

WESTERN RESPONSES TO ‘ORIENTAL’ RELIGIOUS CHALLENGES: THE CONTRASTING CULTURAL VISIONS OF POLO AND RICCI

Mark DeStephano, S.J., Ph.D.

Professor and Chairman

Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures, Asian Studies Program
Saint Peter's University, Jersey City, New Jersey, U.S.A.

Abstract: The approaches that Marco Polo and Matteo Ricci, S.J. take represent distinct responses to Oriental challenges to the Roman Catholic faith, and correspond to the religious thinking of their ages. Polo, who dictates his experiences to Rustichello da Pisa shortly after the final Christian defeat of the last Crusade in Acre (1291), responds to the need to demonize the Oriental “Other” – at least in terms of religious doctrine -- by bolstering the European myths of the “monstrous races” beyond the Holy Land, and by creating new myths of miraculous events in which Christianity is shown to be more powerful than “pagan” faiths, thus offering good reasons to convert to the “True Faith.” Ricci, on the other hand, writes from the experience of the Counter Reformation, in which the Roman Catholic Church – and the Jesuits in particular – made a conscious effort to engage with other religious traditions positively to convince those who were in error to follow the “True Church.” The Jesuit approach was unique in that it involved a sophisticated postcolonial approach to creative dialogue, seeking common intellectual and doctrinal ground, and then attempting to prove philosophically, ethically, and theologically that the “Other” was no different than the Westerner. The work of Polo, which in many ways bolsters the colonial project of the Catholic Western powers that were at war with Islam, contrasts sharply with Ricci’s project, which, while thoroughly Roman Catholic, seeks to honor and preserve the traditions of Chinese thought and custom. Polo and Rustichello make use of colonialist techniques in *Il Milione* in order to identify the “Other” clearly, whereas in his *Treatise on friendship*, Ricci employs postcolonial strategies to eliminate the discourse of alterity and create a vision of respect and equality that allows for true dialogue and the construction of a discourse of unity.

Keywords: Marco Polo, Matteo Ricci, China, Jesuit missions, friendship, travels

Specific conference track and conference venue: Education, Humanities and Social Sciences/Asian Studies

Introduction

Located as it is in the center of the European Mediterranean, Italy was destined to be a cultural and economic bridge between the West and the East, a position it established in the ancient past and which it thoroughly solidified during the Middle Ages. It should not be surprising, then, that, arguably, the two principal agents of the European cultural and religious outreach to the East were Italians: Marco Polo (1254-1324) and the Jesuit, Matteo Ricci (1552-1610). Polo, who is known to the world because of Rustichello da Pisa’s (fl. late 13th century) literary rendition of his travels, *Il Milione* (*The Travels*, 1298-1299), offered the world one of the first accounts of the wonders of the East, with all of its exotic goods, rugged landscapes, curious legends, and strange peoples. Over two hundred years later, Ricci, in a far more intimate tract, his *On friendship* (*Jiao You Lun*, 1595), spoke eloquently and persuasively to his Chinese hosts of the nature of friendship, underlining not the differences between the experiences of East and West, but rather those which united them.

While modern scholars have shown that *Il Milione* is often devoid of accurate geographical and historical information, it remains one of the great documents of its age in that it enshrines the experiences and attitudes of one

medieval Italian who wished to bring the wonders of the East to the attention of his fellow Europeans.¹ Perhaps more important, *Il Milione* documents how Polo and the members of the expeditions in which he participated thought about the Oriental “Other,” the strange peoples who sounded, looked, and acted nothing like their European counterparts. So great was the Europeans’ interest in the theme that, even while Polo was still living, the book had been translated into many European languages, spreading his message of the “Other” to Roman Catholics throughout the West. Great seafaring states such as Genoa, Pisa, Amalfi, Gaeta, Trani, Noli, and Ancona had all contributed to the Italian peninsula’s wealth and power, and had acted as bearers of Western thought and culture. Yet of all the maritime states that adorned the Italian crown, none was wealthier, more powerful, or more ambitious than Venice, which came to rival Rome itself in prestige and political influence. Venice’s prestige and power were, of course, born of its enormous wealth, which it had accrued through several centuries of trade with the East, as Venetian ships linked the European mainland with the riches of Egypt and the Silk Road.²

But there was conflict in the air. Faced with mounting incursions by Muslim invaders from the East, Christian Europe found itself increasingly under attack. Thus, in 1095 Pope Urban II invoked the Crusades so as to repel further Muslim advances against the Byzantine Empire, and to maintain an open passageway for Christians to the Holy Land. Response throughout Catholic Europe was resoundingly favorable, and thousands of zealous warriors for Christ were mobilized in almost every Christian kingdom. Reaction in Venice, however, was much less precipitous. Relying as it did on trade with the East, and, most notoriously, with the Muslim infidel, Venice’s preparations for war were much slower than those of other kingdoms, and indicated a distinct lack of commitment, not because of doctrine, but because of the harmful effects of war on its trading ventures.³ J.J. Norwich observes that by 1097, Christian warriors from other kingdoms were already fighting on the Anatolian Peninsula,

But Venice held back. Her own Eastern markets were already assured – particularly Egypt, which had become a major clearing-house for spices from India and the southern seas, providing in return a ready market for European timber and metal. Her people were too hard-headed to set much store by emotional outbursts about the salvation of Christendom; war was bad for trade, and the goodwill of the Arabs and the Seljuk Turks – who in the past quarter century had overrun the greater part of Anatolia – was essential if the caravan routes to Central Asia were to be kept open. (1989, p.77)

Although it was one of the great powers of Catholic Europe, Venice had always maintained, and would continue to enjoy, excellent trade relations with Arabs and with other merchants from every part of the East, oftentimes to the great distress of the Holy See, which was particularly angered by Venice’s trade in arms and European slaves with the Muslim enemies of Christendom, even to the extent of supplying military intelligence to them (Durant, 1950, p. 711).

By the late thirteenth century, Venetian trade and military and naval power were especially prized, as Christendom was now beset from every point in the East by two powerful and aggressive enemies: the Muslims of northern Africa, Central Asia, and the Levant, and the Tartars of Mongolia and the Central Asian Steppes. It was in response to this growing crisis, political and religious, that the Fourth Crusade had been proclaimed, and which sharply focused the attention of Europe on events that were taking place along the peripheries of its eastern borders. The intensity of the Christian response to the growing expansion of Islam and the Tartar invasions is succinctly delineated in the bull “*Clamat in auribus*,” issued by Pope Alexander VI in 1260:

There rings in the ears of all, and rouses to vigilant alertness those who are not befuddled by mental torpor, a terrible trumpet of dire forewarning which, corroborated by the evidence of events, proclaims with so unmistakable a sound the wars of universal destruction wherewith the scourge of Heaven’s wrath in the hands of the inhuman Tartars, erupting as it were from the secret confines of Hell, oppresses and

¹ For further discussion of the relative value of Polo’s text, see Critchley, 1992, pp. x-xvii; 178-179 and Wood, 1996, pp. 64-80; 140-155).

