

the Catholic press could go far to overcome this difficulty.

3. That superiors and bishops be willing to apply the greatest liberty of spirit in interpreting canons, liturgical laws and religious rules where they are sure of their men; and then be willing to undertake the no mean labour of obtaining indults and dispensations when the matter is passing beyond the experimental stage and needs to be stabilized.

One sometimes hears it said that the matter need not be so directly approached, that when the African priesthood and hierarchies have been established they will see to it. This contains a very large part of the truth, but it is important also to remember the possible contribution of the laity, and the duty of encouraging them also to take responsibility for the matter. Also it is possible that the new African clergy will feel so strongly the bare responsibility of keeping intact the essentials they have been given, that they may not be the most free to experiment, or to permit lay-people to do so. The sense of long tradition and of links with overseas catholicism may make the European missionary more free, even should his understanding of African aspirations remain always less perfect. While it is true that Africa is becoming daily less willing to accept authoritative guidance from people from overseas, it is also true that it is learning a new appreciation of those who are prepared to work with Africans, in the African way, and subjecting themselves to Africa.



## THE ROAD TO PEKING

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**T**HE name of St Francis Xavier is too well known to require any introduction in these pages, yet it is strange that Matteo Ricci, who took up the work interrupted by Xavier's premature death, remains comparatively unknown, even in Catholic circles. This may well be due to the cloud under which Ricci has been for so many years on account of his revolutionary approach to the evangelization of the east; his apostolic

methods among the Chinese gave great scope to his genius for adaptation, but like many other pioneers, Ricci had to pay the penalty of antagonism from those who were less farsighted. It is therefore gratifying to find the present Holy Father holding up Matteo Ricci as a model for all missionaries<sup>1</sup> and thus finally vindicating his apostolic work which has been so widely misunderstood, both in Ricci's own day and also in ours. It may therefore be of interest to review briefly the life and work of Matteo Ricci in this year which marks the 350th anniversary of his death in Peking.

In 1552, a month or so before Xavier died in his valiant attempt to storm the forbidding walls of China, Matteo Ricci was born in Macerata, Italy, the first son of a middle-class family which claimed noble descent. Against the wishes of his ambitious father, he entered the Jesuit novitiate of Sant' Andrea in Rome, where another Jesuit novice, St Stanislaus Kostka, had died only a few years previously. As Ricci's master of novices was Alexandro Valignano, the courageous Neapolitan who was destined for great work in the east, it is not surprising that Ricci soon volunteered for the mission of the Indies and in 1578 duly set sail from Lisbon in the *São Luiz*. The journey from Europe to India now takes under three weeks by ship and less than twenty-four hours by plane. The carrack on which Ricci and his companions sailed was alternately buffeted by storms and becalmed in the doldrums for six months before limping into Goa; this was considered quite good sailing in those days when conditions on board were so indescribably foul that it was quite a feat for a passenger to survive the ordeal. Ricci remained in India for several years until Valignano, now Superior of the Jesuits in the Indies, appointed him to the Chinese mission.

The term Chinese mission was in actual fact a mere euphemism, for the Chinese strictly prohibited any foreigner from entering their country, save those with special permission to offer gifts to the Emperor at Peking. It is true that some stout-hearted Franciscans had penetrated the interior of the vast country as early as the thirteenth century, but their work had not been permanent and, as far as the western world was concerned, China was a forbidden land of mystery and myth. Ricci accordingly settled down in the Portuguese enclave of Macao and began his life-long

<sup>1</sup> *Princeps Pastorum*, 28th November, 1959.

study of Chinese with such thoroughness that one of his books later written in that language was revered by the Chinese themselves as a classic. It says much for his extraordinarily retentive memory that within three months he had overtaken in his studies a fellow religious who had already been plodding away at the complex language for three years.

It was not long before a providential opportunity for entering the forbidden land was presented to Ricci when a mandarin at Shiu-hing, hearing of the Italian's scholarship and erudition, invited him to settle in his district. It is true that the official lived only a mere hundred miles inland, but at least it was within the Chinese frontier. So, bearing the mandarin's official passport with its great red seals, Ricci crossed over into China proper; he was destined never to leave the country again.

The rest of Ricci's life was one gradual trek north to the imperial court at Peking. Like Xavier in Japan, Ricci in China soon realized that unless he obtained the Emperor's patronage, there could be no hope of firmly establishing the Church in the face of opposition from minor officials. To Peking, then, he would go. Yet his journey to the capital took far longer and was more dangerous than his voyage in the *São Luiz*; in fact, he spent no less than eighteen years, slowly edging his way ever nearer to the court of the Son of Heaven. Suspicious mandarins had to be won over, for it was quite unheard of for a western barbarian to proceed by himself through the interior of the country. Twice he came near to death from dysentery, once he was almost drowned, on several occasions he had first-hand experience of Chinese gaols, twice he was on the point of being expelled from the country; yet throughout it all, Ricci's tact and personal charm won the day as he inched his way to the imperial court.

When finally he entered Peking, the eunuchs who controlled the affairs of the effeminate court prevented him from presenting his gifts; disappointed, Ricci withdrew from the city and patiently waited another three years. On his second attempt his mission was once again on the point of failure when the Emperor Wan Li, hearing of the western barbarian who was causing such a stir in the capital, demanded that his gifts be presented. Thus began Ricci's long association with the court at Peking; although he was never allowed to gaze on the countenance of the Son of Heaven, yet the prestige which the Emperor's friendship won for

him protected Ricci for the remaining nine years of his life.

