

# The Society of Jesus and the missionary experience of Father Matteo Ricci in China between *reformatio ecclesiae* and inculturalisation of the Gospel\*

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## 1. *The Society of Jesus in the era of Catholic renewal and the Council of Trent*

In an indicative page of his *Vita e istituto di sant' Ignazio* (1650), talking about the founding of the Society of Jesus, Daniello Bartoli underlined how God himself, «in tempi sì calamitosi alla sua Chiesa», wanted to see the birth of a similar religious congregation not «per privato riposo, ma per fatiche di pubblico giovamento. La contrappose all'ignoranza degl'infedeli, alla malvagità degli eretici, a' vizi de' cattolici». Remarking on the specificity and universality of the real vocation of the institute, Bartoli stressed that, compared to all «gli altri istituti di perfezione» that had arisen during the same period, the

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Society «con particolar disegno e per istinto di Dio» had consecrated «in ogni ministero di pietà e di religione» itself and its work «al romano pontefice», ready «a qualunque fatica e pericolo a lui piaccia esporli, per ingrandimento della religione cattolica e per conversione e ammenda di qualunque terra d'infedeli ingannati o di peccatori», with the sole aim of bringing the faith «non solamente a' lontanissimi popoli e fino agli ultimi confini delle Indie, ma anco a' miserabili sovvertiti dagli eretici»<sup>1</sup>.

At a century from its founding the Jesuit writer reconstructed with great efficiency the different aspects and characteristics of the particular and unitary vocation of the Society of Jesus – that of a chosen and rigorously prepared, both culturally and theologically, religious body, the instrument of a renewed universal *missio* of the Church, ready to operate anywhere at the Pope's bidding, to promote «il progresso delle anime nella vita e nella dottrina cristiana» and «propagazione della fede»<sup>2</sup>.

Under this aspect, the exercise of preaching, catechizing and the missions to the people, the teaching and the many initiatives in educational and cultural fields, the same missionary commitment in the Protestant countries of Europe and among the populations of Asia and the American territories must be seen as different articulations of a sole apostolic and pastoral plan, whose basic characteristics and most qualifying aims would be defined and further specified, during the second half of the sixteenth century, in the light of accumulated experiences and through a vigorous effort to comply with the complex and changing settings in which the Jesuits found themselves<sup>3</sup>.

The same mission of educating and catechizing through colleges developed closely connected to the general strategy of widening the church's presence and its influence in society thus permitting it to control the transmission of knowledge and the formation of the ruling classes: a strategy, we must remember, that, originally pursued in a Europe torn by religious divisions and anti-Protestant polemics, would eventually be extended in the space of only a few years to the missions in the Spanish and Portuguese dominions of the West and East Indies<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *Della vita e istituto di Sant'Ignazio fondatore della Compagnia di Gesù, libri cinque del p. Daniello Bartoli della medesima Compagnia*, in Roma, appresso Domenico Manelfi, 1650, p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> See J.W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, Harvard, 1993; it. tr. *I primi gesuiti*, Milano, Vita & Pensiero, 1999, pp. 79-80.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 75-77. See also the *Storia della Compagnia di Gesù in Italia* narrated with aids from contemporary sources by father P. Tacchi Venturi D.M.C., in particular the vol. 2, II Part: *Dalla solenne approvazione dell'ordine alla morte del fondatore (1540-1556)*, Roma, Edizioni «La Civiltà Cattolica», 1951; of the same *Storia della Compagnia di Gesù in Italia*, see the third volume edited by M. Scaduto and entitled: *L'epoca di Giacomo Lainez (1556-1565)*, 2 voll., Roma, Edizioni «La Civiltà Cattolica», 1964-1974.

<sup>4</sup> See L. Lukács, *De origine collegiorum externorum deque controversiis circa eorum paupertatem obortis (1539-1608)*, «Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu», XXIX, 1960, pp. 189-245; *ibid.*, XXX, 1961, pp. 3-89. Regarding the development and diffusion of the colleges of the Society of Jesus in Europe and the colonies see also the rich documentation reproduced in MHSI, *Monumenta pedagogica Societatis Iesu (1557-1572)*, edited by L. Lukács, Roma, Institutum

In the experience lived at this stage by the Society of Jesus there is, without doubt, a 'fil rouge' that solidly links, not only from a chronological point of view, the constitution of that vast network of colleges for the nobles (*seminaria nobilium*) and the elaboration of the relative system of studies which would result, in 1599, in the promulgation of the *Ratio Studiorum*; the promotion of a new cultural synthesis of universal design, which, uniting science and compassion should be «come modello per le élites dell'Europa cattolicamente riformata e del Nuovo Mondo conquistato alla fede cristiana»<sup>5</sup>; and, last but not least, the gradual approach of a missionary ideal and an evangelizing method for the pagan populations radically different from those that had fed the «conquista spirituale» of Spanish America<sup>6</sup>.

In the course of the demanding and long elaboration of the *Ratio studiorum* for the Society's colleges<sup>7</sup>, as is known, the opening towards the new humanistic and Renaissance culture marked the going beyond the traditional conception of the relationship between holy science and *studia humanitatis*, inherited from the Middle Ages, with the return to and the utilization in the study *curriculum* and educational trends, of languages and the literary and scientific patrimony of Greek and Latin classicism<sup>8</sup>.

The integration of moral teaching and the cultural models of classic pagan tradition with the scholastic theological trends and the principles of Christianity essentially reflected a need, new but deeply felt, right from the start, among the members of the Society of Jesus: that of «rendere la speculazione scolastica significativa sul piano pastorale», translating its teachings into a «retorica umanistica» capable of rendering comprehensible and effective for the new society and its new ruling classes the traditional contents of the Catholic faith and its theology<sup>9</sup>.

In short, the cultural mediation operated by the Jesuits proposed to adapt the Christian message and language of religious communication to the different

Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1974.

<sup>5</sup> A. Biondi, *La Bibliotheca Selecta di Antonio Possevino. Un progetto di egemonia culturale*, in G.P. Brizzi (ed.), *La «Ratio Studiorum». Modelli culturali e pratiche educative dei Gesuiti in Italia tra Cinque e Seicento*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1981, p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> See Y. El Alaoui, *Jésuites, Morisques et Indiens. Études comparative des méthodes d'évangélisation de la Compagnie de Jésus d'après les traités de José de Acosta (1588) et d'Ignacio de Las Casas (1605-1607)*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2006, pp. 75-181. But see also F. Zubillaga, *Métodos misionales de la primera instrucción de San Francisco de Borja para la América Española (1567)*, «Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu», XII, 1943, I-II, pp. 58-88; and Id., *El procurador de las Indias occidentales de la Compañía de Jesús (1574)*, *ibid.*, XXII, 1953, pp. 367-417.

<sup>7</sup> See A.P. Farrel, *The Jesuit Code of Liberal Education. Development and Scope of the «Ratio»*, Milwaukee, The Marquette University Press, 1938, pp. 47-70; and R. Sani, «Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam». *Istituti religiosi, educazione e scuola nell'Italia moderna e contemporanea*, Macerata, eum, 2009, pp. 23-61.

<sup>8</sup> See F. de Dainville, *La naissance de l'humanisme moderne*, Geneve, Slatkin, 1969; Id., *L'éducation des jésuites (XVIe-XVIIIe siècles)*, Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1978.

<sup>9</sup> See O'Malley, *I primi gesuiti*, cit., pp. 279-282.

needs of the times and places and to the various requirements of different interlocutors: it is not by chance that, elaborated to determine the *curriculum studiorum* destined for colleges of secondary education, this new religious rhetoric of humanistic stamp was to be extended and used in all the other duties exercised by the Society of Jesus, particularly in preaching and the missionary work<sup>10</sup>.

Implicit, in the adoption of the *forma mentis* rhetoric, was certainly the idea of a fan adaptation of the Christian message that took into account the different circumstances in which the Jesuits would be operating<sup>11</sup>.

The return to and the revalued utilization – with the idea of promoting a new and more incisive religious rhetoric suitable for the times – of the classical tradition and the humanistic cultural ideas were inserted into that particular spiritual direction which, right from its start, had characterized the Institute. We refer to that *Christian humanism* so dear to Ignacio de Loyola and to the long tradition of the spiritual writers of the Society of Jesus<sup>12</sup>; a spiritual direction that has nothing to do with the proud and self-sufficient anthropocentric perspective matured since the humanistic and Renaissance age, but which is characterized by the equilibrium between the relationship between man and God, Reason and Revelation, and which reaches in spirituality the principle of Thomas Aquinas' theology according to which grace does not suppress human nature but, on the contrary, perfects it<sup>13</sup>.

The basic idea is clear: human nature is fundamentally oriented towards God, even if it is wounded by original sin, and grace operates on this disposition of human nature. In this way, we have continuity of the natural and the supernatural, prospecting, in opposition to Protestant pessimism, an ideal of perfection based on the encounter with and the confident acceptance of God's design for every man<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> See M. Fumaroli, *L'Âge de l'Éloquence. Rhétorique et «res literaria» de la Renaissance au seuil de l'époque classique*, Geneva, Librairie Droz, 1980; it. tr. *L'età dell'eloquenza. Retorica e «res literaria» dal Rinascimento alle soglie dell'epoca classica*, Milano, Adelphi, 2002, pp. 259-491; G.M. Anselmi, *Per un'archeologia della Ratio: dalla «pedagogia» al «governo»*, in Brizzi (ed.), *La «Ratio Studiorum». Modelli culturali e pratiche educative dei Gesuiti in Italia tra Cinque e Seicento*, cit., pp. 26-30.

<sup>11</sup> See MHSI, *Monumenta Ignatiana, Sancti Ignatii de Loyola, Constitutiones Societatis Jesu*, edited by A. Codina, 3 voll., Romae, Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1934-1938, vol. I, p. 414.

<sup>12</sup> See J. De Guibert, *La spiritualité de la Compagne de Jésus*, Romae, Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1953; it. tr. *La spiritualità della Compagnia di Gesù. Saggio storico*, Roma, Città Nuova Editrice, 1992.

<sup>13</sup> See J.W. O'Malley, *The Feast of Thomas Aquinas in Renaissance Rome, A Neglected Document and Its Import*, «Rivista di Storia della Chiesa in Italia», XXXV, 1981, pp. 1-27.

<sup>14</sup> See regarding important research on the trends in Catholic spirituality in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by M. Marcocchi, *Spiritualità e vita religiosa tra Cinquecento e Novecento*, Brescia, Morcelliana, 2005.

This conception of the relationship between divine intervention and man's free will was destined to characterize the various forms and expressions of the apostolic and pastoral activities of the Society, making possible a significant opening towards reality, in as much created by God and redeemed by Christ, and a particular revaluation of the human experience, that is, man who operates under the influence of grace<sup>15</sup>. Hence a specific attitude to operate in the world in the service of the faith, aware that grace allows one to co-operate «cosicché in qualche modo misterioso la responsabilità dell'uomo giocava un ruolo nel processo della salvezza»<sup>16</sup>.

And this awareness of the responsibility of actively co-operating in God's design would sustain the work and testimony of the faith, often in those particularly difficult fields like those of the missions of the disciples of Ignacio of Loyola.

But the complex and long elaboration of the *Ratio studiorum* would reveal itself as particularly significant also for other aspects. In the *Constitutiones* drawn up in the second half of the 60's for the Collegio Germanico of the Society of Jesus<sup>17</sup>, for example, the indications offered for the most suitable and efficacious way to educate and instruct the young boarders create the way for a more general reflection on the exercise of government on men and on the reality destined to permeate the work of the Society well beyond the educational aspect of their formation. «Per ordine del P. Preposito della Compagnia – we read in the introduction to the *Constitutiones* – si sono fatte le presenti costituzioni; le quali sono fondate nell'esperienza; [...] ogni cosa è fondata, oltre nell'esperienza, in vivacissime ragioni. [...] Et questo si può permettere, quando si pensasse di perfettionare et di facilitare più il governo; et ancora perché, secondo la mutatione delli tempi et degl'huomini, così conviene mutare il modo di governarli, tanto più quando l'esperienza et il giuditio d'uomini di governo mostrino che questo si deve fare»<sup>18</sup>.

The need to conform judgement parameters with the «mutazione delli tempi et degl'huomini», elaborating forms of government inspired by experience and capable of guaranteeing control of reality did not only meet the requirements

<sup>15</sup> See MHSI, *Monumenta Ignatiana. Sancti Ignatii de Loyola Constitutiones Societatis Jesu*, cit., I, pp. 147-162. But see also MHSI, *P. Hieronimo Nadal, Orationis observationes*, edited by M. Nicolau, Romae, Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1964, pp. 729-730 e *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> O'Malley, *I primi gesuiti*, cit., pp. 274-275.