² Venice’s unique role as a power dependent exclusively on trade for its very existence is discussed in Crowley, 2013, pp. 3-19).

³ J.J. Norwich notes that Venice’s hesitation to engage in war against the Muslims was obvious: “There can be few clearer indications of the spirit in which Venice had embarked on the Crusades than the fact that, six months after her fleet had set out, it still had not struck a single blow for Christendom, nor indeed even reached the Holy Land. As always in her history, Venice put her own interests first” (1989, p. 78).

crushes the earth that it is no longer the task of Christian people to prick up their ears so as to receive surer tidings of these things, as though they were still in doubt, but their need is rather for admonition to take provident action against a peril impending and palpably approaching. (as qtd. in the Intro. to Polo, 1958, p.11).

Tens of thousands of Crusaders heeded the pope's words and call to arms and embarked on Christendom's mission to expel the Muslim infidel from the Holy Land and defeat the barbarous Tartars. Quick to respond to the needs of the Christian warriors, Venice skillfully negotiated its way to becoming the Crusaders' principal supplier of goods, as well as negotiating contracts to rebuild, with Venetian materials, the ruins of the Byzantine Empire and the Christian outposts in the Holy Land, thereby catapulting itself into the position of the dominant economic power in Europe (Norwich, 1989, pp. 79-85; Boulnois, 2004, p. 339; Pirenne, 1956, pp. 186-188). To the dismay of Christian Europe, the great Crusader stronghold of Acre had fallen in 1291, portending the definitive loss of the Holy Land. It was in this environment, and with the unimaginable treasures of celebrated Eastern cities like Samarkand, Baghdad, Khan-balik beckoning, that two Venetian traders, Messers Marco and Maffeo Polo, set out in 1260 C.E. on a trading mission to Constantinople.

Body of the Paper

The Adventures of the Polo Family in the East

Il Milione is, first and foremost, a fine example of medieval travel literature, which for the scholar is also a fascinating study in the pitfalls and opportunities of manuscript transmission. The work's "Prologue" describes the book's genesis, and how Messer Marco Polo, "who has seen them with his own eyes," will relate "all the great wonders and curiosities of Greater Armenia and Persia, of the Tartars and of India, and of many other territories" (33).⁴ The narrative voice urges its reader to "have it read to you," and, in what is now a famous assertion, affirms that, "I would have you know that from the time when our Lord God formed Adam our first parent with His hands down to this day there has been no man, Christian or Pagan, Tartar or Indian, or of any race whatsoever, who has known or explored so many of the various parts of the world and its great wonders as this same Messer Marco Polo" (1958, p. 33). Given this fact, Marco decided that he must create a written record, "... made up of all the things he had seen and had heard by true report, so that others who have not seen and do not know them may learn them from this book" (1958, p. 33). To do so, Marco turned to the celebrated French romance-writer Rustichello da Pisa, whom he had met in a Genoese prison after having literally walked into a war between Venice and Genoa upon his return from the East. As we shall see, Rustichello's narrative style and adducing of facts may explain, in part, the presentation of information pertaining to religion, western and eastern, in *The Travels*.

Il Milione states that around 1260, Niccolò, the father of Marco (1220-1294), and Maffeo, Marco's uncle (1230-1309), set out on a trading mission from Constantinople to the city of Sudak, and then continued on to the court of Barka Khan, where they were well received. After one year, war erupted between Barka and the powerful Khan of the Levantine Tartars, Hulagu, making it impossible for the brothers to travel in a westerly direction. Thus, they determined to travel east in search of new markets, coming to Bukhara where, unable to travel in either direction, they remained for three years, learning Tartar and the customs of the region. An envoy of Hulagu invited the Venetians to join him on his mission to the court of the Great Khan, Kublai, who had never met any "Latin," assuring them that he would surely welcome them. And welcome them Kublai Khan did, asking the Polos numerous questions about the customs and religion of the West, and eventually charging them with a diplomatic mission to the Pope:

He [Kublai] sent word to the Pope that he should send up to a hundred men learned in the Christian religion, well versed in the seven arts, and skilled to argue and demonstrate plainly to idolaters and those of other persuasions that their religion is utterly mistaken and that all the idols which they keep in their houses and worship are things of the Devil – men able to show by clear reasoning that the Christian religion is better than theirs. Furthermore the Great Khan directed the brothers to bring oil from the lamp

⁴ All quotations are taken from Marco Polo, *The Travels*, trans. & intro. by Ronald Latham, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1958.

that burns above the sepulcher of God in Jerusalem. (1958, p. 16)

Having received their charge, and now acting as diplomats with full credentials, immunities, and securities, the Polos set out to complete their mission; but they were not to find immediate success. Going first to Ayas, then to Acre, where they arrived in 1269, and finally to Jerusalem, the brothers learned that Pope Clement IV had died in the previous year, leaving them to report to the legate of the Roman Catholic Church in Egypt, Tedaldo Visconti of Piacenza (1210-1276). Learned and cultured, Tedaldo appreciated the significance of the Polos' contacts and encouraged them to wait for the election of a new Pope. In the meantime, Tedaldo did everything in his power to encourage them in their intentions to return to Kublai Khan's court, and to bring the "true faith" to the people of Central Asia.

In this first report of the Great Khan's interest in the forms of government and the religious practices of the West, it is interesting to note the tone of the text. In what would appear to be initial discussions that would allow the ruler to further understand the way of life of the strange men who stood before him, the Great Khan appears to be seeking ways to discredit the religious traditions of the East -- his own territories -- as practices that are false, misguided, and even evil. Rustichello positions Kublai Khan in such a manner as to demonize the beliefs of the East, something which he appears to know already, but which he wishes to corroborate with the help of learned men from the West. In a clear example of colonial discourse, by which the Great Khan, thanks to the presence of his visitors from the West, comes to understand the error of the religious practices of the East, the Khan also obliquely affirms that "the Christian religion is better than theirs" (1958, p. 16).⁵ Presumably, the Polos know little or nothing of the religions of the East, but, as good Catholics, especially in the face of two hundred years of conflict with Muslims and Tartars, and in the current environment of the Fourth Crusade, they must condemn the practices of other faiths, thereby seeking to strengthen the stature of Christianity in Eastern Courts.

After three years of controversy and schism, the very same Tedaldo of Visconti was proclaimed Pope Gregory X in 1271, and the Polos, now with the full backing of the new pontiff, returned to the East, this time as envoys of the Church of Rome. Departing for the East in that same year, the Polos were not accompanied by the one hundred learned men of the Church sought by Kublai, but only by two distinguished priests who were to bring the light of the faith to the Tartar court. Of greater importance to our story was the addition of seventeen-year-old Marco, son of Niccolò, to the returning expedition, along with his father and uncle. Stopping at Jerusalem to gather oil from the lamp above Jesus' sepulcher, as requested by the Great Khan, the Polos journeyed overland along one section of the the Silk Road, where they encountered many dangers and narrowly avoided enslavement or death. After three and a half years they finally reached Kublai's palace at Shangdu, where young Marco quickly gained the admiration of the ruler and his ministers. According to Marco, he himself was eventually named envoy of the Great Khan's court, being sent to what is today southern and eastern China, Burma, India, and many other parts of Central Asia. Eventually, after twenty-four years spent in Asia (1271-1295), the Polos were asked by the Great Khan to escort the wedding party of the bride-to-be of his great nephew, the ruler of Persia. They traveled by junk along what is today Singapore and Sumatra, and in various port cities in southern India and Sri Lanka, eventually arriving in Hormuz. From there, the Polos crossed by land to the Black-Sea port of Trabizond (modern Trabzon), and from there to Constantinople and finally to Venice.

