

St Mary's, Inverness
The RC Diocese of Aberdeen: SC005122]
The Year of St Ignatius
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THIRTY-FOURTH REFLECTION

THE MISSION TO CHINA : FIRST PHASE 1552-1610



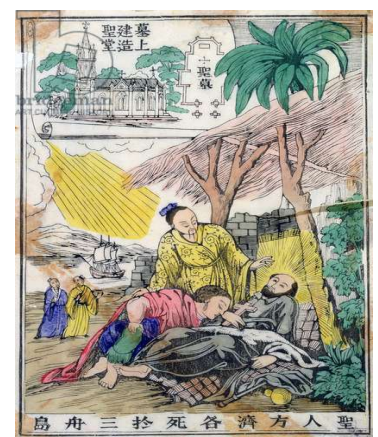
Saint Francis Xavier was one of the greatest missionaries, akin to St Paul he travelled huge distances bringing many people to faith in God through knowledge of Jesus. It is reckoned that he baptized about thirty thousand people. Francis Xavier was canonized in 1622 and his feast day is kept annually on 3rd December.

Francis Xavier was born 1506 in Northern Spain. The third son of a courtier in royal service, and being a younger son he was destined for a career in the Church. He began his theological studies at the University of Paris in 1525 where he met Ignatius Loyola. Loyola was attracting men through the Spiritual Exercise to commit their lives to Christ. Francis Xavier, with Peter Fabre, was one of the original group that in time became the Companions who consecrated their lives together at Montmartre on 15 August 1534.

While the Companions were in Rome awaiting final Papal approval of the order that was to become the Society of Jesus, Ignatius Loyola assigned Xavier to missionary work in the Portuguese East Indies. This was at the request of King John III of Portugal. Xavier's Mission was conducted in four major areas: India, Malacca, Japan, and towards China. 'Xavier arrived in Goa, India in 1542. The following two years he spent among primitive pearl fishers on the Indian coast. Despite of language difficulties he educated and baptized thousands. He founded schools and made efforts to train ministers among the natives, which was an unusual tactic during the 16th century'.

Between 1545-48 Xavier embarked on missions in the Malacca area. He founded mission stations among the tribal peoples who lived there.

While living in Malacca, Xavier befriended a Japanese nobleman whose interest in Christianity inspired him to make a journey to Japan in 1549. The Jesuit code of humble poverty proved an obstacle among the Japanese. Xavier's interest in China began when he appreciated that China was influential within Japan. The Japanese were influenced by the historic Chinese wisdom tradition. Francis Xavier believed that the Japanese would be more open to Christian teaching if they knew that the Chinese had already accepted it. Francis Xavier resolved to enter China despite the local difficulties. During the 1540's admission to the country was almost impossible as it had been declared 'closed to foreigners'. While waiting for a Chinese merchant who was to smuggle him into the country St Francis Xavier succumbed to a fever and died on an island off the Chinese coast.





Fr Michele Ruggieri.

After Xavier's death the Chinese Mission was delayed for twenty-five years, until the Italian Jesuit priest Fr Michele Ruggieri undertook the study of mandarin Chinese language and the manners and customs of the Chinese elites. Fr Ruggieri went to China as a protégé of **Alessandro Valignano** {As Visitor he supervised the Jesuit work in East Asia by recommending the practice of 'accommodation'—seeing Christianity in its local context and aiming to relinquish any European customs that prevented people from seeing the reality of Jesus Christ}.

In this Valignano honoured the nature of local cultures. Fr Michele Ruggiere became learned in Chinese language and respecting their customs he was able to befriend the Mandarins, officials in the Imperial Civil Service. This acceptance was instrumental in securing the initial growth of the Mission. In 1583, Ruggieri was joined by **Matteo Ricci**, who was to become a legendary pioneer of the China mission. Ricci was greatly interested in mathematics and was influenced by the distinguished mathematician and astronomer, Christopher Clavius.



Matteo Ricci entered the Jesuit School in Macerata in 1561, then went to Rome in 1568 to study law. While there he was attracted to the Jesuits and he joined them in 1571. He continued his studies in Rome, studying mathematics and astronomy under Christopher Clavius at the Collegio Romano.