<sup>17</sup> *Constitutiones seu monita ad eorum usum qui Collegio Germanico praesunt*, in MHSI, *Monumenta pedagogica Societatis Iesu (1557-1572)*, cit., pp. 865-926. For the genesis of the *Constitutiones* and, more in general, the origins and first developments of the Collegio Germanico see F. Schroeder, *Monumenta quae spectant primordia Collegii Germanici et Hungarici*, Romae, ex Typ. Pace, 1896. This important document has been studied by Anselmi, *Per un'archeologia della Ratio: dalla «pedagogia» al «governo»*, cit., pp. 26-32, his stimulating reflections have been amply used in this paper.

<sup>18</sup> *Constitutiones seu monita ad eorum usum qui Collegio Germanico praesunt*, cit., pp. 866-867.



for an ordered and functional running of the colleges – the Collegio Germanico for example –, but, as Gian-Mario Anselmi so rightly stressed, also embrace by the greater necessity of defining «un modello che poteva assumere una valenza sociale e politica complessiva di ‘controllo’ e di ‘governo’», taking into account a debate that was strongly felt in the second half of the sixteenth century within the Society, «sul fatto se fosse o no opportuno dislocarsi, come propria funzione, oltre che sul piano educativo e su quello della predicazione, anche su quello della penetrazione negli apparati e nei circoli che, nei vari Stati, presiedevano alla formazione delle decisioni politiche di rilievo»<sup>19</sup>.

The question of the formation and spiritual animation of the ruling classes now became part of the general theme of the construction of a paradigmatic model of government as such and the rules inherent in it. It is no coincidence that the *Constitutiones* of the Collegio Germanico, in its preface, stressed the need to formulate a “science” of behaviour, which, based on experience and on attentive observation of human nature, would make possible a perfect knowledge of the “governed” and all those with whom they came into contact. With this knowledge the Christian message could be adapted to suit different natures and sensibilities: «È molto necessario et importante – we find in the *Constitutiones* – [...] di conoscer e trattar ciascheduno conforme alla sua natura e [si avrà] particolare talento in conoscere et indirizzar ciaschuno secondo la sua natura, procurando secondo l’Apostolo farsi omnia omnibus, cioè con il terribil esser terribile, con l’humani humano, et simili; et ha d’usar in questo particolar diligentia et studio, procurando di farsi ogni giorno con l’esperientia più pratico et accorto in questo negotio»<sup>20</sup>.

We must remember that at the same time the Society was elaborating the *Ratio studiorum*, another more complex and ambitious project was taking shape: that of defining a new cultural synthesis that, in harmony with the ideas of renewal of the Council of Trent, could be proposed as a model not only in the Catholically reformed Europe but also in the recently discovered territories.

The world, as Ignacio of Loyola and his disciples so often repeated, was greatly changed: the expansion of geographic boundaries had revealed the existence, not only of other populations awaiting the Christian message, but also cultures and traditions different from European ones – often extremely complex – which had to be known and integrated into an authentic universal synthesis of knowledge capable of substituting that which had fed and characterized the Middle Ages<sup>21</sup>.

In 1588, in his treatise *De Natura Novi Orbis*<sup>22</sup>, so rightly highlighted by Adriano Prosperi, the Jesuit José de Acosta «aveva proposto una tripartizione di

<sup>19</sup> Anselmi, *Per un’archeologia della Ratio: dalla «pedagogia» al «governo»*, cit., pp. 29-30.

<sup>20</sup> *Constitutiones seu monita ad eorum usum qui Collegio Germanico praesunt*, cit., p. 883.

<sup>21</sup> See O’Malley, *I primi gesuiti*, cit., pp. 79-83 and *passim*.

<sup>22</sup> *De Natura Noui Orbis libri duo, et De promulgatione Euangelii, apud barbaros, siue De procuranda Indorum salute libri sex. Autore Iosepho Acosta presbytero societatis Iesu,*

quelle che noi chiameremmo ‘civiltà’: [...] in primo luogo, quelle più “umane e politiche” della Cina e del Giappone caratterizzate da “costante Republica”, cioè uno Stato ben costituito, magistrature, commerci, accademie e esercizio delle lettere; in secondo luogo, quelle popolazioni barbare del Nuovo Mondo americano che avevano una organizzazione statale ma erano prive dello studio delle lettere; al terzo posto [...] infine i popoli selvaggi, senza legge, con costumi ferini»<sup>23</sup>.

This classification of the levels of civilization and different cultures fully reflected the orientations that animated the Society of Jesus and which were implicit in its ambitious cultural project as can be seen from the re-proposition of José de Acosta’s outline in a work destined from many aspects to represent the apex and most complete expression of such a project. We refer to the famous *Bibliotheca selecta* of the Jesuit Antonio Possevino, edited for the first time in Rome in 1593<sup>24</sup> and repeatedly reprinted in the decades to follow<sup>25</sup>.

Salmanticae, apud Guillelmum Foquel, 1588. Compiled almost certainly in Lima in 1581, *De Natura Novi Orbis* was published only in 1588 together another treatise by Acosta, *De Procuranda Indorum Salute*, written in Lima between 1576 and 1577. In 1590 José de Acosta published his most famous work, la *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* (Sevilla, Juan de León, 1590), the first and second parts of which were constituted by the Castilian translation of the latin *De Natura Novi Orbis*. See also the recent edition of the work edited by E. O’Gorman, *Historia natural y moral de las Indias. En que se tratan de las cosas notables del cielo, elementos, metales, plantas y animales dellas y los ritos y ceremonias, leyes y gobierno de los indios. Compuesto por el P. Joseph de Acosta, religioso de la Compañia de Jesús*, edición preparada por E. O’Gorman con un prólogo, tres apéndices y un índice de materias, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006, p. 97. For bibliography and works by the famous Spanish Jesuit see also: L. Lopetegui, *El padre José de Acosta S.I. y las misiones*, Madrid, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1942; J.L. Huys, *José de Acosta y el origen de la idea de mision. Perú, siglo XVI*, Cuzco, Centro de Estudios Regionales Andinos Bartolome de Las Casas, 1997; and, in particular El Alaoui, *Jésuites, Morisques et Indiens. Études comparative des méthodes d’évangélisation de la Compagnie de Jésus d’après les traités de José de Acosta (1588) et d’Ignacio de Las Casas (1605-1607)*, cit.

<sup>23</sup> A. Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza. Inquisitori, confessori, missionari*, Torino, Einaudi, 1996, pp. 593 and 613-614. It is worth noting that the classification of the levels of civilisation and cultures, already formulated in the treatise *De Natura Novi Orbis*, was reposed with further arguments and notes by José de Acosta even in Book VI of *Historia natural y moral de las Indias*, cit., pp. 317-331.

<sup>24</sup> *Antonii Posseuini Societatis Iesu Bibliotheca selecta qua agitur de ratione studiorum in historia, in disciplinis, in salute omnium procurando*, 2 voll., Roma, ex typographia Apostolica Vaticana, 1593, vol. I, pp. 587 sgg. It is worth noting that, in the same ‘Libro’ or chapter dedicated to the missionari experience in the West and East Indies («De ratione agendi cum reliquis Gentibus atque Indis Novi Orbis, Japonis, Sinesibus, Brasiliis, Peruensibus et Insularum Philippinarum»), Possevino refers to the work of another Jesuit missionari father Alessandro Valignano, to whom we will return later: «Addendus huc fuit utilissimus liber, quem non tam scribendo, quam operando, viginti totos annos edidit Alexander Valignanus, qui pro Societate nostra in universa Orientis India fuit tum Visitator, tum Provincialis, hodieque adeo eam partem administrat».

<sup>25</sup> Antonio Possevino’s *Bibliotheca selecta* in the space of a few years had three editions: Romae in Vaticano, excudebat Dominicus Basa typographus pontificius, 1593; Venetiis, apud Altobellum Salicatum, 1603; Coloniae Agrippinae, apud Ioannem Gymnicum sub Monocerote, 1607. For Possevino’s role in the frame work of the elaboration of the formative anmd study programmes for the Jesuit colleges see R. Sani (ed.), *Educazione e istituzioni scolastiche nell’Italia*

Possevino's work, which constituted substantially an organic and profound reasoned bibliography of knowledge, was articulated in two volumes: the first destined to gather and note the principal works of the Catholic theology and religious culture, the second to present, in an articulated partition, the authors and fundamental texts of the Humanities and Sciences<sup>26</sup>.

Particularly significant, for one study, were chapters or 'books' VI-XI of the *Bibliotheca selecta*, that is to say those that Possevino dedicated to the knowledge necessary to the formation of those destined to face different cultures and civilizations as missionaries: chapter VI illustrates «the most productive techniques for approaching Byzantine Christianity (the Orthodox 'claims'), "Graeci, Mosci, Ruteni"»; the following two chapters were centred on the «red-hot dispute, describing in chapter VII the 'ratio agendi' with the heretics of various sects, unifying in chapter VIII, under the title of atheism ("De Atheismis"), the positions of Luther, Melantone, Beza, Calvin, Anabattisti, – in other words the hydra of the new enemies of the faith»<sup>27</sup>. Lastly, chapter IX focused on missionary work with Jews and Moslems, while the next two, X and XI were dedicated to the peoples and cultures in the most recent and engaging field of evangelization: «Indis Novi Orbis, Japonis, Sinensibus, Brasiliis, Peruensibus Americae et Insularum Philippinarum»<sup>28</sup>.

In short, the *Bibliotheca selecta* aimed at amalgamating into a single project the educational characteristics of the complex controversies and polemics concerning Protestant theology and missionary work outside of Europe. We can undoubtedly speak, in this respect, of a work aimed at affirming and re-launching a unitary vision, characterized in a universal sense, of Catholic culture; or, more precisely, of a conception of Catholicism as the unifying factor of all knowledge and cultures. The "new order" of knowledge and cultures proposed by Antonio Possevino, in fact, if, on one hand, reflected «the same will as a guide of the formative processes (between hegemony and control) represented at a pedagogical level by the *Ratio studiorum*»<sup>29</sup>, on the other, with equal intensity and ethical tension, it aimed at defining the canons and characteristics of a Catholicism that found in missionary zeal and universal propagation of the faith its most authentic and characterizing dimension.

It is not by chance, that in the years that the pedagogical programme of the colleges (1599), as well as the *Bibliotheca selecta* (1593), were being formulated,

*moderna (secoli XV-XIX)*, Milano, ISU–Università Cattolica, 1999, pp. 109-122.

<sup>26</sup> See A. Biondi, *La Bibliotheca Selecta di Antonio Possevino. Un progetto di egemonia culturale*, in Brizzi (ed.), *La «Ratio Studiorum». Modelli culturali e pratiche educative dei Gesuiti in Italia tra Cinque e Seicento*, cit., pp. 43-75. See also R. De Maio, *Riforma e miti nella Chiesa del Cinquecento*, Napoli, Guida, 1973, pp. 365-381.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>28</sup> *Antonii Posseuini Societatis Iesu Bibliotheca selecta qua agitur de ratione studiorum in historia, in disciplinis, in salute omnium procurando*, I, cit., pp. 587-663.

<sup>29</sup> Biondi, *La Bibliotheca Selecta di Antonio Possevino. Un progetto di egemonia culturale*, cit., p. 75.



in the core of the institute founded by Ignacio of Loyola, we have that “turning point” in the missionary field which, in the experience of Father Matteo Ricci and the «advent of the Society of Jesus and Christianity in China» would reach its highest and most significant expression.

2. «*Unum ovile et unus pastor*». *The missionary experience of the Society of Jesus between universalistic applications and cultural renewal*

In a letter dated 12th December 1558, addressed to the missionaries of the Society of Jesus a few months after he was elected superior general, Giacomo Laínez traced the ideal profile of the Jesuit missionary according to the *Costituzioni* of Loyola and, at the same time, stressed the need to centralize the Society's work of evangelization among the pagan natives<sup>30</sup>.

The document confirmed what had already been debated by the Society<sup>31</sup>, in whose opinion the particular dangers and extraordinary difficulties that characterized evangelization among the pagan populations demanded the creation of a select body of missionaries, rigorously prepared, not only spiritually and religiously but also culturally, to face the task that awaited them.

