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**THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONS TO CHINA UNDER MONGOL OCCUPATION:  
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

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ABSTRACT

This article describes the history of the Christian missions to China during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The ways and methods that were used by missionaries to bring and establish Christianity into that country are considered. The efforts of several missionaries are briefly mentioned, but special attention is given to John of Monte Corvino - the one missionary that endured hardships and a life of commitment to establish the Christian mission in China. It also deals with Christianity being brought to the Far East (Asia and China) in the time when Mongols ruled that entire region. Thus it brings into a better perspective the mission of the medieval Christian missionaries, their successes and possible reasons for failures, their commitment and their challenges of introducing Catholic Christianity to the non-Christians of China.

RESUMO

Este artigo descreve a história das missões cristãs na China durante o décimo segundo e décimo terceiro séculos. Os modos e métodos que foram empregados pelos missionários para levar e estabelecer o Cristianismo naquele país são considerados. Os esforços de vários missionários são brevemente mencionados, mas atenção especial é dada a João do Monte Corvino - o missionário que suportou durezas e uma vida de compromisso para estabelecer a missão cristã na China. O artigo também lida com o fato do Cristianismo ser levado para o Oriente (Ásia e China) na época em que os mongóis dominavam toda aquela região. Assim, a missão dos missionários cristãos medievais, seus sucessos e possíveis razões de fracassos, seu comprometimento missionário e os desafios de introduzir o Cristianismo Católico aos não-cristãos da China são considerados em uma perspectiva ampliada e melhor.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo describe la historia de las misiones cristianas a China durante el decimotercer y el decimocuarto siglos. Los caminos y métodos que fueron usados por los misioneros para llevar y establecer el cristianismo dentro de aquel país fueron considerados. Los esfuerzos de muchos misioneros fueron brevementes mencionados, pero atención especial es dada a John de Monte Corvino – un misionero que aguantó penurias y una vida de compromiso para establecer la misión cristiana en China. También comparte con el cristianismo existente, puesto que lo llevó al lejano oriente (Asia y China) en el tiempo cuando los mongoles gobernaban esa región entera. Así lleva a una mejor perspectiva la misión de los misioneros cristianos medievales, sus sucesos y la posible razón para su caída, su compromiso y sus desafíos de introducir el cristianismo católico a los no cristianos de China.

## INTRODUCTION

Although the Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century weakened Christianity in many parts of Asia, it did not kill the fervor and zeal of the Christian missionaries. In many places of Central Asia the Christian communities, mostly Nestorians, were devastated, but not totally destroyed. Once the Mongols conquered their enemies and became the almighty rulers all over Asia (Far East, Mongol Empire), peace prevailed over the Mongol territories and greatly favored the missionary endeavor. About the middle of the thirteenth century, Franciscan and Dominican missionaries made several efforts to introduce Christianity to China, but these efforts did not reach far enough. It was only by the end of that century that John of Monte Corvino, a Franciscan missionary, founded the Chinese Mongol mission. Thus Catholic Christianity was established in China (Beaver 1971, 15:575; Beaver 2002, 8:187; 16:355; Krahl 1967, 3:593; Wiest 2003, 3:492).

This article briefly describes the history of the Christian missions to China during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Ways and methods that were used by missionaries to bring and establish Christianity into that country are considered. The efforts of missionaries are briefly mentioned, but special attention is given to John of Monte Corvino—the one missionary that endured hardships and a life of

commitment to establish the Christian mission in China. This article bears its significance in the fact that it deals with Christianity being brought to the Far East (Asia, China) in the time when the Mongols were the only rulers of that region. In that sense it brings into a better perspective the mission of the medieval Christian missionaries, their successes and failures, their commitment, and their challenges of introducing Christianity to the non-Christians of China.

Moreover, during the time of existence of the Catholic Christian mission in China in the fourteenth century, thousands were baptized, churches were built, and it is estimated that at the time of the death of John of Monte Corvino there were 30,000 Catholic Christians in China (Krahl 1967, 3:591; Wiest 2003, 3:492).

#### CHINA UNDER THE MONGOLS

To understand the Christian missions in China during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, it is appropriate to go back into the past and briefly outline the historical background of China at the time of Genghis Khan and his successors, during the expansion of the Mongol Empire, and until the end of the Yuan Dynasty.