While imprisoned together, Marco Polo narrated his adventures in Asia to Rustichello, who in turn produced an Italianate-French text known as the *Divisement du monde* (*Description of the world*), and is conserved in Paris in the oldest surviving manuscript [F]. Scholars have proven that the text shows signs of abridgement, which can be remediated by comparison with two other manuscripts, a Latin compendium [L] and a corrupt version in Venetian dialect [V] (Polo, 1958, p.24). Yet another, more detailed, text is the Italian translation of Polo's work by Giovanni Battista Ramusio (1485-1557), manuscript [R], which contains much material that is not found in other manuscripts. According to Ramusio, he based his text on a Latin manuscript "of marvelous antiquity," which Professor L.F. Benedetto identified as yet another Latin compendium [Z] (Polo, 1958, p. 25). Finally, there is a second Venetian manuscript [VB], which accounts for some of the differences between what is found in manuscript [F] and that which is contained in Ramusio's text, manuscript [R].

⁵ Critic Bill Aschcroft has written various studies of colonial (colonialist) discourse, which may be found in several of his works: (1999a) *The empire writes back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures*, pp.177-180; (1999b) *Key concepts in post-colonial studies*, pp. 41-43; and, (2001) *Post-colonial transformation*, pp. 9, 38, 46.

When considering the oldest manuscript, that of Rustichello, the art of the romance-writer is evident in the text's conversational and flowing style, its dramatic highs and lows, and its dazzling descriptions of the exotic wonders of the East. Ronald Latham has shown that many parts of *Il Milione* have been taken by Rustichello from his chivalric romances, especially the *Roman de Roi Artus (Romance of King Arthur)* (Polo, 1958, pp. 17-19). For example, it has been shown that Rustichello's description of the Polos' triumphant arrival in Venice after their first trip to the court of Kublai Khan is an almost identical copy of his presentation of the arrival of Tristan at the court of King Arthur at Camelot (Polo, 1958, p. 17). Many of the descriptions in *Il Milione* have been taken from stock formulae of knight errantry, and, except for the changes of geographical settings, portray battle scenes that have also been taken from the pages of Rustichello's romances of chivalry. Latham has shown that the presentations of exotic places along the Silk Road are interspersed with well-known Middle-Eastern legends that are recounted in other Eastern works of literature, and are not unique to Marco Polo's narrative. Among these may be counted three of the most famous "wonders" recorded by Polo: (1) the miracle of the mountain; (2) the tale of the Magi; and, (3) the "Paradise" of Alamut (Polo, 1958, pp.17-18). Latham speculates that Eastern legends may have been brought back to Europe by way of the Holy Land, which would be very possible given the large numbers of Crusaders returning from the religious wars over a period of almost three hundred years. This observation, teamed with Latham's explanation that Polo tended to classify people according to religion, rather than race, color, or culture, underscores the concern of the writers of the various manuscripts to affirm the superiority of the Christian religion (Polo, 1958, pp.19-20). In particular, Polo frequently signals Muslims as rivals and enemies of the "true faith." Finally, Latham has shown that as Polo's narrative discusses geographical areas that are farther east than the Holy Land – especially as these descriptions relate to the far reaches of Central Asia and China – religious digressions that are re-workings of common Middle-Eastern legends become fewer (Polo, 1958, p. 18). It is partially on the basis of this fact that Frances Wood has questioned whether, indeed, Marco Polo did go to the Middle Kingdom.⁶

Christians and Muslims in Conflict

If, as some assert, the Italian title of Polo's work – *Il Milione* – is based on the nickname "*Milione*" ("Million") given to Polo because of his outstanding storytelling abilities (or, perhaps, his enormous exaggerations!), it should come as no surprise that much of the more provocative and interesting material in the work should be based on questions of religion, ethics, and morality.⁷ Most of these stories pit Christianity against Islam or the religions of the "idolaters" (largely Hindus and Buddhists), and "prove" either the superiority of the Christian faith or the corruption of Islam and "idolatry," such as we find in the three "wonders" previously mentioned.

The "miracle of the mountain" recounts the story of a ruler who was a "follower of Mahomet," the Caliph of Baghdad, who hated Christians and constantly thought of how to convert them to Islam. Polo adds a telling comment: "Indeed, it is a fact that all the Saracens in the world are agreed in wishing ill to all the Christians in the world" (Polo, 1958, p. 54). The Caliph and his advisors found a text in the Gospels that stated that if a Christian had faith as small as a mustard seed, by praying he could make two mountains come together (Mt. 17: 20-21). The Caliph convened all the Christians of the city and ordered them, "Either you will move the mountain which you see or I will make you all die an evil death. For, if you do not make it move, you will show that you have no faith; you will all be converted to the good law that Mahomet has given us, and will have true faith and be saved. I will allow you ten days' grace" (Polo, 1958, p.54). All the Christians feared for their lives, and began a solemn period of eight days and nights of supplication. An angel then appeared to a bishop, and told him to speak to a one-eyed shoemaker, and to tell him to pray to make the mountain move. Once, while fitting a woman for a shoe, he had seen her leg and her foot and was tempted, so the shoemaker put out an eye with an awl. Conscious of being a sinner, he at first demurred, but later did as he was asked. On the day of confrontation, the shoemaker fell to his knees and cried out, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, I command thee, mountain, move." And it did

⁶ For further discussion see Wood, 1996, pp. 121-131;140-151).

⁷ Frances Wood explains one possible understanding of the term: "He [Ramusio] discussed the appellation '*il milione*', which was apparently given to Marco during his lifetime (and which is commemorated in the popular name for the Polo family house in Venice, the Corte de Milione), and said that it was because whenever he told of the great wealth of the Mongol Khans, he counted it in millions of gold coins" (Wood, 1995, p.41; Polo, 1958, p.19). Another possible explanation of the name is that the Polo family in Venice, wishing to distinguish itself from among the many branches of the family, called itself "Emilione," or may have named itself after the Venetian palace which the family had brought, which was called "Il Milione" (Larner, 1999, p. 44).

move, which led to the conversion of many Saracens and of the Caliph himself, although secretly, to the Christian faith. It is interesting to note that this legend only appears in manuscript [Z], an ancient Latin compendium.

