

## BOOK REVIEWS

CRIVELLER, G.: *Preaching Christ in Late Ming China. The Jesuits' Presentation of Christ from Matteo Ricci to Giulio Aleni*. Taipei - Brescia, Ricci Institute for Chinese Studies and Fondazione Civiltà Bresciana 1997. 479 pp.

Christological research in China is a new subject of Chinese studies. Relatively recently, until the otherwise excellent J. Gernet's: *Chine et Christianisme. Action et Réaction*, Paris 1982 and its English version *China and the Christian Impact. A Conflict of Cultures*, New York 1985, it was commonly admitted that some aspects of the personality of Jesus, namely his passion and resurrection remained hidden, or not enough preached by the first Jesuit missionaries in China after 1582. Professor Gernet mostly took over the assertions of the Chinese adversaries of Christianity, followers of Neo-Confucianism and different forms of Buddhism. After Gernet's book was certainly favourably received by many European and American readers, contemporary Jesuit scholars, for instance, N. Standaert, and the author of the book under review, started to study the less known treatises of their *confrères* of the early seventeenth century and proved that those assertions were not completely true.

The first Jesuit missionaries Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) and Michele Ruggeri (1543-1607) preached at first in the clothes of Buddhist monks. Since Buddhists did not always have a good reputation in China in those times, and they (especially Ricci) found out that Confucian moral teaching had some similar features to Christianity and more influence in the society, Jesuits changed their accommodation policy and started with the new strategy of indigenization consisting in implementing Confucianism with new Christian ideas, and taking over some Confucian manners in lifestyle, language, knowledge of philosophical, religious and literary writings, finding relatively common denominators concerned with the names appropriate to God, spirit, soul, esteem for friendship and the relative understanding of the different attitudes to the problem of belief.

Up to the last decades more attention was dedicated to mediating role of the Jesuit missionaries between Europe and China in the philosophical realm and natural sciences. In reality, all the followers of St. Ignatius in China, were more interested in preaching Christian doctrine than in spreading other kinds of knowledge. Jesuit missionaries, because they were much better educated than Franciscans or Dominicans, were able to use this knowledge in order to persuade the Chinese of their truths, both in the field of science and in Christian teachings.

The very ostentative preaching of Franciscan and Dominican friars was mostly very unattractive to educated Chinese and provoked misunderstanding and persecution. Ricci and his followers tried to say all or nearly all from the life and work connected with Jesus Christ, although they were very careful with the unbelievers, since they knew that the reaction of the Chinese could be very harmful to a few converts who were in the vicinity of the missionaries. Both Ricci and Ruggeri in their catechisms did not mention Christ's resurrection, since they knew that most of the Chinese would not believe in it. It does not mean that they did not speak about it to the converts. It was a condition for baptism.

Fr. Criveller further analyses similar writings by other outstanding members of Jesuit mission of the early seventeenth century in China, namely Diego de Pantoja, João Da Rocha and others, among them also Niccolò Longobardo and Alfonso Vagnoni, who were the champions for more direct apostolate than Fr. Ricci and his followers. Some of Longobardo's translations of prayers and hymns, such as the Pater Noster, Ave Maria, Salve Regina and Credo were so popular that they remained in use among Catholics until the 1950s.

Greatest part of the book under review is devoted to the life and work of Giulio Aleni. Just at the time of the publication of this book in 1997, another one edited by T. Lippicello and R. Malek: *"Scholar from the West". Giulio Aleni S.J. (1582-1649) and the Dialogue between Christianity and China*" jointly published by the Fondazione Civiltà Bresciana and the Monumenta Serica, Sankt

Augustin, appeared, as an outcome of the international symposium on the life and work of Aleni, as a promoter between China and the West, held in Brescia, October 19–22, 1994. If at the symposium, the object of the study included all the aspects under study, here the Christological side was highlighted, not only because it was neglected before, but probably also because of the approaching Holy Year 2000, which in respect to China, will bring the most broad picture of the personality of Jesus and his “faces” at different times in China, certainly from the Jesuit “Generation of Giants” up to our times. It should be published at the end of 2000 in Sankt Augustin under Professor Malek’s editorship.

In contrast to the proceedings of Brescian symposium, where relatively much has been devoted to Aleni’s scientific works from the realms of geography, mathematics, philosophy and linguistics, this book devotes not even one whole page to this area. If Ricci and his younger followers during the Qing Dynasty (after 1644), as Johann Adam Schall von Bell (1592–1666) or Ferdinand Verbiest (1623–1688), he did not put so much stress on the scientific knowledge and on the strains to get near, or even to be present at the imperial court. Aleni worked in the Province of Fujian, trying to come into contact with high literati, and practicing the model of “family conversion”. After converting the head of the family, according to his experience, other members also became Christians. It was the most practiced model of Jesuit missionaries in China. His many books or booklets were read by the high literati. Aleni had great knowledge of Confucian philosophy, even of Chinese myths, and knew how to spread the Christian teaching to interested readers. He did even more through small groups of educated people and discussions with them. He was not always successful. The Chinese were proud of their classical heritage and after comparing their own Confucian or Buddhist teachings, they very often hesitated to accept Christian dogmas. The concept of God and of the Trinity was something that they usually could not acknowledge in its Christian interpretation. Both the human and divine aspects of Christ’s personality were often beyond their understanding. Great difficulties were presented by Jesus’ incarnation, his attitude to the parents, especially to his mother, and they had great doubts concerning his birth, the situation in the poor family where he lived, his life in Judaea, a small province of great Roman Empire, and also problems concerned with the rather rude scholastic theology the Jesuit presented. With the exception of the converts, Aleni and other Jesuits, did not even try to highlight Christ’s passion and his death, since for the Chinese literati, and most of them were officials or even judges, Jesus, who died on the cross, was regarded as a criminal. In spite of that Aleni and others wrote about the passion and death of Jesus, but little emphasis was given “to the Resurrection and to the glorious Christ” (p. 437). This is even more understandable. For ordinary rational human beings, both are something absurd, for which the belief (and the Chinese literati were not prepared for it), is necessary.

The book by Criveller is worth reading. It is a work of long and painstaking research. It is also necessary to mention that probably it was edited in a hurry, there are misprints in the text, and the book is without an index which is its disadvantage.

*Marián Gálik*  
Institute of Oriental and African Studies,  
Slovak Academy of Sciences,  
Klemensova 19, 813 64 Bratislava, Slovakia

