifixion of Jesus is represented again, but this picture is very different from the earlier one in the same text; it is also different from Da Rocha's and Nadal's. The three women of the Gospel's narration are around Jesus on the cross. The women have Chinese faces. All around the border of the picture, there are ten small scenes representing the events recorded in the four Gospels and honoured in Christian tradition that happened at the moment of Jesus' death. Among these scenes two are of a larger relief: at the top there is the scene, of the veil of the Sanctuary torn in two--with an explanation-- and on the bottom, the descent of Jesus into Limbo to liberate the souls of the ancient saints.

The most interesting difference between Aleni and his models is the very last image that represents the Coronation of the Virgin. The European original is divided into three parts: in the bottom section there are the Apostles, in the middle Mary and Jesus in a circle of clouds, in the top, a small scene of the Coronation. Da Rocha reduced the tripartition to one single scene. This produces a significant impact. The Virgin is in the clouds, receiving the crown. She is beside God the Father and the Son, and above them there is the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. Aleni keeps the central scene of the Coronation as in Da Rocha, but adds about ten 'Chinese-like' angels

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[36] Prof. Eugenio Borao, of the National Taiwan University, whom I thank here, provided me with a photocopy of an early edition (1637) of the book with 56 (sometimes not in order) images, plus the plan of Jerusalem, the introduction and Jesus the King with the four evangelists, kept in the archives of the Franciscan Fathers in Madrid (26/2).

[37] I consulted personally about twelve editions, and have copies of five of them.

on the right and on the left. The most important novelty is the reintroduction of the people in the bottom section. The Western Apostles are not alone in applauding the glory of the Virgin. There is a large group of at least fifteen Chinese, mixed with the European personages, among whom Aleni inserted the Pope, recognizable from the Tiara, and also a European sovereign. The Chinese figures represent several literati wearing different headgear, a soldier, a child

with the characteristic forelock. Between the people and the clouds there is a line of buildings (houses, palaces, temples) of European and Asian architecture. Another minor detail featuring Chinese characteristics is the globe that Jesus holds in his right hand. The picture really gives the impression of a mixture of European and Chinese people witnessing the great event of the Coronation of the Virgin Mary. In fact, the footnote explanation says:

> The Emperors, the kings, the scholars and the people of all the countries pray (pay respect) to the Holy Mother to be (as) a protecting Sovereign and benevolent Mother of humankind.[38]

The explanation of the buildings is:

> People from every place of the world respectfully build temples to venerate the Holy Mother and receive (from her) every sort of grace and protection.[39]

What did Aleni mean by this illustration that so dramatically differs from the others? We should consider that all the other images illustrated episodes in the History of Salvation in which, in fact, no Chinese person took part. But the last episode, the Coronation of the Virgin, is not necessarily dated in the past, it can indeed be considered an atemporal event, or even a current event. This event, that is continually happening, is witnessed by the present Church (and not only the Apostles) as well as by its members from every country where the Church is present. The message that Aleni wanted to communicate is that the Chinese people are now part of this Church, having the same dignity as all the other members. If before, they were excluded from the salvific event, it is so no longer. China is at last inserted into the life of the universal Church and is part of the on-going history of salvation. With a picture, Aleni was able to answer objections of the Chinese about the exclusion of China in the plan of salvation.

If this interpretation is correct, the omission of this image in the 19th century editions of the book becomes even more striking.[40] As

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[38] *BAV, Barberini Orientale* III, 134 (1), image n. 55.

[39] *Ibid.*

[40] The editions of the 19th century are preserved in the Urbaniana Library (Rome), bound in the *Daoyuan Jingcui.*

far as I know, no one has ever noted this detail. The editions of the 18th century kept the same illustrations as those of the first editions, although we already have the combinations of written text and images in the same book. In some editions however, there are fewer images.[41] This is one of the reasons to suspect that the omission in the 19th century edition is intentional. Another reason is that in the later editions of the last century the number of the images has increased from about 56 to 141 or to 153, as in Nadal's original work. Therefore the editors would have had the problem of producing new images, not of reducing their number. Other minor adaptations made by Aleni, e.g., the 'washing of the Apostles feet', were completely omitted from the 19th century editions.

Unfortunately, from this it is evident that inculturation was not an on-going process developing into a deeper respect of indigenous characteristics. Here there is a sign of regression in the missionary conscience and practice, probably one of the many negative consequences of the Rites controversy.

(We are indebted to the Vatican Library for the illustrations used in this article. They are used with permission.)

[41] The copy in the Theological Library of Fu Jen University of Taipei was published in Beijing in 1738 (from one of the introductions). This copy has only 39 images. The last illustration 'the Coronation of the Virgin' is similar to Aleni's original.