It is also true that in the same period of Laínez's election to superior general, in a memorial probably written by father Polanco, the most important points of the new missionary strategy had been defined<sup>32</sup>. The memorial, while appreciating on one hand the experience acquired by the Society in the missionary field, on the other, related it to the more general strategy of the post Council of Trent church, of which the Jesuits intended to become «useful and docile instruments». In fact, the document opened with the presentation of «a universal programme of conquest, that contemplated, above all, the conversion of the pagans in India and the other overseas territories; then the recuperation of the heretics and schismatics of the north (Protestants) and the south (Copts); lastly the promotion of the Christian life in Catholic countries»<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> The letter is reproduced in MHSI, *Monumenta Lainii, Epistolae et acta Patris Jacobi Lainii*, 8 voll., Matriti, Typis G.Lopez del Horno, 1912-1917, vol. IV (1558-1560), pp. 15-19; e in MHSI, *Documenta Indica (1557-1560)*, edited by I. Wicki, Romae, Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1956, pp. 109-113.

<sup>31</sup> An echo of this internal debate of the Society of Jesus on the organisation of missionary work can be found in the letters of Jeronimo Nadal in the second half of the 50's. See MHSI, *Epistolae P. Hieronymi Nadal Societatis Jesu ab anno 1546 ad 1577*, 4 voll., Matriti, Typis Augustini Avrial, 1898-1905, vol. IV, pp. 303-345.

<sup>32</sup> The memoriale was edited for the first time in father de Leturia's work, *Un significativo documento de 1558 sobre las misiones de infieles de la Compañia de Jesús*, «Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu», VIII, 1939, II, pp. 102-117. See MHSI, *Documenta Indica (1557-1560)*, edited by Wicki, cit., pp. 72-80.

<sup>33</sup> Scaduto, *Storia della Compagnia di Gesù in Italia. L'epoca di Giacomo Lainez (1556-*

Having stressed the need to rigorously select for the missions elements that were «inwardly called» and well prepared from a cultural point of view, Polanco's memorial went on to stress how, not only was it important that missionary candidates be able to speak the language of where they were operating but also that the Society make an effort to determine the evangelizing methods most appropriate for the characteristics and peculiarities of the different centuries, adapting them to the various forms, and sometimes very different, missionary contexts<sup>34</sup>.

The emphasis placed by the 1558 memorial on the necessity of adapting missionary strategies to different situations drew its principal explanation from the controversial results that had characterized the missionary experience of Francis Xavier in India and other areas of the Far East.

Animated by fervent activism, Xavier had landed in Goa as early as 1542<sup>35</sup> and had crossed, as is known, in towns and country, preaching and converting. Later, the man who had soon become known as «the apostle of the Indies», had travelled «tutte le terre allora appena scoperte, dalle Indie alle Molucche e al Giappone»<sup>36</sup>, until, after many trials and tribulations, just as he was preparing to enter China, he died 3rd December 1552 on the island of Sancian, only a few miles from his last intended destination for a new missionary enterprise<sup>37</sup>.

It goes without saying that the echo of Francis Xavier's fervent and passionate activity had enthralled Catholic Europe, feeding a new and modern deal of Christian heroism and transforming into legend the experiences of the missionaries in the East Indies<sup>38</sup>, but, it is also true, from a practical point of view that his work had produced no lasting results<sup>39</sup>.

1565), cit., vol. I, pp. 241-245.

<sup>34</sup> MHSI, *Documenta Indica (1557-1560)*, cit., pp. 78-80.

<sup>35</sup> There is an enormous bibliography on Francis Xavier's epic missionary deeds in the East Indies. See the imposing documentation in G. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier. His life, his times. I: Europe (1506-1541); II: India (1541-1545); III: Indonesia and India (1545-1549); IV: Japan, India and China (1549-1552)*, Romae, Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1973-1982, 4 voll. For the more general context in which the penetration of Christianity took place in the Indian subcontinent see S. Neill, *A History of Christianity in India. The Beginnings to A.D. 1707*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984.

<sup>36</sup> G. Di Fiore, *Strategie di evangelizzazione nell'Oriente asiatico tra Cinquecento e Settecento*, in G. Martina, U. Dovere (eds.), *Il cammino dell'evangelizzazione. Problemi storiografici*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2001, pp. 101-102.

<sup>37</sup> On Francis Xavier's planned entry in China and the reasons for its failure see the letters and documents reproduced in MHSI, *Monumenta Xaveriana ex autographis vel ex antiquioribus exemplis collecta*, Matriti, Typis Augustini Avrial, 1912, vol. II, pp. 660-679.

<sup>38</sup> See P. de Leturia, *El puesto de Javier en la fundación de las misiones del Extremo Oriente*, «Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu», XXII, 1953, pp. 510-522. But see also M.C. Osswald, *The Iconography and Cult of Francis Xavier, 1552-1640*, *ibid.*, LXXI, 2002, pp. 259-278; e F. Garcia Gutiérrez, *Iconografía de San Francisco Javier en Oriente*, *ibid.*, LXXI, 2002, pp. 279-302.

<sup>39</sup> G. Di Fiore, *Strategie di evangelizzazione nell'Oriente asiatico tra Cinquecento e Settecento*, cit., p. 102.

The modest results obtained by his preaching in Japan<sup>40</sup> had, in fact, raised quite a few perplexities regarding the suitability and efficacy of his methods. Even Daniello Bartoli, who was certainly not lukewarm towards the «Apostle of the Indies» and had dedicated many enthusiastic pages to Xavier's work in his *Historia della Compagnia di Giesu* had to admit that, in Japan, his missionary brother had not been able to «pescare con la rete, conducendo al battesimo i Giapponesi a popoli interi, ma stentatamente con l'hamo, gittato assai delle volte indarno, e trahendo ad uno ad uno i presi, e v'ebbe luogo, onde altro non riportò che schiamazzi dal popolo, e oltraggiose beffe da' Bonzi»<sup>41</sup>.

Francis Xavier's missionary epos in the East Indies was destined to produce, within the Society of Jesus, a double effect. If on one hand, as has already been noted, his uncertain results would have led to a revisitation of missionary methods towards complex populations and cultures, on the other, the enormous echo in Europe caused by the enterprises of the «Apostle of the Indies», the narration of which was entrusted to letters and reports sent to Rome, would soon reveal itself as an extraordinary instrument of propaganda for the missionary ideal and of the spiritual edification and renewal not only for the Society of Jesus but also for the Catholic populations of the old continent<sup>42</sup>.

The narration of the «incomparable and miraculous fruits» produced by the missionary preaching and the «terrible sufferings and martyrdoms» that

<sup>40</sup> See J.F. Schütte, *Introductio ad historiam Societatis Jesu in Japonia, 1549-1650*, Roma, Institutum Historicum Societatis Jesu, 1968; e N.S. Fujita, *Japan's Encounter with Christianity. The Catholic Mission in Pre-Modern Japan*, New York, The Paulist Press, 1991.

<sup>41</sup> *Dell'istoria della Compagnia di Giesu, il Giappone seconda parte dell'Asia descritta dal P. Daniello Bartoli della medesima Compagnia*, In Roma, nella stamperia d'Ignatio de' Lazzeri, 1660, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> With reference to published texts on the subject we can signal: *Avisi particolari delle Indie di Portogallo. Novamente havuti questo anno del 1555, da li R. padri della Compagnia di Iesu, dove si ha informatione delle gran cose che si fanno per aumento de la Santa Fede. Con la descriptione e costumi delle genti del Regno de la China et altri paesi incogniti novamente trovati*, Roma, apud Antonium Bladum Impressorem Cameralem, 1556; *Nuovi Avisi delle Indie di Portogallo, venuti nuovamente dalli R. padri della Compagnia di Giesu et tradotti dalla lingua spagnuola nella Italiana*, Parte quarta, Venezia, per Michele Tramezzino, M.D.LXV; *Lettere del Giappone degli anni 74, 75, e 76 scritte dalli Reverendi Padri della Comp. di Giesu, et di Portoghese tradotte nel volgare italiano*, Roma, Zanetti, 1578; *Lettere dell'India Orientale, scritte da' Reverendi padri della Compagnia di Giesu. Nelle quali si scopre la grande arte usata da gli istessi, per liberar l'anime de gli infideli. Nuovamente stampate, e ampliate in molti luoghi, e ricorrette con diligenza*, In Vinegia, appresso Antonio Ferrari, 1580; *Avvisi del Giappone de gli anni M.D.LXXXII-M.D.LXXXIII et LXXXIV. Con alcuni altri della Cina cavati dalle lettere della Compagnia di Giesu, ricevute il mese di Dicembre M.D.LXXXV*, In Roma, per Francesco Zanetti, M.D.LXXXVI; *Nuovi Avisi del Giappone con alcuni altri della Cina del LXXXIII e LXXXIV cavati dalle lettere della Compagnia di Giesu, Ricevute il mese di dicembre prossimo passato M.D.LXXXV*, In Venezia, appresso i Gioliti, MDLXXXVI; *Ragguaglio d'alcuni avisi notabili dell'Indie Orientali e Occidentali. Con l'arrivo delli signori ambasciatori Giaponesi alli loro stati. Cavato da alcune lettere scritte gli anni 1590 e 1591 da i PP. Pietro Martinez provinciale dell'India Orientale, Giovanni d'Atienza provinciale del Peru, Pietro Diaz provinciale del Messico... e raccolto dal padre Gasparo Spitilli*, In Roma e in Bologna, per Vittorio Benacci, 1593.

accompanied the transmission of Christianity in the Indies contributed to strengthen in Catholic consciences the idea of the universal mission of the papacy and the Reformed Church in a Europe that, in the second half of the sixteenth century appear to be lacerated by the spiritual and theological fractures of the Protestant reform and torn by religious wars: «Beato il secol nostro – wrote Daniello Bartoli remembering the last moment of life of Francis Xavier on the threshold of China –, a cui è toccato in sorte il vedere, a grande stento sì ma pur finalmente, non entrar solo ma ben largo diffondersi, come tuttavia va facendo, il conocimiento del vero Dio in una sì qualificata nazione; e più del nostro beato qualunque altro degli avvenire sarà il primo che vegga non rimanere un palmo di terra non soggetto alla monarchia della Chiesa, dov'ella da cento anni addietro non ne possedeva un palmo»<sup>43</sup>.

With its ability to feed the popular taste for the exotic and the adventurous, through the introduction of a modern and enthralling story-line of the new martyrs and new apostles «per la fede esposti alle fiere tempeste di persecuzioni»<sup>44</sup>, the missionary propaganda on this front, started by the Society of Jesus, was destined, in this way, to interest an enormous public<sup>45</sup>.

The fascination for the missions aroused by the letters and reports sent to Europe by significant effects within the Society itself where some scholars went as far as to compare the «letters coming from missionary lands» to «incendiary torches for the [disciples of Ignacio of Loyola] remaining in Europe»<sup>46</sup>. The passionate interest aroused in the houses, colleges and novitiates of the Institute by the reading of letters and reports sent by Francis Xavier and other missionaries in the Indies is well known<sup>47</sup>.

After some decades, Daniello Bartoli could easily underline how far the missionary ideal had penetrated the disciples of Ignacio of Loyola so as to be found in every apostolic and pastoral activity<sup>48</sup>. It is not by chance that in 1583, the new superior general Claudio Acquaviva, when recommending all

<sup>43</sup> *Dell'istoria della Compagnia di Giesu, la Cina terza parte dell'Asia descritta dal P. Daniello Bartoli della medesima Compagnia*, In Roma, nella stamperia d'Ignatio de' Lazzeri, 1663, p. 27.

<sup>44</sup> Besides the works already mentioned of M.C. Osswald and of F. Garcia Gutiérrez, see also K. Noreen, «*Ecclesiae militantis triumphus*»: *Jesuit iconography and the Counter-Reformation*, «*Sixteenth Century Journal*», 29, 1998, pp. 689-715. On a general level, see J. Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1985; e da M. Gotor, *I beati del papa. Santità, inquisizione e obbedienza in età moderna*, Firenze, Olschki, 2002.

<sup>45</sup> See A. Prosperi, *Il missionario*, in R. Villari (ed.), *L'uomo barocco*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1991, pp. 182-186.

<sup>46</sup> Scaduto, *Storia della Compagnia di Gesù in Italia. L'epoca di Giacomo Lainez (1556-1565)*, cit., vol. I, p. 376.

<sup>47</sup> J. De Guibert, *La spiritualité de la Compagne de Jésus*, Romae, Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1953; it. tr. *La spiritualità della Compagnia di Gesù. Saggio storico*, Roma, Città Nuova Editrice, p. 221.

<sup>48</sup> *Dell'istoria della Compagnia di Giesu, l'Italia prima parte dell'Europa descritta dal P. Daniello Bartoli della medesima Compagnia*, in Roma, nella stamperia d'Ignatio de' Lazzeri, 1673, p. 126.



the members of the Society to aim at the interior aspiration of the *renovatio spiritus*, in order to avoid worldly temptations, proposed as a model and reference the «ardent zeal» to preserve the interior spirit of the many brothers who had met martyrdom in the missionary territories<sup>49</sup>.