Christopher Clavius was born in Franconia, Germany on 25 March 1528. He entered the Society of Jesus in 1555, being admitted in Rome. He received his education within the Order. He was sent to the University of Coimbra in Portugal in 1556 to study at the Jesuit College that had been founded there.

Clavius had always been interested in mathematics and he excelled in the mathematical courses which he took as part of a general degree. An event which had a large influence on him was an eclipse of the sun which occurred on 21 August 1560.

This event was important for Clavius since it convinced him to devote his life to mathematical and astronomical study. Following his eclipse observations, he returned to Italy where he studied theology at the Jesuit Collegio Romano in Rome. He was ordained in 1564 but remained at the Collegio Romano teaching mathematics in the year of his ordination. In fact, except for a period in Naples around 1596 and a visit to Spain in 1597, Clavius remained the Professor of Mathematics at the Collegio Romano for the rest of his life.

After completion of his studies in mathematics and astronomy Matteo Ricci set out on his sea voyages in 1577. He arrived first in Portugal where he studied at the University of Coimbra before proceeding in 1578 overseas to the Portuguese city of Goa on the west coast of India. In Goa Ricci studied for the priesthood, and he was ordained in 1580. Two years later he sailed to China.



Ricci arrived at Macau on the east coast of China in 1582. He settled in Chao-ch'ing, Kwangtung Province and began his study of Chinese. He also worked at acquiring understanding of Chinese culture. While there Ricci produced the first edition of his map of the world *Great Map of Ten Thousand Countries* which is a remarkable achievement showing China's geographical position in the world.

In 1589 Ricci moved to Shao-chou and began to teach Chinese scholars the mathematical ideas that he had learnt from his teacher Clavius. This is perhaps the first time that European mathematicians and Chinese mathematicians had discussed and challenged each other. Ricci attempted to visit Peking in 1595 but found the city closed to foreigners. He went instead to Nanking where he lived from 1599, working on mathematics, astronomy and geography. Ricci was well received in Nanking and this encouraged him to try again to visit Peking which he

did in 1601. This time he was allowed to live in the city and he made this his home from that time until his death nine years later.

Matteo Ricci worked with his fellow Jesuit Fr Rugieri for six years in Zhaoqing, in Guangdong Province, immersing themselves in the culture and making modest gains in proselytizing the Chinese.

In 1585 Fr Rugieri returned to Italy and Fr Ricci took charge of the China mission. He developed connections among the most prominent members of Chinese society. Ricci as a western scholar also knowledgeable in Confucian philosophy presented the Gospel in a language and thought forms which the educated Chinese could understand. Integrating further with the Chinese elites Ricci began to wear traditional Mandarin clothing, thus identifying with the *literati*. This top-down approach to evangelisation eventually bore fruit as there were conversions among the Mandarins. The Jesuit policy of adapting to the indigenous culture was advantageous for in time Ricci and his associates shared the Christian message with everyone who cared to listen, irrespective of social standing.

In 1601 Ricci was finally able to take up residence in Peking (Beijing). The esteem in which he was held enabled a more stable environment both for the Mission in the northern capital of the Chinese empire and for the other Jesuit missions in the south. Matteo Ricci, a considerable scholar wrote several books : *Tianzhu shiyi (The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven)*, an overview of core Christian beliefs; *Ershiwu yan (Twenty-five Sayings)*, a commentary on a selection of Greek philosophy; and *Jiren shipian (Ten Essays on the Extraordinary Man)*, a compilation of essays about his discourses with the *literati*. These and other Jesuit publications were encouraged by partnership with the *literati*, who

offered their stylistic help and cultural expertise to the Jesuit fathers. The missionary enterprise was much assisted by the already existing printing facilities. The Jesuit missionaries printed their materials largely on straightforward, inexpensive woodblocks. These Jesuit writings, including letters from the Mission, discussed the China mission itself and the strategy of *accommodation* to local customs and thought. To publicize Confucian thought in Europe, the Jesuits translated and commented on several Confucian classics.



