



Missionary Prayer Intention - The Pope's missionary prayer intention April 2006: "That the Church in China may engage in its mission to evangelise with serenity and full freedom"

Comment by Rev. Ambrogio Spreafico, rector of Urban University

Rome (Fides Service) - "Go out into the world and preach the Gospel to all creatures" Jesus said to his disciples after his Resurrection. This missionary mandate has animated the Church from the very beginning. This is why the Council decree *Ad Gentes* says: "The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father" (2)

Nevertheless the Church does not reject what is good and true in the cultures of peoples for whom she has great respect. The same decree says again: "Missionary activity is closely bound up even with human nature itself and its aspirations... Christ and the Church, which bears witness to Him by preaching the Gospel, transcend every peculiarity of race or nation and therefore cannot be considered foreign anywhere or to anybody"(8)

The history of evangelisation in China demonstrates the Church's attention for the noble Chinese culture. It suffices to think of Matteo Ricci and his deep respect for China which appeared so vast and so distant from the western culture from which he came. He showed the Gospel of Christ as it is intended for every human condition and every people: a word to foster the integral development of man who on no account may be denied his longing for the transcendent, his search for God. *Ad Gentes* says: "In order that they may be able to bear more fruitful witness to Christ, let them (Christians) be joined to those men by esteem and love; let them acknowledge themselves to be members of the group of men among whom they live; let them share in cultural and social life by the various undertakings and enterprises of human living; let them be familiar with their national and religious traditions; let them gladly and reverently lay bare the seeds of the Word which lie hidden among their fellows" (n. 11). Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical 'Deus Caritas est' speaks of "Christian humanism". Announcing the Gospel of Christ who died and is risen the Church does not contradict the deepest aspirations of the human heart indeed she brings them to completion on that profound exchange between God and the new Adam Jesus Christ, through the working of the Holy Spirit.

The need to "engage in her mission in full freedom and serenity", the intention for which the whole Church is united in prayer, is simply a response to the mandate received from the Lord and which for the Church is a need which cannot be renounced. Moreover today the Church presents herself to the world free of political conditioning which in the past may have rendered her missionary activity a problem for some people. Her presence moves with the sole intention of communicating that which she is convinced contains the authentic good for mankind, the message of Jesus Christ. And if the Church demands freedom she is also aware that the Word she communicates in a gift which comes from God and is never imposed. Conversion in fact is a freely given response to the Lord's call.

There are several Chinese priests studying in Rome. They are a response to the concern of Propaganda Fide since it was instituted in 1659 with a document which stressed the necessity of local clergy. And this clergy because of its original culture is best equipped to interpret in China the missionary mandate entrusted by Jesus Christ to his Church in every age. Let us pray that the Church in the noble nation of China may be ever more free to carry out her duty and that hostility towards bishops and priests will stop. This greater freedom will not fail to promote the good of China and the human and spiritual growth of the Chinese people. The Church loves every people and therefore also the great nation of China. Urged on by this love she wishes that this people may continue to receive the Gospel which today has reached only a few. (Mons. Ambrogio Spreafico) (Agenzia Fides 27/3/2006; righe 45, parole 690)