The rise of the Mongols went hand in hand with the rise of Temujin, the later acclaimed Genghis Khan. Genghis Khan was born in 1155, 1162, or most probably in 1167, and he died in 1227 (Prawdin 1940, 551-2; Lattimore 1971, 10:101-3; C. R. B 2002, 19:745-7). Having only eight years of age at the time of his father's death, he was already a betrothed young man. At 15 he was a warrior and also got married. In 1206, about the age of 40 he was acclaimed "Genghis Khan", the "Universal Emperor", and by the time of his death he had spent more than 20 years rising to power in Mongolia and another 20 conquering other territories (Lattimore 10:101). Many names were given to Genghis Khan during his life: "the Mighty Manslayer, the Scourge of God, the Perfect Warrior, and the Master of Thrones and Crowns" (Lamb 1963, 1).

The Mongols Invaded China under the rulership of Genghis Khan about 1211-1212, and in 1215 the Peking area was occupied. After these invasions the Mongols' attention went elsewhere, and the conquest

of China was completed only in 1264 by Genghis Khan's grandson, Khubilai Khan. By the time of his death Genghis Khan had conquered the Tangut territory, the Kingdom of the Karachitan (Hsi Liao), the Uighurs, the Jurchen Empire, Khorezm, parts of Russia, parts of East Asia, most parts of China, western parts of Asia, and some parts of Europe (Gernet 1982, 360-1; Whyte 1988, 41). He became the only conqueror from Armenia to Korea, and from Tibet to the Volga, and after many conquests he "died in the full tide of victory", and his name "survives in the legends of Asia to-day" (Lamb, 3).

Without any doubt Genghis Khan was the founder and mighty ruler of the Mongol empire in its first 22 years (1206-1227), and his successors continued ruling China (Asia) until the end of the Yuan dynasty (Mongol empire), about 1368 (Prawdin, 553).

When the Mongols (under Genghis Khan) first attacked China, it was destroyed by civil war and was divided into several parts by the hostile dynasties of the Liaos, the Kins, and the Sung. The Mongol invaders eventually "restored its ancient greatness and unified the land so thoroughly that during the six centuries which followed their expulsion that unity was never disturbed" (507).

In 1229 the heirs of Genghis Khan chose his third son, Ogodai, the "Great Khan", to rule over the Mongol empire. His reign endured for almost 12 years, from 1229 to 1241. Ogodai led the Mongol advance into China, and overcame the Chin dynasty in 1234. He fought the Sung dynasty, especially in the present Szechwan, reduced Korea to subjection, went west as far as Mesopotamia, Georgia, Armenia in Southwestern Asia, and into Hungary and Poland in Europe. Under Ogodai, the Mongol empire was consolidated, and began the slow transition from a military state into a centralized bureaucracy. After the death of Ogodai, the Mongol empire was ruled under a weak and divided leadership. His first son, Guyuk, ruled from 1246 to 1248, and it was during his reign that John of Plano Carpine was sent as a papal envoy to the Mongol court in China (Kwanten, 124-5, 136; Latourette, 1934, 245-6).

Mongke, a grandson of Genghis Khan, was the successor of Guyuk, and ruled the Mongol empire from 1251 to 1258. He "ordered the conquest of Persia and Southern China, which were fully completed

by the last quarter of the thirteenth century” under Khubilai, the founder of the Yuan dynasty. Mongke possessed an excellent personality and it is only because of his leadership that it was possible to keep the empire together. If Genghis Khan “was the founder of the Mongol world empire, Mongke was to be its first real emperor (Kwanten, 139, 141-3).

The Yuan dynasty, which was an extension of the Mongol empire in China, began when Khubilai was proclaimed the “Great Khan”, May 5, 1260. It lasted more than a hundred years, and ended about 1368. During the Yuan dynasty China was totally conquered by the Mongols under the reign of Khubilai. At the time of Khubilai’s death China “was once again a flourishing and powerful nation” (Kwanten, 145, 154), and “for the first time in record history, all China was in the hands of non-Chinese conquerors” (Latourette, 247). It was forty years after the so-called “restoration” (1328) of the Yuan dynasty, and under the rulership of Toghon Temur (1332-1370), that the Mongol empire entirely collapsed. In 1368, Chu Yuan-Chang, the founder of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), conquered Peking without any fight, bringing to an end the Mongol domain in China (Kwanten, 156, 242-3, 297; Latourette, 299).

The Christian mission to China was established during the Yuan dynasty, but with the expulsion of the Mongols from that country, these Catholic Christian communities also disappeared (Latourette, 292).

#### THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEYS TO CHINA

The nature of these missions were in a sense, more political than religious. The representatives of the pope (missionaries) always carried letters with them to rulers of the Tartars (Mongols) and these letters were an invitation for them to accept the envoys of the Pope, and also to accept the Christian Faith. The interest of the West was also to obtain information about the military operations of the Mongols in Asia. Thus the Papal ambassadors, every one carrying letters, and having a particular mission, went on their way to China.