Shortly after the “miracle of the mountain,” listeners are told of further evils of the followers of the Muslim faith: “The law that Mahomet has given them lays down that any harm they may do to one who does not accept their law, and any appropriation of his goods, is no sin at all. And if they suffer death or injury at the hands of Christians, they are accounted martyrs” (Polo, 1958, p. 57). Polo adds another salient point about the Muslim faith:

When they are on the point of death, up comes their priest and asks whether they believe that Mahomet was the true messenger of God; if they answer, ‘Yes,’ then he tells them that they are saved. That is why they are converting the Tartars, because they are allowed great license to sin and according to their law no sin is forbidden. (1958, pp. 57-58)

Latham notes that the last sentence above only appears in manuscripts [V] and [R]. While Ramusio’s text [R] shows a marked interest in exalting Christianity as the “true faith,” it also offers various examples of the demonization of Islam, such as we have just seen. Although they despise Christianity, Polo recounts that Muslims are not above tricking one another for their own ends. Such is the case of Sheik Alaodin of Mulehet, who drugged young men from the ages of twelve to twenty, having them brought to a Muslim “Paradise” of his own creation, but constructed according to all of the promises of the Prophet Mohammed: a place with beautiful women to fulfill the men’s every wish, and a place flowing with water, wine, milk, and honey. Then, when he wished to test them to find the most efficient assassin, so as to eliminate his enemies, the sheik would have them drugged again and brought back to the court. Told to murder certain individuals, the young men were anxious to do the sheik’s bidding so as to be killed in the process and then return to “Paradise” for fulfilling the sheik’s holy command. Such was the infamy of Sheik Alaodin (Polo, 1958, pp. 70-73). Polo has yet again offered an example of the treachery of Islam and the facile ways in which Muslims achieve their own ends by perpetrating dastardly deeds in the name of Mohammed. Such examples of perfidy should alert Christian readers of the West of the true evil that lurks behind the exotic, rich, and sensuous products that were unloaded from the ships of Western merchants.

The Challenge of the Tartars

But the Muslims were not the only strange “Others” to be feared. There were also the “idolaters” of Central Asia and Cathay who had awesome powers that were unknown to Westerners. Polo tells of other strange marvels of the court of the Great Khan:

The wise men who do this are called Tibetans and Kashmiris; these are two races of men who practice idolatry. They know more of the diabolic arts and enchantments than any other men. They do what they do by the arts of the Devil; but they make others believe that they do it by great holiness and by the work of God. For this reason they go about filthy and begrimed, with no regard for their own decency or for the persons who behold them; they keep the dirt on their faces, never wash or comb, but always remain in a state of squalor... When a man is condemned to die and is put to death by the authorities, they take the body and cook and eat it. But if anyone dies a natural death, they would never think of eating him. (Polo, 1958, p. 110)

These “idolaters” possess the most remarkable powers, which are evident in the daily life of the court for all to see:

I assure you that, when the Great Khan is seated in his high hall at his table, which is raised more than eight cubits above the floor, and the cups are on the floor of the hall, a good ten paces distant from the table, and are full of wine and milk and other pleasant drinks, these *Bakhshi* contrive by their enchantment and their art that the full cups rise up of their own accord from the floor on which they have been standing and come to the Great Khan without anyone touching them. And this they do in the sight of 10,000 men. What I have told you is the plain truth without a word of falsehood. And those who are skilled in necromancy will confirm that it is perfectly feasible. (Polo, 1958, p. 110).

As we have seen, Polo continues the narrative of the corruption of Islam, which takes all of its strength from the Devil or from necromancy. Not only are these wicked practices common occurrences in the East, they also threaten the survival of Christianity there. Western Christians had hoped that they would find allies in the Tartars in their

struggle against the spread of Islam throughout the East, but Polo's tales of the "idolaters'" dalliances with the powers of evil and their plying of black magic offered little consolation or hope for union (Polo, 1958, p. 11; Larner, 1999, p. 16).

Even worse, the idolaters' magical powers diminished the possibility that mass conversions to the faith would be possible. Although the Great Khan had said that of all religions he admired Christianity the most because "... it commands nothing that is not full of all goodness and holiness," he was unable to embrace the faith publicly because of its apparent lack of power. Speaking frankly, the Great Khan explains his dilemma:

On what grounds do you desire me to become a Christian? You see that the Christians who live in these parts are so ignorant that they accomplish nothing and are powerless. And you see that these idolaters do whatever they will; and when I sit at table the cups in the middle of the hall come to me full of wine or other beverages without anyone touching them and perform many marvels. And, as you know, their idols speak and give them such predictions as they ask. (Polo, 1958, pp. 119-120)

Il Milione remains silent as to why Christians are unable to perform these feats but can only offer examples of miraculous interventions such as we have seen. It is because of this apparent lack of power that the Great Khan missions the Polos to go to the Pope, asking that he send the one hundred wise men to prove the superiority of the Christian faith in word and in deed. The Great Khan affirms that when the court witnesses the strength of the learned Christians and how they will demonstrate that the idolaters work their marvels through black magic, then he and all of his "barons" will accept baptism, thereby increasing greatly the number of Christians in the world (Polo, 1958, 120).

Polo makes several mentions of the legend of the Christian ruler Prester John, which was also a cause for concern among Western Christians. Introducing the Tartars, he recounts that they were tributaries of a certain "Ung Khan," "Prester John," and that Chinghiz (Ghengis) Khan sent emissaries to Prester John to ask for the hand of his daughter in marriage. Offended by the temerity of his underling, Prester John rebuffed the request arrogantly, threatening Ghengis with death. Thereupon, Ghengis prepared to attack the Christian king, gathering his diviners, both Christian and Saracen, so as to determine what the outcome of the struggle would be. The Saracens could not see the result; however, the Christians announced clearly that Ghengis would be victorious in battle against Prester John. And this is precisely what occurred, with Prester John being killed in the confrontation. Despite this distressing turn of events, Polo reports that the Christian descendants continue to live in the province of Tanduc, where the Christian descendant George continues to rule with the title "Prester John," as a 'vassal' of the Great Khan (Polo, 1958, pp. 93-96; 105-106). And thus, slender hope still existed that the East might accept the Christian faith and aid in the defeat of militant Islam.

As he describes the course of his journey through Asia, Polo tells other tales of Christian miracles, many of which have been conserved not in manuscript [F], but in extracts from the *Imago mundi* [I], a compendium of geographical texts collected by Fra Iacopo d'Acqui (? - 1334). As might be suspected, this text offers something of a close study of the differences between the Christian faith and that of the idolaters and Saracens. For example, [I] presents a discussion of the Tartars' tolerance in questions of religion, stating that, "They object to your speaking ill of their souls or intermeddling with their practices. But concerning God and your own soul do what you will, whether you be Jew or pagan, Saracen or Christian, who live among the Tartars" (Polo, 1958, p. 47). Manuscript [I] also includes a description of the place of Noah's Ark, and a warning that the Christians of Georgia are losing their faith because of a lack of preachers (Polo, 1958, p.49).