The circulation of the letters and reports coming from the Jesuit missions in the West and East Indies caused, among other things, an authentic desire of emulation among the young men of the European aristocracy studying with the Jesuits especially those who were preparing to enter the Society. The activities of the Society of Jesus conserve hundreds of letters addressed to the father general of the novitiates “begging” him to send there to the missions in the Indies: a genuine army of priests animated, in some cases by a real desire for martyrdom and, more generally, by the awareness that the missionary vocation represented the peak of divine service<sup>50</sup>.

The enthusiasm for the missions on the part of the young members of the Society grew so much that in the 50's father Polanco wrote to the Provincial of India: «Se si potesse dar briglia sciolta a quanti [...] desiderano servir Dio nostro Signore in cotesta vigna, ritenendo singular privilegio consacrarvi l'attività e la vita, sappia che sono così numerosi, che V.R. non si lagnerebbe di scarsezza d'operai»<sup>51</sup>.

That this phenomenon was not just the fruit of a passing information, is clearly evident in Daniello Bartoli's touching reflection when, after some decades, he declared: «Imperciocché, se dello spargimento del sangue parliamo, nel corso a pena d'un secolo, de' figliuoli della Compagnia, uccisi chi seminando la fede fra' gentili e chi difendendola fra gli eretici, si contano al giorno d'oggi assai più di trecento. [...] Con tutto ciò sono sì efficaci e copiose quelle prime influenze per muovere a dare in testimonio della fede la vita, con che pare che la Compagnia nascesse, che, se si mandassero alle Indie quanti ne han desiderio, scemerebbe si può dire per metà la Compagnia in Europa»<sup>52</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> See *Lettera del nostro padre generale Claudio Acquaviva. Sopra la rinouatione dello spirito a padri e fratelli della Compagnia*, Roma, in aedibus Societatis Iesu, 1583. With regard to the spiritual approach of father Claudio Acquaviva see J. De Guibert, *Le Généralat de Claude Acquaviva (1581-1615). Sa place dans l'histoire de la spiritualité de la Compagnie de Jésus*, «Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu», X, 1941, I, pp. 93-152.

<sup>50</sup> In *Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI), Litterae Indipetae*, can be found the vast and extraordinary collection of letters, almost 15.000, sent to the father General by more than 5.000 young religious of the Society of Jesus between the second half of the sixteenth century and the final phase of the Ignatian order (1773), asking to be sent to the missions. A considerable part of these petitions regards the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the desire to be sent to the East Indies. Numerous other like letters in the normal correspondence conserved in the same archives.

<sup>51</sup> See Juan Alonso Polanco in MHSI, *Documenta Indica (1557-1560)*, edited by I. Wicki, Roma, Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1956, pp. 856-857.

<sup>52</sup> *Della vita e istituto di Sant'Ignatio fondatore della Compagnia di Gesu, libri cinque del p. Daniello Bartoli della medesima Compagnia*, cit., p. 91.



It is worthwhile stressing that, while the old world was in the thrall of a missionary propaganda destined to inflame and inspire young men to initiate the glorious exploits of Francis Xavier and his brothers, in the missionary territories the confrontation between populations and cultures so profoundly different from Western ones and sometimes successfully disposed to welcoming the Christian message, was destined to provoke a profound reflection in the missionaries of the Society of Jesus.

The warm, initial welcome received by Francis Xavier in those lands had, as is known, made him very optimistic regarding the prospects of a Christian penetration in those places, the mass of correspondence from him and other missionaries sent to the Society in Europe exudes, not only enthusiasm for the positive relations established with the local authorities and their permission to evangelize, but also an extremely positive opinion about the character and customs of the populations, whose sense of humour and high degree of culture seemed to constitute fertile ground on which to found the work of evangelization<sup>53</sup>. Among other things, wrote Xavier, «gran parte della gente sa leggere e scrivere, il che è gran mezzo per brevemente imparare l'orationi et cose d'Iddio», and would help evangelization and the spread of the faith<sup>54</sup>.

But, as things turned out, even in China later, «the benevolence shown by the local authorities towards the missionaries was not dictated by altruism or a sudden conversion» to the new religion imported from the West, but was largely based on the «intellectual curiosity of a civilization as evolved as the European one», and, above all, on the «exotic presents that the Western men used to conquer the souls of their interlocutors»<sup>55</sup>. These rather superficial impressions on the part of the missionaries when first entering Japan were soon contradicted by facts. The gradual impact with a society with a far more complex and advanced culture, gradually made the missionaries more cautious towards what was called the inheritance of the «Apostle of the Indies»<sup>56</sup>.

It is worth noting, among other things, that in his preaching and in the personal relationship established in the course of his mission in Japan, Francis

<sup>53</sup> See MHSI, *Epistolae S. Francisci Xaverii aliaque eius scripta (1535-1552)*, edited by G. Schurhammer and I. Wicki, 2 voll., Roma, Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1944-1945. But see also the contemporary letters and reports from East Indies by other Jesuit fathers in MHSI, *Documenta Historica Japoniae (1547-1557)*, edited by J. Ruiz de Medina, Roma, Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1990.

<sup>54</sup> See Schütte, *Introductio ad historiam Societatis Jesu in Japonia (1549-1650)*, cit., pp. 52-54.

<sup>55</sup> Di Fiore, *Strategie di evangelizzazione nell'Oriente asiatico tra Cinquecento e Settecento*, cit., p. 118. But see also M. Steichen, *Les daimyô chrétiens ou un siècle de l'histoire religieuse et politique du Japon, 1549-1650*, Hong Kong, Imprimerie de Nazareth, 1904; C.R. Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan 1549-1650*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1974.

<sup>56</sup> See A. Valignano S.J., *Historia del principio y progreso de la Compañia de Jesús en las Indias Orientales (1542-1564)*, edited by I. Wicki, Roma, Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1944.

Xavier, repeating the strategy so successfully used in India<sup>57</sup>, made an effort to “accommodate” his work to the characteristics and expectations of his new interlocutors, applying this style of adaptation to the different situations and contexts that, as so rightly underlined by John W. O’Malley, had become, in Europe as well as the missionary lands, «un aspetto della *forma mentis*, [...] del modo di procedere dei gesuiti a un livello profondo». In short, Francis Xavier, as Daniello Bartoli pointed out, «facendosi co’ fanciulli fanciullo; sì come con una sua meravigliosa arte di carità pareva che si trasformasse in ogni altro con cui trattava, qual ch’egli fosse, soldato, mercatante, artiere, o schiavo, prendendo le maniere lor proprie, favellando con essi de’ loro interessi e guadagnandoli a sé con la benivoglienza, per guadagnarli a Dio con la salute», had worked with all his might to bring the interlocutors to «conoscimento della verità e [...] al battesimo»<sup>58</sup>.

The problem then, beyond that of a major or minor attitude of sympathy, respect and kindness towards the interlocutor, lay in the ability to understand at a deeper level the characteristics, the way of life, the social rules of those people destined to hear the message of the Gospel. Had not this, then, been the awareness that had fed the long and difficult elaboration of the *Ratio studiorum*, when, in defining the characteristics of a pedagogy directed at the new Catholic European ruling classes, the scholars stressed the need to operate with “discretion” and prudence in order to develop the perfect knowledge of the “nature” of those they were called upon to educate? And was it not also true that, only with a similar knowledge of the interlocutor, would it be possible to develop that capacity of “government” of the consciences and men able to create the condition for a successful reception of the Christian message?

The first person to uphold and promote in Japan the need to «perfettionare et di facilitare più il governo» of the missions, reorganizing the work of the Society of Jesus in the light of and «secondo la mutatione delli tempi et degl’huomini», was of course father Alessandro Valignano, nominated, in 1573, inspector of all the Society’s missions from the Cape of Good Hope to the extreme borders of Asia<sup>59</sup>.

Valignano, who had first set foot in Japan in July 1579, after staying there for about two and a half years (25th July 1579-20th February 1582), on the basis of the experience accumulated by his fellow missionaries and, in particular,

<sup>57</sup> See I. Wicki, *Zur Missionsmethode des hl. Franz Xaver*, «Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft», 2, 1949, pp. 85-103.

<sup>58</sup> *Dell’Historia della Compagnia di Giesu il Giappone seconda parte dell’Asia descritta dal P. Daniello Bartoli della medesima Compagnia*, cit., p. 3.

<sup>59</sup> On Alessandro Valignano and his work see J.F. Schütte, *Valignanos Missionsgrundsätze für Japan*, Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1958, 2 voll.; J.F. Moran, *The Japanese and the Jesuits. Alessandro Valignano in sixteenth-century Japan*, London, Routledge, 1993; and A. Tamburello, M. Antoni J. Üçerler, M. Di Russo (eds.), *Alessandro Valignano S.I. uomo del Rinascimento: ponte tra Oriente e Occidente*, Roma, Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2008.

in the light of an attentive analysis of Japan's cultural traditions and social customs, elaborated the foundations for more organic and strategic missionary work.

### 3. *Father Alessandro Valignano and the Society of Jesus' new missionary strategy in the East Indies*

As can be seen from the letters sent to the superior general Claudio Acquaviva, at the origin of Valignano's decision to introduce strategic changes into the Society's missionary work in Japan there was the awareness of «the difficult and unpleasant conditions» in which the Jesuits found themselves working<sup>60</sup>, and of the resistance they met in the face of local authorities and customs. «Per più di un anno – as the Jesuit remembered – mi diedi da fare unicamente per penetrare i loro usi e costumi. Mi rivolsi ai nostri Padri, ai Fratelli europei e giapponesi, agli stranieri e a quelli di casa, per avere quante più informazioni mi fosse possibile. Dovevo scoprire la causa degli errori e trovare l'adeguato rimedio»<sup>61</sup>.

And the right remedy, as is known, was to consist in the systematic adjustment of the style of life, public behaviour, method of preaching and announcing the faith, on the part of the Jesuits to the traditions and customs of Japanese society. In a word, as Joseph F. Schütte remarked, «occorreva cambiare strada: adattarsi all'indole giapponese attraverso uno studio intenso della lingua e della cultura locale, del carattere del popolo e delle sue forme di vita»<sup>62</sup>. It was necessary not only to adjust to Japan's customs but also to adopt the minute and rigid forms of courtesy that regulated interpersonal contacts and also to evaluate how far to observe, in the exercise of evangelization, the uses and ceremonies practiced by the Bonzies of zen Buddhism.

In the wake of these reflections, in the course of his stay in Japan, Alessandro Valignano put together a series of instructions, almost a manual, on behaviour, for the Society fathers. This "manual", based as it was on an accurate and careful study of the country's customs and traditions, would end up by becoming a kind of *magna charta* of the Jesuits' new missionary strategy, not only in Japan, but more in general, as we know, in most of the Far Eastern territories<sup>63</sup>. The work was originally called *Advertimentos e avisos acerca dos costumes e catangues de Jappaô*, but it soon became better known as *Cerimoniale per i missionari del*

<sup>60</sup> Letter from Alessandro Valignano to father Claudio Acquaviva, Bungo 7 October 1581, reproduced in A. Valignano S.J., *Il cerimoniale per i missionari del Giappone*, introduction and notes by G. Fr. Schütte S.J., Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1946, p. 20.

<sup>61</sup> Letter from Valignano to Claudio Acquaviva, Goa 23 November 1595, *ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>62</sup> J.F. Schütte, *Introduzione storica e critica del testo*, cit., p. 24.

<sup>63</sup> See Di Fiore, *Strategie di evangelizzazione nell'Oriente asiatico tra Cinquecento e Settecento*, cit., pp. 119-132.

*Giappone*<sup>64</sup>, it describes in detail the rules and customs that the missionaries should follow in their daily activities and, in particular, in their evangelization.

Firmly convinced of the necessity to adapt, Alessandro Valignano considered the lack of adaptation to Japanese ways of life as the first and most dangerous obstacle in the Christianization of Japan; he wrote: «Ora – as the Visitor said –, una delle cose principali che nel Giappone sono necessarie per fare ciò che i Padri si propongono circa la conversione e la Cristianità, è di saper trattare coi Giapponesi di tal maniera, che d'una parte godano autorità, e dall'altra usino di molta domestichezza, unendo queste due cose in tal guisa, che l'una non impedisca l'altra, ma si congiungano in modo che ciascuna abbia il proprio posto. [...] Per questo conviene di guardare sempre il proprio e accurato modo di procedere che corrisponde alla propria qualità. [...] Per non essersi ciò osservato in Giappone, ne sono derivati finora errori notevoli, per cui i Padri rimasero abbattuti, e tenuti in molto minor riputazione quale porterebbero loro, se avessero tenuto il proprio posto e il modo di procedere che conviene alla loro dignità»<sup>65</sup>.