The memorable day came when the clock which Ricci had given to the Emperor stopped chiming and terrified courtiers, fearing the imperial wrath, rushed the missionary to the palace to repair the magical contrivance. On other occasions the ever resourceful Ricci taught the imperial musicians how to play the clavichord (and for good measure, he composed hymns in Chinese for them to sing to the Emperor), and also lectured on mathematics to the court astronomers so that they could foretell eclipses with greater accuracy.

In this way Ricci enjoyed imperial protection and was able to build the nucleus of the Chinese Church and lived to see many eminent men converted to Christianity. No longer a despised western barbarian, he was now the revered western scholar, whom, it was whispered with awe, even the Emperor consulted. But the cost had been great. The continual strain and hardship of his eighteen-year journey to Peking had sapped his strength and eventually caused his health to break down; on May 11th, 1610, Matteo Ricci died peacefully, surrounded by his Chinese Christians. Even the Son of Heaven expressed his condolences and provided a suitable place for burial, while a famous mandarin furnished his epitaph—one, perhaps, which would have most pleased Ricci—'The author who loved virtue'.

If one were to recount no more than Ricci's accomplishments as a traveller—the first European to penetrate China since the times of Marco Polo, the first to give the outside world any accurate information concerning the geography and population of the Middle Kingdom, the first to make a profound study of the language, customs, literature and religions of China, the first to prove that the mythical Cathay and China were identical—all these feats, and many more, would be sufficient to ensure for Ricci a permanent place of honour in the records of exploration. But Ricci was more than a mere explorer; whatever those who were sceptical of his apostolic methods may have said about him, he was first and foremost a missionary, and in fact his great claim to fame lies in the field of missiology. One might even say that before the time of Ricci the term missiology had no meaning, for few appreciated the pressing need of adaptation of missionary methods in the east. The vast majority of missionaries were not aware of the necessity of adapting their apostolate to the peoples

of Asia; in the view of many, Asians were inferior people,<sup>2</sup> pagan religions were the invention of the devil and were intrinsically evil, and the maxim, *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*, was to be interpreted in the strictest possible way.

But Ricci's placid temperament (it is interesting to note that Ricci, Valignano and De Nobili were all Italians) aroused in him a great sympathy for the cultural values of the east. His study of the writings of Confucius (he, in fact, was the first to latinize the name Kung Fu-tzu into its present European form) convinced him that the teachings of the national sage could serve as an ethical basis on which he could safely superimpose the teachings of Christ. In this, it must be admitted, he had a far easier task than De Nobili in India, who experimented to see how much Hindu thought could be assimilated; for Confucianism, more of an ethical system than a religion, naturally lends itself to Christian adaptation.

Ricci's ambition was to present to the Chinese the basic truths of Christianity, stripped of their western trappings, in such a way that the eastern mind would find no difficulty in admitting the truth of Christ's message. For this, a thorough research into Chinese psychology, culture, traditions and religion was necessary, and to his dying day Ricci never ceased from his study of things Chinese. His whole missionary life was spent in an attempt to interpret Christianity to the Chinese in their own terms and concepts. He realized that any other method would only make the highly cultured people he was dealing with regard Christianity as an alien creed, and converts would be forever considered as outcasts in their own country, quasi-subjects of the dreaded European imperialists.

There is no necessity here to enter into a discussion of the Chinese rites controversy which in later years was to destroy utterly Ricci's painstaking work; let it suffice to note that the Holy Father's reference to Ricci in his recent encyclical has once and for all vindicated the life's work of the Italian missionary. One perhaps can say that Matteo Ricci was a man born before due time, a saintly genius whose novel methods were to scandalize

<sup>2</sup> Even in recent times we read, 'The Chinese, being by nature inferior to the European, will always be inferior as a Christian'. Also, 'All the missionaries will love the Chinese for the love of God, and for the sake of their souls . . . but friendship! that is impossible.' *Méthode de l'Apostolat Moderne en Chine*. Hong-Kong, 1911, p. 800. Quoted in *Failure in the Far East*, by Malcolm Hay, p. 168.

and shock his contemporaries; only now, three centuries later, are they beginning to be acknowledged as the only means of winning the soul of Asia. The tragedy is that this realization has come so late, and China once more is a country barred to Christ.



## THE FIVE BEATS OF EVERY APOSTOLIC LIFE<sup>1</sup>

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**A**FTER the apostles themselves, as we see them in their writings and in the Acts, who is there better than the Father of the Preachers to show us the laws of apostolic life? St Dominic in fact exhibits very strikingly certain realities which are most essential in such a life. They form what one might call the Law of the Five Beats. The more one meditates on it, the more one comes to think that it deserves to be classical.

### 1. *Hidden life in God with Jesus Christ*

Today the first 'beat' in order of time does not seem, for most apostles, to be contemplative withdrawal into God. They are in the world, they have experience of it, and grace presses them to proclaim the gospel to it. They begin with what was for St Dominic the second and the fourth 'beats': they can already taste the experience of combat for the faith. It is at this point generally that they feel the need for hidden inwardness with Christ; it is not first in time for them. Worth noticing is the fact that St Dominic himself, before the fulfilment of his vocation as a canon, of course heard calls to the salvation of mankind, but this was in the line of corporal mercy. The young man, at the university, could no longer 'study on dead skins while men are dying of hunger'; he sold his books, his irreplaceable manuscripts, to give them bread.

St Dominic lived in a Christian age and society when the ideal of course was 'apostolic life'—but this did not mean life consecrated to proclaiming the gospel to those who have never heard it. It meant imitating the primitive Christian community: the

<sup>1</sup> Adapted and translated by F. K. from *La Vie Spirituelle*, July 1959.