In Rustichello's "Prologue" to *Il Milione*, the writer affirms Marco Polo's motive for composing the book, as he had seen more of the world than any other person up to that time: "For this reason he made up his mind that it would be a great pity if he did not have written record made of all the things he had seen and had heard by true report, so that others who have not seen and do not know them may learn them from this book" (Polo, 1958, p. 33). Indeed, *Il Milione* is a rich deposit of information about many of the riches and wonders of the East. Nonetheless, there can be no doubt that the work is also an apologetic work of the Catholic faith that is a true product of the age of religious confrontation that was the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in both the West and the East.

Alessandro Valignano and the Jesuit Missions in the East

Famed Jesuit priest, mathematician, linguist, and theologian Matteo Ricci, like Marco Polo, also wished to spread a message, but by very different means. Ricci went to China, learned Mandarin, studied the country's literary, philosophical, and religious texts, and made peoples of both the East and the West his audience. He composed one of his seminal works, a treatise on friendship (*Jiao You Lun*, Nanchang, 1595), in Chinese, seeking to demonstrate that the Confucian "Three Bonds and Five Cardinal Relations" were the same as Christian doctrines on friendship and love, their only difference being their form of expression within their distinct cultural contexts.

Ricci was the product of the Jesuits' entirely new approach to evangelization in Asia. Following the death of the Jesuit missionary to the East, Francis Xavier, in 1552, the Jesuit Superior General, Everard Mercurian (reg. 1573-1580), sent the brilliant Italian nobleman Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606) to be the new Visitor⁸ for the Far East. Arriving in Goa on September 6, 1574, Valignano was little impressed, either by the Portuguese or by the indigenous peoples he encountered, being almost single-minded in his drive to evangelize China and Japan.⁹ Yet, his time in India was to prove invaluable, as the Visitor quickly surmised that radical measures would be necessary if the mission were to succeed. Not only did Valignano demand that potential missionaries study the regional languages of Tamil and Konkani, as Xavier has previously urged, he also insisted that they develop native Christian literature in these languages, such as catechisms, lives of the saints, pamphlets on the practice of confession, and books of apologetics. Even more far-reaching was Valignano's establishing of six regional seminaries, with instruction in each to be in the language of that region.¹⁰ And although it cannot be proven that the men had met, the Visitor's principles were carefully applied by the Jesuit who had been, perhaps, the most successful of all the Catholic missionaries in India, Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656).¹¹ Yet, Valignano's thinking must be understood as but an extension of an even greater project, that of the Superior General of the Jesuits, Everard Mercurian, who wished to distance the evangelizing mission of the Society of Jesus in Asia from the constraints and failures of the Iberian powers. Both Mercurian and Valignano possessed a clarity of vision and exquisite perception of Japanese and Chinese sensibilities, and recognized that the bullish exploits of the conquistadors and the abuses of the *padroado* and the *patronato* systems would only lead to a total failure of the evangelizing mission in the context of advanced civilizations such as those of Japan and China. Valignano even went so far as to warn Mercurian that an outlandish plot by a Spanish Jesuit in Mexico to invade China militarily with Spanish troops from the Americas should under no circumstances be permitted, as this would both offend the King of Portugal and lead to military defeat.¹²

Heading for Japan, Valignano first arrived in Macao in 1578, hoping to try a new approach to the China mission. Given the Jesuits' success in India, the Visitor now attempted to implement the strategy of inculturation in a Chinese context. To this end he summoned his countryman and former student, Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607), to come to Macao to undertake intensive studies of the Chinese language and classical Chinese texts. Valignano made another significant discovery in Macao, however: few Chinese were becoming Christians because the Portuguese were forcing converts to change their names to Portuguese names, and to change their dress and their customs to those of the Portuguese as well. Sensitive to the glories and traditions of China, the Visitor recognized clearly that this way of proceeding would never be accepted in the Middle Kingdom. Only a true cultural exchange would lead to the acceptance of Christianity in China, and, thus it was that the Jesuits on Macao humbled themselves to become the students of those whom they wished to bring into the faith.¹³

⁸ A "Visitor," in Jesuit parlance, is the office of regional superior and representative of the Superior General of the Society of Jesus.

⁹ Bangert, 1972, p. 84.

¹⁰ Witek, 2004, p. 823.

¹¹ For further discussion of DeNobili's approach to the mission in India, see Bangert, 1972, pp. 152-154.

¹² Witek, 2004, p. 827.

¹³ "Arriving in Macao in 1578 he [Valignano] had spent eleven months studying the government, laws and religion of China, as well as past missionary failures. Since the death of Francis Xavier numerous attempts had been made, chiefly by Jesuits and Franciscans, to obtain a footing, all without success, for the Chinese, cut off for centuries from the outside world, mindful of the recent Tartar invasions and terrified by the aggressive acts of Portuguese merchants, viewed all foreigners as enemies or evil spirits. But with Valignano past failures weighed less than the prospect of converting what he had learned to be the most populous, fertile and wealthy kingdom of the world, its people industrious and peaceful, its government in the hands of philosophers whose learning, order and prudence won his admiration. After a detailed, empirical study of the difficulties involved, he decided to attempt to realize Francis Xavier's dream along entirely new lines. Missionaries in the past had been arrested as spies preparing another Portuguese attack and, unable to explain themselves, sent back to Macao. Valignano believed China, which

New Jesuit Approaches in the China Mission: Ruggieri and Ricci

Ruggieri rather quickly sought to establish a Jesuit residence on the mainland, but, like his predecessors, he was flatly denied permission by Chinese authorities. Ruggieri was humble enough to realize that, although he was a gifted linguist, he struggled with the challenges of learning Chinese and made but slow progress.¹⁴ In a moment of great clarity, he requested that his friend and former companion, Matteo Ricci, be brought to Macao so that both men could study together and prepare themselves for a renewed mission to the mainland.¹⁵ Once again, Valignano's influence can be seen in the formation and choice of Ricci, who, with Ruggieri, had also been a novice¹⁶ under the Visitor back in Italy. It was Valignano who now revolutionized missionary outreach in Asia because of his immense respect for the ancient cultures of Japan and China. Above all, Valignano understood the need for Jesuit missionaries to prepare themselves for their mission by first engaging in extended studies of the languages, cultures, and customs of the lands they hoped to evangelize.¹⁷ If they were to work with the Chinese, the Jesuits needed to understand, appreciate, and love the people and culture they were seeking to join. The Visitor was meticulous in his selection of his missionary candidates, only accepting the best of men, who had distinguished themselves by their holiness, their flexibility, and their linguistic, mathematical, and scientific abilities.¹⁸

Together, Ruggieri and Ricci made great strides in their study of the Chinese language and of classical Chinese texts. Ricci, who is believed to have possessed a photographic memory, made astonishing progress in his mastery of Chinese, giving the Jesuits greater access to the local population.¹⁹ By 1582, Ruggieri had ventured as far as Zhaoqing, in Guangdong Province, visiting many of the villages and towns along the route, but he was soon expelled by the governor-general of the Guangdong and Guangxi Provinces, only to be invited back to Zhaoqing the following year. The governor of Zhaoqing, Wang Pan, had heard of Ricci's remarkable mathematical and scientific acumen, and sent a soldier to bring the Jesuits to his home. Through their unassuming interactions with the Chinese, their demonstrations of Western scientific and mathematical curios, and their ability to discuss aspects of the Chinese classics, the Jesuits were granted permission in 1583 by the governor-general of Guangdong and Guangxi, Kuo Ying-p'ing, to establish their first permanent residence in Zhaoqing.²⁰ What is more, the Jesuits made it very clear to the governor that they were, first and foremost, men of God, who in no way wished to be a burden to their Chinese hosts.²¹ They had shaven heads and faces, wore the gray robes of Buddhist *bonzes*, and observed all of the proper

practiced religious toleration and admired learning, would be naturally well disposed to Christian ideals. These, so far, had been overshadowed by piracy and aggression. Missionaries therefore must achieve an almost impossible feat, which no Westerner had ever before attempted: they must learn to read, write and speak the Chinese language. Only in this way could they explain their doctrine and good intentions, prove themselves men of learning and overcome the xenophobia aroused by the swashbuckling methods of early Portuguese traders" (Cronin, 1955, pp. 34-35).