This is why he insisted that the missionaries have «their own ceremonial when eating, dressing, speaking to servants, welcoming guests in every single manifestation, according to the people and social class involved», so as to save, as he wrote «the reputation of the Christian religion» in the eyes of the Japanese.

It also appears necessary to adapt to the uses and customs of the bonzes, whose decorum and dignity were at the base, according to the Visiting General, of the esteem and appreciation in which they were held by the Japanese people. It was certainly true, Valignano commented, «che la dottrina cristiana, grazie alla sua verità, e la virtù cristiana, grazie alla sua forza interiore, non hanno pari. In questo, i Bonzi non possono in alcun modo paragonarsi ai Missionari cristiani. Ma l'occhio dei Giapponesi non è ancora affinato. Essi ammirano nei loro Bonzi elevate qualità esteriori: padronanza di se stessi, dei propri impulsi e di tutti i loro movimenti esteriori; maturità e intelligenza nell'azione, considerazione e autorità nella direzione delle loro case»<sup>66</sup>.

The new missionary strategy introduced by Valignano in Japan and, in particular, the ordinances contained in the *Advertimentos* were destined, as is known, to raise an ample debate in the Society of Jesus and to involve the highest levels of the order.

In December 1582, the Visiting General sent to the General Superior in Rome, Claudio Acquaviva, a series of important documents on the Japanese mission which made no mention of the *Cerimoniale*<sup>67</sup>. He was well aware,

<sup>64</sup> The text of the *Cerimoniale* was published by J.F. Schütte in a valuable critical edition in Valignano S.J., *Il cerimoniale per i missionari del Giappone*, cit., pp. 118-313.

<sup>65</sup> Valignano S.J., *Il cerimoniale per i missionari del Giappone*, cit., p. 121 and p. 129.

<sup>66</sup> Schütte, *Introduzione storica e critica del testo*, cit., p. 29.

<sup>67</sup> See J.F. Schütte, *Valignanos Missionsgrundsätze für Japan*, I, pp. 126 sgg. See also MHSI, *Documenta Indica (1580-1583)*, edited by Wicki, cit., 1972.

in fact, that this document, if not adequately presented and contextualized in the peculiar Japanese situation, could cause perplexities and incomprehension. Regarding this he intended to illustrate it personally to the Superior General and his collaborators on his next visit to Rome where he could explain the fundamental guide of the *Cerimoniale* and why it was necessary to adopt it in Japan<sup>68</sup>.

But, unable to go back to Europe at an early date, Valignano entrusted father Diogo de Mesquita, who belonged to the famous *Ambasceria or Legazione dei nobili giapponesi*, with the task of taking the treatise to Rome. He sailed from Nagasaki in February 1584 bound for Rome where he was to honour the Pope and bear witness, in the eyes of government and public opinion, to the universal dimension of the post Council of Trent Church and the central role played in this by the Society of Jesus<sup>69</sup>.

The *Cerimoniale per i missionari del Giappone* was accompanied by a long explanatory letter from Valignano to father Claudio Acquaviva, in which he illustrated the reasons for the choices made.

The reply from the Superior General of the Society arrived a few months later, and is a document that is worth studying closely. On retreat in the house of the novitiates of the Society in St. Andrew's at the Quirinale, father Acquaviva examined very carefully the documentation sent to him by Valignano, as well as letters from Francisco Cabral, at the time Superior in China, and letters from other Jesuit missionaries in Japan, all expressing perplexity about the strategy to adapt<sup>70</sup>. The superior general sent his reply back 24th December 1585. In it, after congratulating Valignano for his clear exposition of the facts and the particular circumstances, he manifested approval for most of the measures adopted by Valignano in Japan:

Se bene la presentia di V. R. qui sarebbe stata a tutti, et a me in particolare, di molta consolazione – Acquaviva wrote –, et ci harebbe anche apportata molta luce et chiarezza delle cose del Giappone, tanto differenti da queste nostre di Europa et quasi di tutto il mondo, nondimeno resto molto consolato et sodisfatto della resolutione presa, che V. R. restasse, sì per i molti pericoli et per il travaglio et stanchezza della sua persona in così lunghi viaggi, come anche per la notabile utilità et consolatione che Dio Nostro Signore è stato servito di cavare in tutta cotesta Provincia dal restare V.R., come noi speravamo; tanto maggiormente

<sup>68</sup> For the letter from Alessandro Valignano to Claudio Acquaviva, Macao 17 dicembre 1582, see Schütte, *Introduzione storica e critica del testo*, cit., p. 31.

<sup>69</sup> See *De missione Legatorum Japonensium ad Romanam curiam, rebusque in Europa, ac toto itinere animadversis dialogus ex ephemeride ipso rum legatorum collectus, et in sermonem latinum versus ab Eduardo de Sande Sacerdote Societatis Iesu*, in Macaensi portu Sinici regni in domo Societatis Iesu cum facultate Ordinarii, et Superiorum anno 1590. About the results of the mission in Japan and its large echoes in Europe, see: P. D'Elia, *I primi ambasciatori giapponesi venuti a Roma (1585)*, «La Civiltà Cattolica», 103, 1952, pp. 43-58; and H. Bernard-Maître, *Le retentissement dans la Chrétienté du succès des missions au Japon*, in S. Delacroix (ed.), *Histoire universelle des missions catholiques*, Paris, Grund, 1956, vol. I, pp. 317-321.

<sup>70</sup> See Schütte, *Introduzione storica e critica del testo*, cit., pp. 35-36.



che questo danno di non poter così pienamente formar concetto delle cose del Giappone, è stato da V. R. ristorato pienamente col trattato mandatoci, et con le dimande della Consulta et risposte fatteli. Io (benché fussi pieno di occupationi, et assai impedito per la presentia di questi signori nostri giapponesi, che mi portò varie occasioni di occupationi, più di quello che si poteva credere) mi ritirai per alcuni giorni a posta a Santo Andrea et lessi diligentemente tutti due questi libri, notando cosa per cosa quel che mi occorreva [...] et premetto a V. R. che hebbi segnalata consolatione in Domino, non solo per il frutto et dispositione che vedevo in quel paese, che tengo vivamente a cuore, ma anche per li buoni ordini et indirizzi che V. R. lasciava, et per la chiarezza tanto particolare che ci dava d'ogni cosa: che con molta distintione et resolutione mi pare d'haver quasi presente lo stato di quelle cose. Hora, havendo fatta questa diligenza, dico a V. R. per sua consolatione e per confirmatione di quanto ha ordinato che mi pare che stia molto bene, et solo ad alcuni capi, intorno a' quali mi è parso dire alcuna cosa, toccherò quel che m'occorre in particolare in un memoriale separato.

Although agreeing generally with the strategy adopted by Valignano, father Acquaviva could not but express some doubts on the risk of assuming in the Japanese uses and customs, in particular what concerned the adoption on the part of the Jesuits of the style of life and the hierarchies of the Zen Buddhists:

Ma quel che ci dà molta difficoltà – continuava il generale della Compagnia di Gesù – et ha bisogno di consideratione et rimedio, è intorno a que' punti che V. R. tratta nel suo *Trattato del Giappone* al cap. 23, et nella *Consulta* si trattano nel capo 17, 18 et 19, et nelle sue *Resolutioni* che rispondono a questi punti: perché, se bene ci piace quel che V. R. ordina. [...] Nondimeno sento gran difficoltà et temo di danno in alcuna cosa, cioè in quel che V. R. dice che quanto agli honori et modo di trattarsi con riputatione dobbiamo conformarci co' i Bonzi, per non diventar contenibili et noi et la nostra legge, tanto più che, non essendovi altri prelati, bisogna che noi teniamo luogo di prelati, pastori etc. et conserviamo la dignità ecclesiastica; perché, come Dio Nostro Signore non concorre già con miracoli et doni di profetie, et quelle genti si muovono tanto con queste cose esteriori, è necessario accomodarsi loro et entrar con la loro per poi con la nostra. Questo, Padre mio, sino a un certo punto mi par consiglio molto prudente, perché anche l'Apostolo diventava con tutti tutte le cose per guadagnarli a Christo, et così lodo io che nelle cortesie, nella compositione esterna della modestia et gravità, nel non dar mostra di alcuna passione scomposta, et nelle cose che toccano al tratto et commercio politico, ci accomodiamo con loro. Ma che i Nostri, per conformarsi co' Bonzi, premano in certi punti di honori, habbino d'andar accompagnati con numero di gente, tenghino in casa chi gli serva, et per occasione di vestimenti politi gli habbiano anche et tenghino come proprii, questo temiamo che possa col tempo apportar gran pregiudizio alla Compagnia.

In short, if on one hand, it was certainly true that the adaptation strategy was necessary, as father Acquaviva underlined, since «Dio Nostro Signore non concorre già con miracoli et doni di profetie, et quelle genti si muovono tanto con queste cose esteriori», it appare as the only plausible way to establish a contact in order to make evangelization possible («accomodarsi loro et entrar con la loro per poi con la nostra»); on the other, it was equally true that such a strategy was not immune from the risk of distorting the missionary work and even of confusing the basis of the Christian message.

Nor, added l'Acquaviva, was it to be feared that

doppo tanto tempo siano i principali et prudenti della natione per scandalizzarsi et stimare in poco le cose nostre, se pure, come è necessario, è stato predicato loro l'Evangelio, perché ivi havran veduto Christo Nostro Signore dispregiato, povero et finalmente ignudo in Croce, et gli Apostoli poveri anch'essi et bisognosi d'ogni cosa et maltrattati dal mondo. Hora, chi questa dottrina predica, non so perché debba ascondere tanto lungamente la virtù della Croce et la imitatione di Christo che predica per Dio, il quale et consigliò et mostrò con esempio la volontaria povertà et il dispregio d'ogni cosa mondana; ché, se essi intendono, come io non dubito, che il non esser' avaro et il dar le robbe sue a poveri, et il far poco conto di questa vita et delle cose sue, è atto di gran virtù et protestatione della remunerazione che aspettiamo nell'altra, credo che come gente di molto ingegno et capacità intenderanno ch'è degno di lode et non di dispregio chi per grandezza d'animo, come fanno i servi di Dio, calpesta ciò che il mondo apprezza. [...] Onde desidero che pigliamo grande animo, che se noi vivremo conforme alla nostra professione, concorrerà Nostro Signore più di quel che la nostra prudenza si potrebbe promettere; et in luogo de' miracoli o profetie, la forza della parola di Dio et la predicatione della santa Fede, che è il granello di senape, non lascerà di fare l'effetto suo, come etiamdio senza miracoli la Maiestà divina ha dimostrato in varie parti: anzi tanto darà maggior frutto la terra, quanto sarà coltivata con gl'istromenti che 'l Signore volse usare nel resto del mondo, cioè la croce, stenti et dispregi.

Along with a vigorous exhortation not to risk fulfilling, even temporarily or for opportunistic reasons, the duty of bearing witness to «la virtù della Croce et la imitatione di Christo», and to trust more in the merciful intervention on God's part, rather than of men's prudence («concorrerà Nostro Signore più di quel che la nostra prudenza si potrebbe promettere»), in the last part of the letter Acquaviva substantially gives his approval of Valignano's choices, inviting him to proceed very cautiously in his policy of adaptation in his missionary work to the uses and customs of Japan: we read, at the end of the letter, «V. R. – we read in the end of the letter – veda di lasciar in modo la condiscendenza et l'accommodarsi con loro (che di questo mi rimetto alla sua prudenza) che non solo non crescano, ma né anco restino certi abusi. [...] Temperi dunque la cosa in modo che si condiscenda, sì, ma senza nostro pregiudicio et senza trasformarsi in altra forma, et confidi nella bontà divina che darà felice successo»<sup>71</sup>.

Father Acquaviva's words reveal a conviction that was profoundly rooted in the Society's spirituality, according to which, in virtue of the compatibility and continuity between “nature” and “grace”, between “reason” and “revelation”, Christians did not have to rely on divine grace alone, but were called on to actively co-operate with it, using all the human resources available to them and devoting themselves to the realization of God's design for salvation. Was not this, then, what the *Society's Costituzioni*<sup>72</sup> prescribed and what Ignacio of Loyola's *Esercizi spirituali* insisted on?

<sup>71</sup> Letter from Claudio Acquaviva to Alessandro Valignano, Roma 24 December 1585, in Valignano S.J., *Il cerimoniale per i missionari del Giappone*, cit., pp. 315-323.