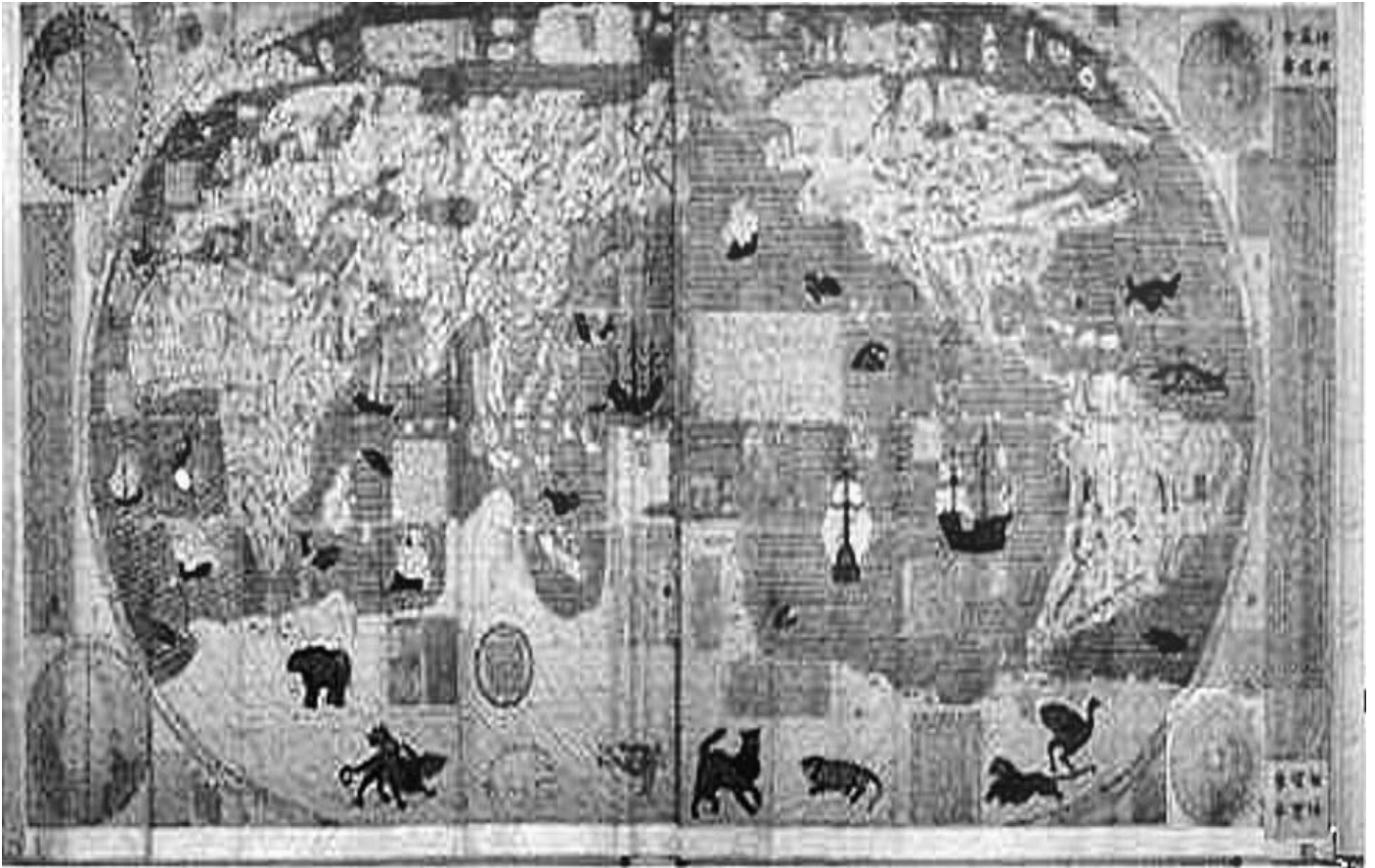
Matteo Ricci (left) with his colleague Paul Xu Guangqi (right).