¹⁴ Cronin, 1955, p. 35; Ryan, 2007, p. 20.

¹⁵ Witek, 2004, p. 826.

¹⁶ The first two years of formation of a Jesuit are called his "novitiate," and the candidate himself is called a "novice." After success training and discernment as a novice, a man is invited by the Society of Jesus to pronounce the perpetual vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

¹⁷ Saint Ignatius Loyola had, as early as early as 1547, urged Jesuit missionaries to send information about 'such things as the climate, diet, customs and character of the natives and of the peoples of India.' As quoted by Steven Harris in, "Mapping Jesuit science: The role of travel in the geography of knowledge" in O'Malley, 1999, p. 212.

¹⁸ For an extensive examination of the many practices implemented by Valignano, see Schütte, 1980. These practices are also discussed by Ross, 1994, "Alessandro Valignano," pp. 336-351.

¹⁹ In a challenge, Ricci made the following request to a crowd of onlookers: "If you will write down a list of characters with no connection between them – as many as five hundred – I will repeat them from memory." Vincent Cronin describes the conclusion of the events: "The guests welcomed the idea; paper, a brush and ink were brought in, and everyone wrote down in turn the first words that came into his head. After several pages had been covered, they were handed to Ricci. He read the nonsense through a single time and gave back the papers, so that the doctor could check his recitation. Then he repeated it word for word, his authoritative voice almost lending meaning to the Chinese gibberish," Cronin, 1955, p. 126.

²⁰ Up to this date, the Jesuits had made twenty-four attempts to establish themselves on the mainland. Witek, 2004, p. 820.

²¹ Through their translator, a Chinese Christian from Macau named Philip, Ruggieri made the following statement of the Jesuits intentions: "We are religious who serve the King of Heaven, and come from the farthest parts of the West

forms of obeisance, stressing both their humility and their concern for things sacred. It must be noted that, although the Jesuit strategy had been to convert the emperor to the Christian faith, the missionaries focused their initial efforts on evangelizing the south of China, especially the provinces of Guangdong, Fujian, and Guangxi, in the hope of gaining the favor of local mandarins through their faithful service.²² It is significant to note that, on one occasion in 1586, Ruggieri told Wang Pan the exact latitude and longitude of the latter's hometown. Wang Pan became infuriated, warning Ruggieri that foreigners were never to demonstrate such a knowledge of the interior regions of the country, as the local population perceived this as a preparatory plan for conquest. This was especially true in Guangdong Province, where foreigners were deeply mistrusted.²³ Beijing was but a distant glimmer in their minds; it was much later, after their fame had spread, that these Western advisors would be called to the capital to serve the emperor. By 1598, Jesuits had established missions in every province of the empire except Yunnan and Guizhou, even though their numbers never exceeded twenty-four men.²⁴

In 1589, Ruggieri and Ricci were expelled from Zhaoqing by Liu Chi-wen, the new governor-general of Guangdong and Guangxi, but were permitted to move to Shaoguan. From there, Ricci made trips to other areas, such as Nanchang, Nanjing, the Tongzhou District of Beijing, and Suzhou. He was finally invited to the Imperial Court by the emperor in 1601. As is well known, Ricci distinguished himself there, introducing many novelties of Western science and mathematics, especially through his re-publication of his world map in 1602 and 1603 – which challenged current imperial thinking about the geographical relationship of the Middle Kingdom to the rest of the world. Even more important was Ricci's ability to produce a more accurate lunar calendar than that of the emperor's current advisors, as the calendar was essential to the maintenance of imperial power, even to the point that the acceptance of the Chinese almanac by tributary states was understood as being proof of their vassalage.²⁵ What is more, Ricci and his Jesuit companions serviced the emperor's mechanical clocks, discussed Chinese and Christian philosophical issues with court intellectuals, and constructed sundials, globes, quadrants, and other astronomical instruments to give as gifts to the court mandarins.²⁶ Of course, many of the Jesuits' contacts in Beijing were thanks to the astronomer, mathematician, and agricultural scientist Xu Guangqi [Christian name, Paul] (1562-1633), who was their close collaborator, and who eventually became a Christian.

Ricci's *On friendship*

In what Ricci claims to have begun as a translation exercise to perfect his classical Chinese, *On friendship* became in its day one of the most influential books in Ming China (Ricci, 2009, p. 8). One year after its composition, and without Ricci's permission, the book was published by two Chinese friends of the Society of Jesus. So popular was the work that two other editions were issued in 1599 and 1601, respectively. That the Jesuit was keenly aware of the success of his work is evident from a letter he sent to superiors in Rome in 1599: "This *Friendship* has earned more credit for me and for our Europe than anything else that we have done; because the others do us credit for mechanical and artificial things of hands and tools; but this does us credit for literature, for wit, and for virtue" (Ricci, 2009, p. 3). So successful was the treatise that Chinese scholars not only applauded it but quickly excerpted it in some of the most influential collections of the day, such as Wang Kentang's (1549-1613) anthology, *Pen notes from the Lush Ridge studio*, and in the works of scholars such as Wu Congxian (1614), Chen Jiru (1615), Jiang Xuqi (1616), Feng Kebin (1622), Zhu Tingdan (1626), and Tao Zongyi (1646). The definitive edition of the work was produced by the accomplished convert to Christianity Li Zhizao (1565-1630) as part of his multivolume work of Jesuit Chinese writings, the *First writings of heavenly studies* (1629). The culmination of Ricci's success was the inclusion of *On friendship* in the first great imperial library, the *Compendium of ancient and modern books and illustrations*, which was published in 1725 (Ricci, 2009, p. 3). Finally, it is significant to note that Ricci's work became standard reading for all Jesuit missionaries, perhaps as part of their Chinese-language studies, and even inspired another Jesuit,

– that is, from India. Our journey has taken three or four years. We have heard of the good government of the Middle Kingdom, and all we ask is a piece of land away from the commercial distractions of Macao, where we can build a small house and pagoda. There we will remain serving Heaven until we die. We beg your Excellency to help us. We shall give no trouble. We intend to seek alms for our food and clothing and shall remain indebted to your Excellency for the rest of our lives." Cronin, 1955, p. 43.