<sup>72</sup> See MHSI, *Monumenta Ignatiana. Sancti Ignatii de Loyola Constitutiones Societatis Jesu*, 3

It is not by chance that, in his letter approving the choices made by Valignano in Japan, father Acquaviva refers to Saint Paul, *Corinthians*, 9, 20-22 («Mi sono fatto Giudeo con i Giudei, per guadagnare i Giudei...»). If it was true, in fact, in the same way that had inspired the first apostles and laid the foundations for the evangelization of the West, the task given to the Tridentine Church was the realization, even in the distant East Indies, of the *unum ovile et unus pastor*, it was equally true that the strategy to adopt for such a difficult and decisive task should be rooted in the most solid and authoritative apostolic tradition and from it draw its basic reasons.

#### 4. *Beyond adaptation: Matteo Ricci and the inculturation of the Gospel in China*

When, in 1583, Matteo Ricci entered China the country had already, albeit hastily and with little effect, come into contact with Christianity. The Christian message had been announced for the first time by the Nestorian communities present in the Middle East in the first half of the VII century, and later, in the XIII and XIV centuries, in a more organic and incisive way, by the Franciscans Giovanni da Pian del Carpine and Giovanni from Montecorvino<sup>73</sup>. In the course of their missions with the Mongols. When Matteo Ricci reached China, however, the fruits of those earlier attempts at evangelization had been completely lost<sup>74</sup>.

Following the policy of the Visiting general of the East Indies, Alessandro Valignano, Ricci was to be promoter and creator, in China, of the strategy of adapting and conforming to the uses and customs of the host country which was certainly not mere astuteness and pretence, as Adriano Prosperi<sup>75</sup> wrote some years ago; neither can it be simply reduced to a more efficacious tactic to

voll., Romae, Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1934-1938, pp. 147-162.

<sup>73</sup> See G. Han, *Giovanni da Montecorvino fondatore della Chiesa cattolica in Cina. Nel settimo anniversario del suo arrivo a Pechino (1294-1994)*, it. tr., Roma, Curia generalizia dei Frati Minori, 1996; G. di Pian di Carpine, *Historia Mongalorum*, critical edition to the latin text ed. by E. Menestò, Spoleto, Fondazione del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo, 2006. See also M. Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan. His life and times*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988; e Id., *Governing Chinas Multiethnic Frontiers*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2004.

<sup>74</sup> See P.M. D'Elia, *Introduzione generale alle Fonti ricciane*, in *Fonti Ricciane. Documenti originali concernenti Matteo Ricci e la storia delle prime relazioni tra l'Europa e la Cina (1579-1615) editi e commentati da Pasquale M. D'Elia*. Sotto il patrocinio della Reale Accademia d'Italia [poi: della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei], 3 voll., Roma, La Libreria dello Stato, 1942-1949 [Edizione Nazionale delle opere editate e inedite di Matteo Ricci S.I.], vol. I, pp. LXIV-L. XXXII. But also see the Letter from Matteo Ricci to Claudio Acquaviva, Pechino 26 July 1605, in *Opere storiche del P. Matteo Ricci S.I., edite a cura del Comitato per le onoranze nazionali. Con prolegomena, note e tavole dal P. Pietro Tacchi Venturi S.I.*, 2 voll., Macerata, Premiata Stabilimento Tipografico F. Giorgetti, 1911-1913, vol. II, pp. 286-294.

<sup>75</sup> Prosperi, *Il missionario*, cit., pp. 196-197.

remove the obstacles from the preaching of the Gospel in *partibus infidelium*, but it reflected, as can also be seen from Valignano's writings, a specific spirituality and a precise theological concept – those same concepts that had guided and continued to inspire in Europe, as well as in the missionary lands, the commitment and preaching of the Society of Jesus.

We will not follow the long march of the Jesuit from Macerata towards the heart of China which has already been reconstructed and documented in the works published by various scholars<sup>76</sup>. Here, in particular, we intend to examine more closely some aspects of Ricci's experience and missionary work that perhaps, International historiography, has neglected and which to us seem worthy of study in order to give the figure and work of the great Jesuit from Macerata his just collocation in the missionary field of the reformed Church.

Right from the start of his missionary experience in China, Matteo Ricci was a convinced advocate of the strategy of adaptation inspired by father Valignano and introduced into the missions in Japan<sup>77</sup>. Regarding this, in a letter to father Acquaviva from Sciaocce, in November 1592, he wrote: «Per autorizzarci [acquistare autorità] più non ivamo per le strade a piedi, ma ci facessimo portare in sedie, in omeri di huomini, come qui sogliono le persone gravi; della qual autorità habbiamo molta necessità in queste parti, perciocché senz'essa non si fa nessun frutto tra gentili; et il nome di forastiero e di sacerdote è tanto vile nella Cina, che habbiamo bisogno di queste et altre simili inventioni per mostrarli che non siamo sacerdoti sì vili come i suoi»<sup>78</sup>. And in another letter, after having detailed his great efforts to adapt himself to the ways and customs of the country he concluded: we lent ourselves to all these manifestations «deseiando tomar com elles algum credito, [...] por entender quanto isto emportava ao serviço e gloria de Nosso Senhor e ao que nosoutros pretendemos»<sup>79</sup>.

While putting into practice the strategy of adaptation, however, Matteo Ricci revealed himself as intelligent and creative, correcting the course where necessary as he gradually realized that the reality of China was different from that of the original model for Japan. For example, after having adopted, in his early years in China, the way of dressing and behaving of the Buddhist monks as Varignano had suggested to the Jesuit missionaries operating in Japan, where

<sup>76</sup> Examples of recent works are: J.D. Spence, *The memory palace of Matteo Ricci*, New York, Viking Penguin, 1984; J. Besineau, *Matteo Ricci serviteur du Maître du Ciel*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 2003; M. Redaelli, *Il mappamondo con la Cina al centro. Fonti antiche e mediazione culturale nell'opera di Matteo Ricci S.J.*, Pisa, ETS, 2007. For a large bibliography on the topic see A. Dudink, N. Standaert, *Chinese Christian Texts Database*, in <<http://www.arts.kuleuven.be/sinology/cct>> (last access: 1st February 2010).

<sup>77</sup> See J.P. Rubies, *The Concept of Cultural Dialogue and the Jesuit Method of Accommodation: Between Idolatry and Civilization*, «Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu», LXIV, 2005, pp. 237-280.

<sup>78</sup> Letter from Matteo Ricci to Claudio Acquaviva, Sciaocce 15 November 1592, in *Opere storiche del P. Matteo Ricci S.I.*, cit., vol. II, p. 104.

<sup>79</sup> Letter from Matteo Ricci to Duarte de Sande, Nancian 29 August 1595, *ibid.*, p. 155.

he realized that this choice did not suit his objectives, 1595 he radically changed attitude, conforming to the life style and etiquette of the scholars and officials of the Confucian élite.

He explained this himself in a letter sent from Nancian, 29th August of that same year in which he stated that: «E porque ja tinhamos determinado de deixar os nomens de bonzos, que entre os Chines he tido em tão vil e baixo estado, e tomar nome de letrados e pera isto conforme aa licença que nos tinha deixado o padre visitador, fizemos crescer as barbas e o cabelo ate orelha, e iuntamente haviamos de usar dum vestido particular, que os letrados usão no tempo das visitas e não do que primeiro usavamos de bonzos; [...] e semduvida, pollo que ate agora vamos vendo, foi cousa muj asertada fazermos esta mudança, porque agora somos tratados de todos bem diferentemente do que heramos primeiro»<sup>80</sup>.

Matteo Ricci had, in fact, understood very early on, that the most influential political faction in China, which, once won over, would make the penetration of Christianity the Celestial Empire possible and favour the positive result of the mission, was that of the Mandarins, that is the élite formed by high state officials. These, as has been quite rightly pointed out, «costituivano l'ossatura della burocrazia cinese, a cui si accedeva con severi concorsi pubblici. I mandarini avevano il culto delle lettere e delle scienze: erano sì funzionari statali, prefetti, ufficiali di vario grado, ma soprattutto erano intellettuali. Matteo Ricci pensò di conquistare questa classe e si mise subito all'opera, imparando la lingua e la letteratura cinese non solo con una costanza e una determinazione ammirevoli, ma anche con eccellenti risultati. [...] Uomo di vastissimo sapere, versato nelle scienze esatte come nelle discipline umanistiche, Ricci impersonava il meglio della cultura occidentale, e proprio come esponente di questa millenaria cultura si presentò ai mandarini cinesi. [...] Egli divenne ben presto famoso per il suo sapere, accompagnato da una prodigiosa memoria, e conquistò grande prestigio, [...] fu accolto dai letterati come uno di loro, che apprezzavano in lui non solo l'umanista, ma anche lo scienziato con le sue cognizioni di matematica e di astronomia»<sup>81</sup>.

Matteo Ricci's choice to address himself almost exclusively to the ruling classes in order that the mission in China take root and flourish must not come as a surprise. In fact, it inserted itself into the more general strategy of the religions and spiritual formation and animation of the élites that the Society of Jesus had chosen to follow and that in Europe and the newly discovered territories, had resulted in the constitution of a network of excellent colleges (*seminaria nobilium*) for the education of the aristocratic and upper class young<sup>82</sup>.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 156-157.

<sup>81</sup> Di Fiore, *Strategie di evangelizzazione nell'Oriente asiatico tra Cinquecento e Settecento*, cit., p. 133.

<sup>82</sup> See G.P. Brizzi, *La formazione della classe dirigente nel Sei-Settecento. I seminaria nobilium nell'Italia centro-settentrionale*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1976. Regarding the development of Jesuit



On his part, widening his knowledge of «the things of China», Ricci had become convinced as he himself noted that «the lower classes have no power»<sup>83</sup>; and that, however, only by winning the trust and the esteem bureaucratic élites would it be possible to reach the Emperor and thus obtain from him the official recognition of the mission and the authorization to preach the Gospel through the country. He wrote from Nancian in October 1596: «Quello che hora speriamo è di alcun modo avere intrata al re e, avendo la sua gratia, avere anco libera licentia di predicare, la quale, se si avesse, vi prometto che in brieve milioni di anime si convertirebbono, per quel che veggo»<sup>84</sup>. And yet again, when writing to father Acquaviva about the reflections formulated with his brother missionaries: «Habbiamo concluso tra di noi due cose per aver di ciò segni manifesti; l'una è che, avendosi in queste terre licentia libera per predicare il sancto Evangelio, in brieve tempo si farebbono milioni di christiani; l'altra è che, senza tal licentia, subito havressimo da perdere quel puoco che habbiamo, se ci diamo di proposito a voler far christiani, per la grande susptione che vi è in questo regno di forastieri e in speciale di noi, che già ci tengono per uomini di ingegno, spirito e potere per cominciare ogni grande opera. Per questa causa non ardiamo andare se non con il pie' di piombo»<sup>85</sup>.

Aware that in order to win the trust and esteem of the Chinese élites it was necessary to operate primarily on a cultural level, Matteo Ricci, as has already been said, dedicated himself to the study of Chinese literary traditions and scientific doctrines, maturing in this way an extraordinary competence; at the same time, he made an effort to illustrate the main scientific and technological discoveries of the West to the Chinese intellectuals<sup>86</sup>. These letters permit us to understand the meaning and profound reasons of this task, at the same time

allowing us to recognize the close and inseparable bond between this cultural and scientific activity and the religious and pastoral work carried out in China by this Jesuit from Macerata in those same years<sup>87</sup>.

In a letter sent from Sciaochin in September 1584, Matteo Ricci gave a first, enthusiastic evaluation of the high level of Chinese culture and science, underlining the importance of a dialogue with the intellectuals to help

colleges in Europe and the other continents see: A. Scaglione, *The Liberal Arts and the Jesuit College System*, Amsterdam-Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1986; and A. Lynn Martin, *The Jesuit Mind. The Mentality of an Elite in Early Modern France*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1988.

<sup>83</sup> Letter from Matteo Ricci to Girolamo Costa, Nancian 15 October 1596, in *Opere storiche del P. Matteo Ricci S.I.*, cit., vol. II, p. 232.

<sup>84</sup> Letter from Matteo Ricci to Giulio Fuligatti, Nancian 12 October 1596, *ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>85</sup> Letter from Matteo Ricci to Claudio Acquaviva, Nancian 13 October 1596, *ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>86</sup> Regarding Matteo Ricci see *Notices biographiques et bibliographiques sur les jesuites de l'ancienne mission de Chine, 1552-1773, par le p. Louis Pfister S.I.*, 2 voll., Chang-hai, Imprimerie de la Mission catholique, 1932-1934 (rist. anast.: Nendeln, Kraus Reprint, 1971), vol. I, *ad vocem*.

