

Science and Faith for promoting the Gospel: Matteo Ricci and Gerbert of Aurillac

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Abstract: Matteo Ricci (1562-1610), Jesuit and Gerbert of Aurillac (938-1003), Benedictin were outstanding scientists, for their times; astronomers and geographers. Their contribution on the dialogue between cultures is evidenced. For Matteo Ricci and his followers the scientific culture become a support for the evangelization, as a mean to help the chinese society and to promote it. Chinese nowadays are still grateful to Matteo Ricci, Li Ma To. Gerbert of Aurillac enjoyed the period of time when Arabs and Christians were in peaceful contact during his permanence in Catalonia. He left his intellectual heritage to Europe, even after the fall of this favorable period.

In 1610, the year of the *Sidereus Nuncius*, in Beijing father Matteo Ricci (1562-1610) died on May 11th. The information traveling on Portuguese sheeps required almost two years to reach China from Europe, considering also the long procedures of checking at the borders of the 'Celestial Empire', and either the works of Galileo and the news of Matteo were respectively known with a consistent delay.

Nonetheless the preparation of the Jesuit fathers belonging to the second generation after St. Ignatius (1491-1556), and their capillary diffusion along the commerce paths realized an

extraordinary network of catholic faith and western science whenever they were sent for the announce of the Gospel.

The curriculum studiorum of the Jesuits has been set up by the first generations of Fathers in Rome at the Collegio Romano, and father Christopher Clavius (1538-1612) who taught mathematics in the Collegio for 40 years contributed to the extension of science studies in a decisive way.

Ricci was the most brilliant student of Clavius, and beyond mathematics, geography and astronomy he developed extraordinary skills in the art of memory, that in China led him to learn perfectly and rapidly the Chinese language and comprehending their culture and religion.¹

The scientific formation of these Jesuits was the civil service that they offered to the Country where they were sent for the sake of the Gospel annunciation.

It happened that not only the curiosity of the Emperor and their dignitaries about the construction of mechanical clocks and their maintenance, but also the capability of Ricci to realize geographical charts and to represent the known world and China among it, and also the astronomical skills of the fathers: all of these situations opened gradually the dialogue between the suspicious culture of the far Eastern country, already slightly contaminated by Islam, with the Western christian world.

The catholic faith and the Western science penetrated first among the top class of the Country and slowly among the more humble people, thanks to the example of the fathers.

The fortune of the faith among the dignitaries was also subjected to the acceptance of scientific advancements, that the following generation of Jesuits fathers after Matteo Ricci were able to bring.

¹ <http://www.gliscritti.it/blog/entry/2142>

Science and faith has been always a binomium which characterizes the carism of Jesuits, and it is indeed a point of reflexion during the pontificate of the first Jesuit pope, Francis, and it is interesting that another Pope, Sylvester II (999-1003) died the 12th of May, was the first to introduce science matters in the curriculum studiorum of the chatedral schools. His knowledge of arabic numbers and algorithms² sprung during a fruitful time of cultural exchange between Arabs and Christians, sadly ended shorter after he left Catalonia.³



Fig. 1 The gravestone of Matteo Ricci in Beijing, among 84 Jesuits buried in the same area.



² J. N. Silva, GERBERTVS 4, 101 (2013).

³ C. Sigismondi, GERBERTVS 1, 265 (2010).

Fig. 2 Xu Guan Qi, Servant of God and chinese scientist.

XuGuanQi (1562-1633) was the first chinese scientist who received a strong influence reading the catechism written in Chinese by Matteo Ricci, Li MaTou, and with Ricci he is very well remembered even nowadays as one of the benefactors of China. He was baptized with the name of Paolo and contributed to the spread of catholic faith, with many priests in his following generations. His cause of beatification has been recently started by the 94 years old bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian.

The seed cast by the greatest teacher of X century, Gerbert of Aurillac, born in 938, a genius like Leonardo, Pico and Matteo Ricci, created Pope at the turn of the first millenium, revealed its full fecondity half a millenium later in the Society of Jesus. These two relevant figures of the history of science and of church have in common the same brithdays to the heaven and an extraordinary similar approach to the language of science, another language of God.

These arguments have been presented in Washington DC at Catholic University of America on May 1st, 2014 at 12h by Costantino Sigismondi, professor of History of Astronomy at the Pontifical Atheneum Regina Apostolorum in Rome and visiting astronomer at the Observatorio Nacional in Rio de Janeiro in 2013-4. Visiting scientist at the NAOC National Astronomical Observatory of China in 2011 and 2012 and at the Korean History of Astronomy Museum in 2005, 2009 and 2012, founder of the Journal GERBERTVS; since 2003 and organizes international meetings on Gerbert of Aurillac and the early medieval science.