²² Standaert, 1999, p. 358.

²³ Hsia, 2010, p. 102.

²⁴ Ryan, 60.

²⁵ Cronin, 1955, p. 230.

²⁶ Hsia, 2010, p. 212.

Martino Martini (1614-1661), to write a sequel to the work fifty years later, the *Pamphlet on gathering friends* (Ricci, 2009, p. 4). Ricci's work was the first European book to be included in Chinese *collectanea* and is little known by scholars, Eastern or Western.

In the prologue of *On Friendship*, Ricci explains that the Prince of Jian'an Commandery, Lord Qian Zhai, a cousin of the emperor, welcomed him warmly to his home, and proposed a discussion between friends, prompting Ricci to compose his celebrated treatise:

He sat me in the place of the honored guest, and there was much wine and merriment. Then, the prince came over to me, took my hands in his, and said: "Whenever there is a traveler who is a gentleman of virtue who deigns to visit my realm, I have never failed to host him and to treat him with friendship and respect. The nations of the Far West are nations of virtue and righteousness. I wish that I could hear what their discourses on the way of friendship are like." I, Matteo, thus withdrew into seclusion, and from the sayings I had heard since my youth, I compiled this Way of Friendship in one volume, which I respectfully present as follows. (Ricci, 2009, p. 89)

Ricci sets the tone of his work by first stating that he is from the "Far West," traveling "across the seas," and entering China "with respect for the learned virtue of the Son of Heaven of the great Ming dynasty." After traveling to various cities of the province, Ricci came upon West Mountain, a land that "must be the dwelling place of sages." It was here that Ricci took up residence, clearly wishing to embrace the life of the Chinese wise men who had sought refuge in this serene setting, where he would eventually write *On Friendship* (Ricci, 2009, p. 87).

Ricci's creation of the literary conceit of having a conversation on friendship with the "king" was not a fantastic invention. As Timothy Billings has explained in his outstanding introductory essay to his edition of *On friendship*, Ricci's choice of theme corresponded to a veritable wave of interest in works on friendship during the late years of the Ming dynasty (Ricci, 2009, p. 21).

Composed of one hundred passages, *On friendship* was often interpreted as being the thought of Ricci himself, yet in actuality, it is a compilation of the reflections of Western thinkers such as Aristotle, Plutarch, Herodotus, Cicero, Ambrose, Augustine, and Erasmus, interspersed with reflections from the Confucian classics (Ricci, 2009, p. 20).

In a letter of 1596 addressed to the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Claudio Acquaviva (1543-1615), Ricci discusses the genesis of his project, the extent of its influence, and something of the literary technique he employed to bring success to his work:

Last year, as an exercise, I wrote in Chinese several sayings *On Friendship*, selected from the best of our books; and since they were from so varied and eminent personages, the literati of this land were left astonished, and, in order to give it more authority, I wrote an introduction and gave it as a present to a certain relative of the king's, who also has the title of king. (Ricci, 2009, p. 8)

Little could Ricci have imagined that what began as a series of exercises in Chinese composition became, with the help of Chinese friends of the Jesuits, a masterwork that was considered by Chinese scholars to be one of the greatest works produced by the West. Timothy Billings theorizes that Ricci almost certainly knew of the popularity of the theme of friendship in Ming society, and, because of his study of the Confucian classics, also knew the opinions of many Chinese scholars (2009, p.23). Above all, Ricci must have been familiar with intellectual currents in Chinese society, and was keen to join in the discussion on friendship both to mingle with scholar-elites and to project a message of openness and rapprochement between West and East.

The theme of friendship had been richly cultivated by Chinese scholars, especially through the traditions of the *jiangxue*, philosophical debates, and the *jianghui*, debating societies, which had been made popular by the Neo-Confucian School of Mind (*Xinxue pai*). During the late Ming, especially in the south of China, meetings had been arranged in academies and temples in which groups of men could spend extended periods of time together, debating and enjoying each other's company. As a result, men who participated developed strong bonds of friendship, and dedicated themselves to cultivating a vigorous discourse on the nature of friendship (Ricci, 2009, pp. 23-24). Timothy Billings highlights the work of scholar Lü Miaofen, who identifies three recurrent themes that underlie the discourse on friendship of the Yengming School of the Mind: (1) the need for friends to rely on each other for the

cultivation of virtue and learning; (2) the importance of friends rendering financial or political support when necessary; and, (3) the ideal and practice of seeking friends from as far away as possible. Billings notes that Ricci offers examples of all three of these essential elements of friendship, perhaps one of the reasons that *On friendship* enjoyed almost universal acceptance and approbation, especially in the areas of southern China where he resided and worked (Ricci, 2009, p. 24).

Changing political and social realities greatly affected the Jesuits' plan of apostolic action in eastern Asia. Although hard won, the missionaries' acceptance in southeastern China did seem to be advancing slowly, especially thanks to the help of Chinese Christians such as Xu Guangqi, Li Zhizao (1565-1630), and Wang Cheng (1571-1644) [Christian name, Philip].²⁷ Their setbacks with the local mandarins and governors-general, beginning around 1586, led the missionaries back to their administrative center in Macao, there to ponder the best course of action. Since the time of Xavier, the mission in Japan had been flourishing, with the Catholic faith spreading rapidly throughout the areas where Portuguese trade was also expanding. As a consequence, Valignano directed all of the available Jesuit manpower to Nagasaki rather than to China.²⁸ As fate would have it, however, Jesuit Father Gaspar Coelho (1530?-1590) became embroiled in local politics, igniting the anger of a powerful daimyo, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536?-1598), who, on July 24, 1587, issued an edict expelling the Jesuits from Japan. Thanks to some deft diplomatic maneuvering by Valignano, the edict was not enforced; however, relations had deteriorated to such an extent by 1592 that the Christian communities in Japan headed into a period of persecution and martyrdom. It must also be recalled that, apart from Ruggieri and Ricci, Western missionaries had not been permitted to proselytize in China yet either. Thus, the Jesuits in Macao found themselves rethinking their entire way of proceeding in eastern Asia, especially after the crucifixion of twenty-six Christians in Nagasaki on February 5, 1597. Christianity was finally banned from Japan by the Tokugawa shogunate in 1614, now leaving China as the greatest hope for Christian expansion in Asia.