<sup>87</sup> See D. Ramada Curto, *The Jesuits and Cultural Intermediacy in the Early Modern World*, «Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu», LXXIV, 2005, pp. 3-21.

evangelization. He wrote: «El saver de los Chinos se podrá ver por la invención tan gentil, aunque dificultosa, de sus letras, que para cada cosa tienen la suya y está bien revuelta y enlaçada de manera que quantas calabra ay en el mundo, tantas son la letras diferentes unas de otras, y con todo esto las aprenden y saven, y aprenden en ellas sus ciencias, en que son muy doctos, como es en la medezina, en la fisica moral, en las matemáticas y astrología; que sacan los eclipses muy clara y puntualmente por diferente estilo que nostro, y en la aritmética, y finalmente en todas las artes libérale y mecánicas; [...] y si á la natural quisiese Dios añadir la divina de nuestra santa fé cathólica, parésceme que no supo tanto Platón poner en especulación de república quanto la China puso en plática»<sup>88</sup>.

Later, facing a substantial change of mind regarding the real development of Chinese scientific culture, the Jesuit remarked on the extremely positive reaction that Western culture revealed by him, was meeting among the Chinese intellectuals and joked about the “fame” that he was acquiring as a man of letters and science. In a letter from Nancian in October 1595, he noted: «Si era sparsa qua una fama che io sapevo fare argento di argento vivo; et qui vi son migliaia d’huomini che attendono a questo e vi spendono la vita e la roba. [...] Et quanto più dico che sono in questa materia *sicut asinus ad lyram*, tanto meno mi credono. [...] Et nel vero per loro posso dire di essere un altro Tolomeo; perché non fanno niente, fanno horologi solo inchinati, cioè equinotiali, ma non si inchinano se non a ragione di 36 gradi, pensando che tutto il mondo è di 36 gradi di altezza, né più né meno. Però veda V. R. che visite saranno le mie et che verità possono sapere delle hore: pensano che tutta la terra è piana e quadrata; che il cielo è uno e liquido, cioè di aria et altre cose assai absurde etc. Dell’eclisse del sole danno buona ragione, ma della luna loro stessi stanno svergognati di sì fiacca ragione; perché dicono che quando la luna sta dirimpetto al sole fa chiara più la sua luce, ma quando gli sta puntualmente per diametro, come impaurita, perde a luce e il colore»<sup>89</sup>.

This subtle self-irony of the asinus mistaken for an alter Tolomeus can be directed in another important letter sent to the superior general Acquaviva, in November of the same year where Ricci affirms: «E nel vero, se la Cina fosse tutto il mondo, senza dubbio mi potrei chiamare il maggior matematico et anco philosopho naturale, perché è cosa di riso quello che dicono, e di meraviglia il puoco che fanno. [...] Ma lasciando di contare il puoco che fanno molti, che intendono alcuna cosa, restano admirati della sottigliezza delle ragioni che gli do, sì in pruovare alcuna cosa di matematica, come de philosophia, e delle cose

<sup>88</sup> Letter from Matteo Ricci to Giambattista Roman, Sciaochin 13 September 1584, in *Opere storiche del P. Matteo Ricci S.I.*, cit., vol. II, p. 45.

<sup>89</sup> Letter from Matteo Ricci to N.N., Nancian 28 ottobre 1595, *ibid.*, p. 175.

della nostra fede, e pensano che sono io un mostro di sapere e che di nostra terra non uscì mai cosa simile, cosa che mi fa molto ridere»<sup>90</sup>.

In spite of the self-irony and the evolution of the scientific progress in China, Matteo Ricci, together with his fellow missionaries, had made enormous efforts to spread, directly and indirectly, the knowledge of Christian principles and to root the Gospel in the culture and traditions of the country. It is not by chance that, when referring to the appreciation shown to him as the populariser of western culture and science in China, he could quite justifiably affirm: «Porque, posto que não seia de nossa profissão andar buscando honrras, todavia nesta terra, onde a lei de Nosso Senhor não he conhecida e do credito e reputação que terão os pregadores desta sagrada doutrina depende, em hum certo modo, tam bem a reputação da mesma lei, he necessario quanto ao exterior que nos acomodemos con os costume e modo de proceder dos Chinas»<sup>91</sup>.

As early as 1584, Ricci's fellow missionary, Michele Ruggieri, had compiled a little treatise, in the form of a dialogue between a Chinese and a Jesuit, after the style of the western catechism so dear to the Society of Jesus – rather like, for example, the *Dottrina* of father Roberto Bellarmino or that of Pietro Canisio<sup>92</sup>–, in which, while on one hand it aimed at «refuse the major sects of China», that is those cults that Ricci liquidated as idolatrous<sup>93</sup>, and on the over «it stated everything necessary for the Christian»<sup>94</sup>, or, to use the words of the Macerata Jesuit «con ragioni naturali proviamo in esso la nostra santa fé catolica»<sup>95</sup>. We refer to *T'ien cen sceng kiao* [*Tianzhu shilu*] or *Vera esposizione della dottrina del Signore del Cielo*, which, together with a series of other Christian texts, among which the *Decalogo* and the *Credo*, constituted the first instrument to catechize and illustrate the principles of the faith in Chinese used by the Jesuits in their mission<sup>96</sup>.

<sup>90</sup> Letter from Matteo Ricci to Claudio Acquaviva, Nancian 4 novembre 1596, *ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>91</sup> Letter from Matteo Ricci to Duarte de Sande, Nancian 29 agosto 1595, *ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>92</sup> See Cl. Dhôtel, *Les origines du catéchisme moderne d'après les premiers manuels imprimés en France*, Paris, Aubier-Montaigne, 1967, pp. 166-299. On Bellarmino see in particular L. Lujambo Arias, *Origen y destinación de la «Copiosa declaración de la doctrina cristiana» de Roberto Bellarmino*, Roma, LAS, 1987. With regard to Canisio, see the essay, dated but still valuable, by O. Braunsberger, *Entstehung und erste Entwicklung der Katechismen des seligen Petrus Canisius aus der Gesellschaft Jesu*, Freiburg, Herder, 1893.

<sup>93</sup> Letter from Matteo Ricci to Giambattista Roman, Sciaochin 13 settembre 1584, *cit.*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>94</sup> Letter from Matteo Ricci to Claudio Acquaviva, Canton 30 novembre 1584, *ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>95</sup> Letter from Matteo Ricci to Giulio Fuligatti, Sciaochin 24 novembre 1585, *ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>96</sup> Of the work *T'ien cen sceng kiao* [*Tianzhu shilu*] or *Vera esposizione della dottrina del Signore del Cielo*, there is an exemplary manuscript in Latin conserve in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale «Vittorio Emanuele II» in Roma (BNCR), Mss. gesuitici, 1276, ed. by M. Ruggieri, *Vera et brevis divinarum rerum expositio*, in *Opere storiche del P. Matteo Ricci S.I.*, *cit.*, pp. 498-540. See L. Wieger, *Notes sur la première catéchèse écrite en chinois 1582-1584*, «Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu», I, 1932, I, pp. 72-84. In the letter from Matteo Ricci to Claudio Acquaviva, Sciaochin 20 October 1585, we read: «Mandammo anco a V. P. un *Catechismo*, che habbiamo qui stampato in lettera cina, con un *Pater noster*, *Ave Maria* e *Comandamenti* in sua

The modest results reached by the diffusion of the *Vera esposizione della dottrina del Signore del Cielo*, prompted Matteo Ricci to refine the ways and instruments for the propagation of the faith. His increasing knowledge of the context in which he found himself operating led him to write, in September 1584, that «en la China no ay religión», and that, although some sects existed, their hold on the populations, especially the upper classes, was quite marginal also because, as he wrote «el poco culto que ay, es tan intricado, que sus mesmos religiosos no saben dar razón dél»<sup>97</sup>. Much more incisive and rooted, on the contrary, especially among the intellectuals, mandarins and high officials, was what Ricci defined the «scholars' sect», that is Confucianism, that he judged not a real religion but rather as a kind of moral doctrine, a way of life inspired by the teachings of Confucius and his disciples and commentators<sup>98</sup>.

The peculiar characteristics of these doctrines and its deep rootedness in the Chinese intellectual and political élite persuaded Matteo Ricci that it could not be ignored. And these years, in fact, the Macerata Jesuit systematically applies himself to the study of Confucian texts convinced that «a doutrina dos letrados a qual e muy acomodada á nossa porque não tem nenhuma conta com pagode e trata somentes das virtudes e bom modo moral de proceder nesta vida»; and that, therefore, far from representing an element of insurmountable contrast towards Christianity, it could be to a certain extent, received and integrated into the Christian vision of the world<sup>99</sup>.

Regarding this, in an important letter to father Acquaviva from Sciaocao in December 1593, Ricci informed him of the studies and initiatives undertaken in that direction. He wrote: «Tutto l'anno fossimo occupati in studiare, e finii di leggere al padre mio compagno come un corso che costumano udire delle cose morali i letterati della Cina, che sono *Quattro Libri* di quattro philosophi assai buoni e di buoni documenti morali. Questi anco mi fa il p. visitatore traslare in latino per agiutarmi di quello in fare un nuovo catechismo, di che habbiamo molta necessità, in sua lingua; perché l'altro che si fece nel principio [allude al *Tianzhu shilu* o *Vera esposizione della dottrina del Signore del Cielo*], non essere riuscito sì buono come avria d'essere; [...] [L'opera *Quattro Libri*] è nel morale un altro Seneca o altro autore dei più nostri famosi tra gentili»<sup>100</sup>.

In his concise summary, Ricci stressed how, after having applied himself to the study of the *Quattro Libri*, that is a collection of key texts of the Confucian ethics<sup>101</sup>, suggested by father Valignano he had then dedicated himself to

lettera, acciocché V.P. si consolasse con questo» (in *Opere storiche del P. Matteo Ricci S.I.*, cit., vol. II, p. 54).

<sup>97</sup> Letter from Matteo Ricci to Giambattista Roman, Sciaochin 13 settembre 1584, cit., p. 48.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49. See P. D'Elia, *Ermeneutica ricciana*, «Gregorianum», 34, 1953, pp. 673-678.

<sup>99</sup> Letter from Matteo Ricci to Duarte de Sande, Nancian 29 agosto 1595, cit., p. 156.

<sup>100</sup> Letter from Matteo Ricci to Claudio Acquaviva, Sciaocao 10 dicembre 1593, *ibid.*, pp. 117-118.

<sup>101</sup> On this ancient Confucian texts see: J. Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity*, Tokyo, Kodansha International. The Institute of Oriental Religions, 1977; Id., *Mysticism and kingship in*



translating this work into Latin, so as to better assimilate its contents in order to use them for the elaboration of a new and more efficacious catechism destined to substitute the one compiled by father Ruggieri a decade earlier. The final reference to Confucius comparing him to «un altro Seneca o altro autore dei più nostri famosi tra i gentili»<sup>102</sup> was not gratuitous, but showed, in an unequivocal way, the desire to provide a presentation of Christianity's principle truths (the «new catechism», to which he refers in his letter to father Acquaviva) which, based on natural reason, could draw on and adapt as its own the moral knowledge of the original Confucianism. «Così cominciai – a year later he wrote in a letter in October 1594 – un libro delle cose della nostra fede, tutto di ragioni naturali, per distribuirlo per tutta la Cina quando si stamperà»<sup>103</sup>.

The reference was naturally to Matteo Ricci's work *T'ien ciu sce i or Vero significato della dottrina del Signore del Cielo*, that, as we know, will not appear until 1603, at the conclusion of a long and fundamental work of revision and integration of Confucian moral wisdom with the principles of Christian doctrine<sup>104</sup>.

At this point, it is necessary to direct our attention to this work and its prospective. In a series of letters sent from China between 1594 and 1595, the Macerata Jesuit stressed more than once the importance of the study of the doctrines contained in the afore-mentioned *Quattro Libri* and in other texts of the Confucian tradition that he judged as made of «di sententie morali assai acute e buone»<sup>105</sup>.

*China. The heart of Chinese wisdom*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997; J. Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact. A Conflict of Cultures*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985<sup>2</sup>. In a letter dated 9th September 1597, Matteo Ricci wrote: «Fiorirono nel tempo che fra noi fiori Platone et Aristotile, come feci il conto de' tempi, anco tra loro alcuni letterati di buona vita, che fecero alcuni libri di cose morali non per via di scientia, ma di sententie buone, dei principali de quali fecero poi quattro libri [allude ai già ricordati Quattro Libri], che sono adesso gli più stimati e letti de giorno e de notte, che non passerà il volume della grandezza delle epistole familiari di Marco Tullio [Cicerone], ma gli comentarij e glosse, e comentarij de' comentarij et altre espositioni e discorsi sopra essi sono già infiniti» (Letter from Matteo Ricci to Lelio Passionei, Nancian 9 September 1597, in *Opere storiche del P. Matteo Ricci S.I.*, cit., vol. II; p. 237).