The intellectual pursuits of the Jesuit missionaries as representative of Western learning, were attractive to the Chinese elites. To convert them Ricci, and those who followed him, employed not only rhetorical skills, but also their knowledge of astronomy and mathematics. Educated in the best European traditions, the Jesuits used their scientific expertise to appeal to the Mandarins and win them over; thus,

Ricci collaborated with two top civil servants, Xu Guangqi and Li Zhizao, on several projects, one of which was a translation of Euclid's *Elements of Geometry* (*Jihe yuanben*). The Jesuits also "introduced paintings that surprised the Chinese by their use of geometric perspective, . . . translated books on the calendar, agriculture, and technology, and

printed an enormous global map which integrated the results of the latest world explorations."

In 1602 Matteo Ricci produced a very large MAP, 5 ft high and 12 ft wide by using woodcut printing which using mathematical projections showed China at the centre of the known world.



It portrays both North and South America and the Pacific Ocean with reasonable accuracy. China appropriately is linked to Asia, India, and the Middle East. Europe, the Mediterranean, and Africa also are well delineated. It was noted that: "There is some distortion, but what's on the map is the result of commerce, trade and exploration, so one has a good sense of what was known then."

Ti Bin Zhang, first secretary for cultural affairs at the Chinese Embassy in Washington, D.C., said in 2009: "The map represents the momentous first meeting of East and West" and was the "catalyst for commerce."

The secret of Ricci's success was his ability to go beyond cultural barriers and befriend people of another race and religion. His remark about his friend Feng Yingjing brings reveals the spirit of this great missionary: "He treated the affairs of our fathers as if they were his own and our fathers in turn treated his as if they were ours."

Fr Matteo Ricci died in 1610, and soon afterwards the Jesuits fell out of favour with the state officials at Nanjing, the southern capital of the Ming dynasty. The Jesuits were charged with disturbing social order, misusing the teachings of Confucius, and being in cahoots with the Portuguese Crown. The missionaries kept a low profile working quietly until in the early 1630s a new era began for the China mission: the Jesuits regained something of their respect and esteem and in many respects they had become self-sufficient. While previously they relied on the support of the elites to protect new converts, now they themselves cared for the socially vulnerable Christians. The China Mission was on the cusp of a new phase in its life.

Thoughts to Consider:

- Understanding the culture and context : how alert are we to prevailing cultural influences that might limit our ability to share the gospel, particularly among the young?
- When we welcome people from different cultures how well do we seek to understand theirs, and do we make enough effort to explain some of our own cultural differences?

- Trading patterns are now global : are there matters of justice that we might consider in dealing between China and the United Kingdom? Do we seek to understand the Chinese perspective?

Suscipe

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,
All I have and call my own.

You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.

Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me.

THE EXAMINATION OF OUR LIVES [THE EXAMEN]

Daily Examen :

Looking with quiet sincerity and simplicity of heart at the day



Preparation for Scriptural Reflection :

- Short acts of devotion : placing ourselves in the presence of God.
- Opening up conversation with God by expressing our sorrow for sin and our gratitude for our blessings
- Asking God to receive our lives, our hopes and prayers
- Reading the Passage of Scripture slowly saying the words silently
- We place ourselves into the scene of the Scripture : what we see, what we hear, what it feels like, what we smell, what we might taste.

Passage for Spiritual Reflection :

Luke 10:1-24

10 After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. ² And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. ³ Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. ⁴ Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. ⁵ Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' ⁶ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. ⁷ And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the labourer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. ⁸ Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. ⁹ Heal the sick in it

and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' ¹⁰ *But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say,* ¹¹ *'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.'*

Points for Consideration

- Mission requires willing missionaries- who volunteers?
- Mission involves 'going-out', making an effort to meet people
- Mission involves shedding extra baggage- do we have too many mental or spiritual burdens that inhibit us?
- Mission involves accepting people where they are, always taking them the healing love of God.
- **A Period of Silence** in which we pray with St Ignatius, talking conversationally to God as Father : seeking understanding and insight, ever searching, ever finding, always willing, and Loving.

"For those who love, nothing is too difficult, especially when it is done for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Ignatius Loyola

The Lord's Prayer

Jesus Mercy, Mary Pray



Praise God Always