Conclusion

Except for its geographical observations and descriptions of products, *Il Milione* focuses largely on questions of faith, as Frances Wood has recognized:

Though the scanty evidence we have for Marco Polo's activities in Venice suggests that he continued to be involved with mercantile matters, the view of one of his contemporaries, Friar Pipino of Bologna, who translated the *Description of the World* into Latin during Marco Polo's lifetime, was that it was not the materialistic and mercantile, but the religious aspect of the book that was most important, revealing the wonders of Creation and contrasting the dark pagan world of idolators [sic] with that of Christianity. Despite this accolade, there is, unfortunately, no evidence of any papal recognition of any of the Polos and the religious aspects of their mission, just as there was no official recognition of their travels made by their home town of Venice. (Wood, 1996, pp. 130-131)

In the contentious setting of the Crusades, Venetians sought to maintain good trade relations with their "infidel" Muslim partners, despite the dire warnings of the papacy that Islam was on the verge of conquering Christian Europe. Polo's text clearly offers the hope of gaining the Tartars as civilized and trustworthy allies in the religious struggle against Islam. Yet, as we read the text of *Il Milione*, in light of our understanding of Rustichello's literary art, our awareness of the various and differing manuscripts of the book, and our recognition of the intense struggle between Christianity and Islam, are we truly hearing the voice of Marco Polo? As we have seen, most of the religious material presented is that of a Christianity that is triumphant against Islam in miraculous situations, all of which appears in stock legends that are not unique to Polo. As we never seem to hear anything truly personal from Polo with regard to the Catholic faith, we must question if his text has not been subject to censorship or doctrinal depuration. What is clear is that *Il Milione*, whosever's opinions we are hearing, is representative of the religious concerns of medieval Christianity, namely, in demonizing other faiths, calling Christians to arms, and exalting the power of the Cross. While Polo does seek to educate Europeans as to the possibilities and challenges that lay beyond the Holy Land, he also makes it clear that travel to the East will require skill, tact, strength, perseverance, and strong faith.

²⁷ Dunne, 1963, p. 148.

²⁸ Brockey, 2007, pp. 40-41.

For his part, Ricci represents the best of the new approach to missionary outreach which was instituted by Alessandro Valignano and supported by the Jesuit Superiors General Everard Mercurian and Claudio Acquaviva. Ricci was culturally sensitive, highly trained in the language and literature of the nation he hope to evangelize, and carefully sought to insert himself into the company of influential intellectuals and government officials. Rather than seeking to vaunt the glories, power, and supremacy of the Christian faith, Ricci honored the cultural richness of Chinese heritage, and sought to find points of commonality. These, he hoped, would lead to deeper conversations between Christians and Chinese intellectuals, and would eventually open a path for Chinese to embrace the Christian faith. Key to the process of establishing common ground was to strengthen the bonds of friendship, which Ricci shrewdly did by joining the late-Ming conversation on friendship, and by contributing to that discussion through his *Treatise on friendship*. A unique work that combined theories of friendship from both Western and Eastern thinkers, *On friendship* represents one of the first attempts to truly integrate Eastern and Western thought.

In the cases of both Marco Polo and Matteo Ricci, opportunities for unity were lost. Polo's work, while in some regards urging acceptance of the "Other," offers little hope for interreligious understanding and dialogue, given its exaggerations and fantastic descriptions. Yet, with the political realities of a militant Islam that was attacking Christian Europe on every front, the Crusades, and the uncertainty of the Tartars, was true dialogue possible? And in light of the Chinese Rites Controversy in which the Holy See refused to accept the Jesuits' subtle attempts to dovetail traditional Chinese beliefs with traditional Catholic doctrine, how much more could the Jesuits do to accommodate those Chinese beliefs? The papal rebuff of the Chinese not only led to the silencing of the Jesuits, but provoked the anger of the Kangxi Emperor such that he forbade the practice of Christianity in any part of his kingdom. Both Polo and Ricci were caught in great ideological struggles which neither could control, including the internal struggles of the Italian Peninsula, the Roman Curia, the kingdoms of the Khans, or the court at Khan-balik. Unfortunately, in the worlds of both Polo and Ricci, suspicion of the "Other" led to new rounds of isolation, both Western and Eastern, which still plague and challenge us to this day.

Brief biography: Fr. Mark DeStephano, S.J., was awarded his bachelor's degree in Philosophy and Spanish from Fordham University. He earned four degrees in Theology from Regis College of the University of Toronto: Bachelor of Sacred Theology, Master of Divinity, Master of Theology, and a Licentiate in Sacred Theology. Continuing his education at Harvard University, he was awarded his master's and doctoral degrees in Romance Languages and Literatures. For the past twenty-one years, Fr. DeStephano has been Chairman and Professor of the Department of Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures, and Director and Professor of the Asian Studies Program at Saint Peter's University in Jersey City, New Jersey, U.S.A. His research focuses on medieval European literatures and on issues of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and identity in Asian and Latino cultures.

REFERENCES

- Aschcroft, B. (1999a). *The empire writes back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures*. London and New York, NY: Routledge.
- . (1999b). *Key concepts in post-colonial studies*. London and New York, NY: Routledge.
- . (2001). *Post-colonial transformation*. London and New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bangert, W.V. (1972). *A history of the Society of Jesus*. St. Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources.
- Boulnois, L. (2004) *Silk Road: Monks, warriors & merchants on the Silk Road*. Trans. H. Loveday. Hong Kong: Airphoto International Limited.
- Brockey, L. M. (2007). *Journey to the East: The Jesuit mission to China, 1574-1724*. Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Critchley, J. (1992). *Marco Polo's book*. Aldershot, Great Britain: Variorum.
- Cronin, V. (1955). *The wise man from the West*. London: E.P. Dutton & Co.
- Crowley, R. (2013). *City of fortune: How Venice ruled the seas*. New York: Random House.
- Dunne, G.H. (1963). *Generation of giants: The story of the Jesuits in China in the last decades of the Ming dynasty*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Durant, W. (1950). *The story of civilization. Vol. IV. The age of faith*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Hsia, R.P. (2010). *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City: Matteo Ricci, 1552-1610*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Larner, J. (1999). *Marco Polo and the discovery of the world*. New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press.
- McCoog, Thomas, ed. (2004). *The Mercurian Project, 1573-1580*. St. Louis, MO: The Institute for Jesuit Sources.

- Norwich, J.J. (1989). *A history of Venice*. New York: Vintage.
- O'Malley, J.W. et al., eds. (1999). *The Jesuits: Cultures, sciences, and the arts, 1540-1773*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Pirenne, H. (1956). *A history of Europe*. Vol. 1. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books.
- Polo, M. (1958). *The Travels*. Trans. R. Latham. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin.
- Ricci, M. (1953). *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583-1610*. Ed. N. Trigault. Trans. L.J. Gallagher. New York, NY: Random House.
- . (2009). *On friendship: One hundred maxims for a Chinese prince*. Trans. & Intro. T. Billings. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Ross, A.C. (1994). "Alessandro Valignano: The Jesuits and culture in the East." In O'Malley et al., 1999, pp. 336-351.
- Ryan, T.F. (2007). *Jesuits in China*. Taipei: Kuangchi Cultural Group.
- Schütte, J.F. (1980). *Valignano's mission principles for Japan*. Vol.I. Trans. J.J. Coyne. Saint Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources.
- Standaert, N. (1999). "Jesuit corporate culture as shaped by the Chinese." In O'Malley et al., pp. 352-363.
- Witek, J.W. "Everard Mercurian and the Entry of Jesuits into China." In *The Mercurian project, 1573-1580*, edited by T. McCoog, 2004, pp. 815-829.
- Wood, F. (1996). *Did Marco Polo Go to China?*. London: Secker & Warburg.