<sup>102</sup> Elsewhere, Ricci defines the Confucians as «una setta di epicuriani, non per il nome, ma per le loro leggi e per le loro opinioni». See P. Rule, *K'ung-tzu or Confucius? The Jesuit Interpretation of Confucianism*, cit., pp. 28-29.

<sup>103</sup> Letter from Matteo Ricci to Girolamo Costa, Sciaocce 12 ottobre 1594, in *Opere storiche del P. Matteo Ricci S.I.*, II, cit., p. 122. See A. Dudink, *Tianzhu jiaoyao: The Catechism (1605) Published by Matteo Ricci*, «Sino-Western Cultural Relations Journal», 24, 2002, pp. 38-50.

<sup>104</sup> An example in Chinese of the work *T'ien ciu sce i* [*Tian zhu shi yi*] is conserved in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana [in seguito: BAV], Ms. Barb. Or. 134. But see M. Ricci, *Il vero significato del «Signore del cielo»*, tr. and ed. by A. Chiricosta, Citta del Vaticano, Urbaniana University Press, 2006.

<sup>105</sup> Letter from Matteo Ricci to Fabio de Fabj, Sciaocce 15 November 1594, in *Opere storiche del P. Matteo Ricci S.I.*, cit., vol. II, p. 125.



The reception of the Confucian doctrines, moreover, would reveal itself as a particularly efficacious in the frequent discussions engaged in with the Chinese intellectuals. Very interesting is the discussion, of which Matteo Ricci gives an ample summary in one of his letters from Nancian, with the scholar Chãopuy<sup>106</sup>, the esteemed president of the local Academy of scholars and a leading figure among the Chinese intellectuals: «E tam bem me vierão visitar – he wrote – muitos de seus discipulos [di Chãopuy] e com elles e com o mesmo Chãopuy ja tive alluma disputas com que ficarão pasmados, vendome argomentar tão a proposito com doutrina e argumentos tirados dos seus mesmos livros, e hum dia vendosse o Chãopuy concluido acerca da doutrina que eu lhe dava do paraiso e do inferno, que elles negão, não tendo mais conta que das virtudes morais e bens desta vida, ficou embaraçado e não teve mais que dizer que alegar huma sentença escrita por hum seu grande letrado antigo em que diz estas palavra: “Se ha paraiso, o bom homem lá subira; e se ha inferno o rujm homem lá dessero. Procuremos nos de ser bons homens e não ruyns”. Com esta sentença se acabou nossa disputa por então»<sup>107</sup>.

Apart from the outcome of the discussion, it is worthwhile observing Matteo Ricci's note about the wonder of his interlocutors on hearing him «argomentar tão a proposito com doutrina e argumentos tirados dos seus mesmos livros». Such importance seems to further sustain the Macerata Jesuit's project to graft the fundamental truths of Christianity firstly those accessible to the light of reason, like the existence of God and the immortality of the soul – on the substratum of ancient Chinese learning, posing again substantially that same process that, in the medieval west, through the Saint Thomas of Aquinas synthesis and its subsequent elaboration in scholastic theology, had brought about the reception and integration into the Christian doctrine of the great philosophical and cultural tradition of Greek and Latin classicism<sup>108</sup>.

In short, Matteo Ricci aimed to reproduce *in partibus infidelium*, and in the awareness that «the quality of this realm is different from all the others in the world»<sup>109</sup>, that same process of inculturalisation of the Gospel, that in those very same years, in Europe, the Society of Jesus was developing in education and learning, by means of the synthesis which culminated in the definite edition of the *Ratio studiorum* in 1599, of the *studia humanitatis* derived from the

<sup>106</sup> «Entre as outras pessoas graves està nesta cidade hum grande letrado, dalcunha *Chão*, que chamão comunemente *Chãopuy*, o qual tem escrito perto de trinta volumes de varios livros de muita erudição entre elles pera emprimir, e he homen muito estimado e tido por pessoa de boa vida, e faz profissão de grande pregador e mestre na doutrina dos letrados» (Letter from Matteo Ricci to Duarte de Sande, Nancian 29 August 1595, cit., p. 156).

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 156-157. The quotation is from Chãopuy in *Chuijjan lu* by Yu Wenbao. See J. Gernet, *Chine et Christianisme. Action et réaction*, Paris, Gallimard, 1982, p. 225.

<sup>108</sup> See P.O. Kristeller, *Le thomisme et le pensée italienne de la Renaissance*, Paris, Vrin, 1967.

<sup>109</sup> Letter from Matteo Ricci to Girolamo Costa, Nancian 15 October 1596, in *Opere storiche del P. Matteo Ricci S.I.*, cit., vol. II, p. 231.

classics, that is of the ethic teaching, the cultural models of the pagan tradition, together with theology and the principles of the Christian faith.

As a further confirmation that this was, in fact, Ricci's ambitious plan, we must signal his letter to the superior general Claudio Acquaviva sent from Nancian in November 1595: after having stressed with which importance, among the intellectuals and in the Chinese culture, the *tetrabiblio*, or the *Quattro Libri* of Confucian inspiration and other fundamental texts of the antique Chinese culture, were held, he affirmed: «[I letterati e intellettuali] sono tutti sopra un *tetrabiblio*, che noi lo chiamavamo, e per oltre questo libro morale vi sono anco sei dottrine antiche. [...] Ma come noi vogliamo provar le cose della nostra santa fede per suoi libri ancora, in questi anni passati mi feci dichiarare da buoni maestri oltre il *tetrabiblio* anco tutte le sei dottrine, e notai molti passi in tutte esse, che favoriscono alle cose della nostra fede, come della unità di Dio, della immortalità dell'anima, della gloria de' beati etc. E quando parlo con questi letterati, gli soglio domandare qual è la sua dottrina, e per essa gli provo quello che voglio provare. Con questo non solo diedi buon principio alle cose della fede, ma anco inavvedutamente gli confirmai la loro opinione che pensano che io leggendo un libro mi resta nella memoria»<sup>110</sup>.

Ricci's growing awareness that the adaptation to China's uses and customs according to the strategy introduced by Valignano, was not in itself enough, and that, if he really wanted to consolidate the Chinese mission «sì per radicarla di più, sì anco per cominciare in più parti puoco a puoco a seminare la parola d'Iddio in questo amplissimo regno»<sup>111</sup>, he needed to start a slow, difficult and indispensable process of the inculturalisation of the Gospel, led him to be more cautious and prudent about further prospects: «E se bene non esplichiamo sinora tutti i misterj della nostra santa fé – in October 1596 he wrote to father Acquaviva– con tutto andiamo ponendo i fondamenti principali, che è Iddio creatore del cielo e della terra, che l'anima è immortale, che ha premio de' buoni e de' mali, cose tutte incognite e non credute sinora da loro; [...] e ci pare in questo principio cominciare da cose, che anco con ragioni possiamo confirmare»<sup>112</sup>.

The changing previous prevision and expectations espresses by Ricci in the span o f his twenty five years in China must be read in the light of this. if, in fact, in 1583 from Macao a young and enthusiastic Matteo Ricci optimistic about the outcome of the mission that awaited him could affirm without doubt: «Sarà

<sup>110</sup> Letter from Matteo Ricci to Claudio Acquaviva, Nancian 4 November 1595, cit., pp. 206-207. *Quattro Libri or Sse-sciu were Ta-hso, Cung-yung, Lung-yü and Méng-tse*. The «six ancient doctrines» or «sei classici» to which Ricci refers were *Ye-king* or *Libro delle metamorfosi*, *Sciù-king* or *Libro delle storia*, *Sci-king* or *Libro delle canzoni*, il *Li-ki* or *Libro dei riti*, *Yo-king* or *Libro della musica* and *Chun-tsiu* or *Annali del reame* di Lu. See E. Pound, *The classic anthology defined by Confucius*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 1954.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>112</sup> Letter from Matteo Ricci to Claudio Acquaviva, Nancian 13 October 1596, cit., p. 225.

facile, se entriamo in contatto con loro [le popolazioni cinesi], convertirli»<sup>113</sup>; very different were the evaluations he formulated in the following years. So, while in the letter he sent from Sciaoceo to father Acquaviva, in December 1593, he still affirmed: «Mi duole di non produrre [da] questa terra nove che dieno maggior contento ai nostri amatissimi padri e fratelli; pure bisogna che habbiamo patientia mentre si semina»<sup>114</sup>; in the one written a few years later in Nanchin in August 1599, the same evangelical image of soling so that others might rape the fruits seems to be in doubt or perhaps delayed in time: «Quanto a quello che mi chiede che là vorrebbero vedere alcune nove della Cina di alcuna grande conversione – scriveva Matteo Ricci –, sappia che io con tutti gli altri che qui stiamo, non sogniamo altra cosa né di giorno né di notte che questo; e per questo qua stiamo lasciando la nostra patria e i cari amici, e ci siamo già vestiti e calzati di habito di Cina, e non parliamo, né mangiamo, né bevemo, né habitiamo in casa se non al costume della Cina; ma non vuole anco Iddio si veda più frutto che tanto delle nostre fatiche, sebbene con tutto questo ci pare che il frutto che facciamo si può comparare et anteporre con altre missioni, che al parere fanno cose meravigliose; perciocché il tempo in che stiamo nella Cina non è anco di raccolta, anzi né di seminare, ma di aprire i boschi fieri e combattere con le fiere e serpi velenosi che qua dentro stanno. Altri verranno con la gratia del Signore che scriveranno le conversioni e fervori de' christiani; ma sappi V. R. che fu necessario prima fare questo che noi facciamo»<sup>115</sup>.

It seems possible to say at this point that differently from what Adriano Prospero suggested some years ago, there is no bitter irony in Ricci's famous letter of October 1595<sup>116</sup>, where he, answering one of his western correspondents about the fruits obtained in this Chinese mission wrote: «Non mi dimandi V.R. quante migliaia di anime ho convertito, ma solo a quanti milioni di huomini habbiamo fatto udire la prima volta questa antichissima nova che nel cielo vi è un Dio creator del cielo e della terra, alla qual nova vanno molti alzando gli occhi e confessano, vere *Deus aliquis creavit coelum et terram et omnia sapientissime gubernat*. E già nella Cina, regno sì grande, non è tanto disconosciuto et inaudito il nome di Dio, quanto fu tanti secoli passati»<sup>117</sup>.

Actually, the Macerata Jesuit's state of mind is the authentically Ignatian one: that of a person who has embraced the evangelical ideal of the *unum ovile et unus pastor* and has assimilated the post Trent prospect of the authentically universalistic dimension of the *missio ecclesiae*. A state of mind that is largely reflected in one of the last letters sent by Ricci to the superior general of the

<sup>113</sup> Letter from Matteo Ricci to Martino de Fornari, Macao 13 February 1583, *ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>114</sup> Letter from Matteo Ricci to Claudio Acquaviva, Sciaoceo 10 December 1593, *ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>115</sup> Letter from Matteo Ricci to Girolamo Costa, Nanchino 14 August 1599, *ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>116</sup> See Prospero, *Il missionario*, cit., p. 199.

<sup>117</sup> Letter from Matteo Ricci to Girolamo Benci, Nanchino 7 October 1595, in *Opere storiche del P. Matteo Ricci S.I.*, cit., vol. II, p. 164.

Society of Jesus, father Claudio Acquaviva, he who had been the promoter of Valignano's 'new course' for the missions in the East Indies and the constant upholder of what difficult and ambitious process of inculturalisation set in motion in China by the Macerata Jesuit.

In what, in some ways, may be considered a spiritual testament Matteo Ricci wrote: «Tutto questo volsi scrivere a V. P. accioché intenda meglio lo stato di questa missione, e non faccia conto del frutto che qui si fa solo dal numero de christiani, ma dal gran fondamento che si va facendo per una cosa molto grande, e per l'altra parte mandi qua huomini di buono ingegno e letterati per potere edificare molto meglio di quello che habbiamo fatto i fondamenti, che spero il Signore con questo sarà servito molto, e la Compagnia vedrà il frutto di tanti travagli che in questi principij patisce»<sup>118</sup>.

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<sup>118</sup> Letter from Matteo Ricci to Claudio Acquaviva, Pechino 22 August 1608, *ibid.*, pp. 367-368.