



VATICAN CELEBRATES EUROPE-CHINA "BRIDGE"

Exhibit Honors Jesuit Missionary on 400th Anniversary of Death

SYDNEY, Australia, OCT. 28, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- China is showing signs of a growing openness to faith, with some officials considering that Catholicism is a force for political unity, says Cardinal George Pell

A display at the Vatican is paying tribute to this missionary and what Benedict XVI called his "peculiar capacity" to reach Chinese culture and traditions "with full respect."

A presentation of the exhibit "To the Heights of History. Matteo Ricci (1552-1610): Between Rome and Peking" was held this morning in the Vatican Press Office. Antonio Paolucci, director of the Vatican Museums and organizer of the exhibit, led the presentation.

The exhibit will be on display in St. Peter's Square through Jan. 24, 2010. It was organized by the Committee for the Celebration of the Fourth Centenary of Father Matteo Ricci, in collaboration with the Vatican Museums, the General Curia of the Company of Jesus, and the Pontifical Gregorian University.

The exhibit includes pieces such as portraits of the Pontiffs who promoted evangelization in the Far East during the 16th century, as well as paintings of St. Ignatius of Loyola writing the Jesuits' Constitution and St. Francis Xavier evangelizing Far Eastern lands.

Father Ricci's manuscripts in Italian and Chinese are also included, as are maps drawn by him, and dozens of pieces representing the union between East and West, which show that Father Ricci understood that it is possible to proclaim the Gospel in all cultures.

"Considering his intense scientific and spiritual activity, one cannot but be positively amazed given the innovative and peculiar capacity he had in approaching, with full respect, Chinese cultural and spiritual traditions in their totality," Benedict XVI wrote in a message sent to the Diocese of Macerata -- Father Ricci's birthplace -- for the fourth centenary of his death.

Matteo Ricci's "extraordinary missionary adventure led him to build, for the first time in history, a true bridge of dialogue and exchange between Europe and China," the bishop of the diocese where he was born affirmed today.

Bishop Claudio Giuliadori of Macerata, Italy, added: "Besides paying homage to this giant of the faith and friendship between peoples, the exhibit seeks to provide all with an opportunity to learn about and be inspired by a model of evangelization of the Gospel culture and inculturation that, in many aspects, has no equal in the history of humanity."

Following St. Francis Xavier

Born in Macerata in 1522, a town then located in the Papal States (at present in Italy), Matteo Ricci left for the Far East on May 18, 1577, when he was not yet an ordained priest, with the blessing of Pope Gregory XIII.

Together with 14 companions, he left on this mission journey with the hope of reaching China, where Jesuit St. Francis Xavier had died just two months after Ricci's birth.

He was ordained a priest in 1580 in Goa, at the southern end of the coast of the Indian Ocean. In 1583 he went to live in the city of Zhaoqing, in the province of Guangdong, after having endured six years of difficulties. Here he dedicated himself intensely to the study of the language.

In Zhaoqing, Ricci drew a map of the world based on European cartography, making the inhabitants of the area aware that there was a world beyond their wall. For the first time in history, China had a map that included the territories of Europe, Africa and America.

"Ricci brought with him the knowledge of the cartographers of his time, something absolutely new for the Chinese," said Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, director of the Vatican press office, during today's presentation.

Little by little he won the esteem of the Chinese people, and succeeded in penetrating this very ancient culture. He also translated books on philosophy and mathematics into Chinese.

"I plan to end my life here. (...) Many have been converted, many come to Mass. They go to confession and Communion on the main feasts and are delighted to listen to the Word of God," wrote Father Ricci in a letter to his brother Antonio.

Appreciating Chinese culture and knowing their language, Father Ricci worked exhaustively for evangelization and cultural dialogue in China. He wrote a catechism in that language and published his work "Treatise on Friendship." He also translated Euclid's first books of geometry in collaboration with his friend Xu Guangqi.

Several of his disciples called him "the strange man," because of his European physical features, his different culture and the fact that he lived celibacy.

Father Ricci died in Peking on May 11, 1610. His tomb is still there. His cause of beatification opened in 1983.

Bishop Guidiolori said today that the community of Chinese Catholics residing in Italy is working enthusiastically so that Father Ricci will be raised to the altar.