*JOHN OF PLANO CARPINE*

One of these missionaries was John of Plano Carpine. He was born in Umbria (most probably at Plano Carpine, now known as Magione), near Perugia, in 1180 (Chambers 1979, 116; Sinor 1967, 7:1066-7; 2003, 7:950-1). He was a contemporary, and one of the first disciples of St. Francis of Assisi. By 1220 he was a member of the Franciscan Order, and later on became “the first noteworthy European traveler in the Mongol empire”, as well as “the author of the earliest important Western work on central Asia” (E. M. J. Campbell 1971, 4: 957-8; 2002, 5:278-9). Carpine also took a leading part in the establishment of the Franciscan Order in Western Europe. In 1222 he became Guardian of Saxony and Provincial of Germany in 1228. In 1230 he went to Spain as Provincial, and returned to Saxony in 1233 also as a Provincial. He was in Cologne during the great Mongol invasion of Eastern Europe and the battle of Liegnitz, on April 9, 1241 (Campbell 1971, 4:958; Dawson 1980, 2).

John of Plano Carpine took part and was the leader in the first Franciscan mission that Pope Innocent IV sent to the court of Kuyuk, the Great Khan, at Korakorum. He left Lyons on Easter day, 1245, and reached Volga in February, 1246. In July 22, 1246, he arrived at the city of Korakorum, in Central Asia. He and his companions were presented to the supreme Khan, Kuyuk, and in this occasion delivered their letters to him. The Mongols retained them until November, 1246, and then dismissed them with a letter to the pope with a “brief imperious assertion of the Khan’s role as the scourge of God” (Whyte 1988, 43; E. M. J. Campbell 1971, 4:957; 2002, 5:278; Latourette 1929, 66-7; Ocker and China Group 2001, 422; see also Camps 1998, 335).

In this letter the Great Khan made a clear and harsh statement saying that he did not understand why the pope had asked him to be baptized, nor why he should have found it strange that his armies had conquered the Hungarians and other Christians since they had murdered Mongol ambassadors and refused to accept the dominion of an empire that had been ordained by God. Pointing out that the pope should have known better that any man that no one could rule all the empires from sunrise to sunset unless it were through the will of God, he warned that if the pope and all the kings of Christendom did not accept God’s will and come to Karakorum to pay homage, he would know them to be his enemies (Chambers 1979, 126).

On November 13, 1246, carrying this message to the pope, they were given permission to leave the court of the Great Khan (126).

Friar John and Friar Benedict the Pole arrived at Lyons on November 18, 1247, two years and seven months after Friar John had left that city, and over a year after they had left the court of the Great Khan, Kuyuk. Friar John reported the success of his mission to Russia, but from the Mongols he brought nothing but threats. He said: "it is their intention to overthrow the whole world and induce it to slavery" (128).

Both Friars wrote records of their journeys. The record of Friar John was the longest and the most detailed. It contained an analysis of the methods of the Mongol military forces. The records of the Friars were the records of the first Western Europeans to make such a formidable journey into the heart of Asia. After this challenging mission, the pope sent John of Plano Carpine on another mission, and in 1248 he became the Archbishop of Antivaria in Dalmatia. Friar John died (probably in Italy), on August 1, 1252 (Chambers, 129; Dawson, 2; E. M. J. Campbell 1971, 4:957; 2002, 5:278; Sinor, 1066).

*ANDREW OF LONGJUMEAU*

Soon after the return of John of Plano Carpine, pope Innocent IV sent a second mission, led by Ascelin, a Dominican. Apparently, Andrew of Longjumeau was a member of Ascelin's mission. The mission reached the camp of Baiju, west of the Caspian Sea, on May 24, 1247. Ascelin and his colleagues were received by an envoy of the Great Khan, Aljigiday, but were sent back to the pope, together with two Mongol envoys, bringing an answer similar to that which had already been brought by Friar Carpine (Dawson, xix). Soon after they arrived, the king of France, Louis IX, "sent back with the Mongol envoys the most important mission that Christendom had sent hitherto" (E. M. J. Campbell 1971, 1:909; 2002, 1:392). This mission was led by Andrew of Longjumeau, a French Dominican missionary, a diplomat, and a papal ambassador. He was born early in the thirteenth century, and died in France around 1270 (J. D. Campbell 1967, 1:495-6; 2003, 1:406).

The purpose of this mission to the Mongols, at Korakorum, was two fold: to investigate the Khan's alleged reported conversion to the Christian faith, and also to win the Mongols as allies against the Muslims (J. D. Campbell, 496; Krahl, 591).

Andrew and several ecclesiastics left Cyprus early in 1249. After a year of journey, the papal ambassadors arrived at the court of the Great Khan, in or near Korakorum. Andrew found that the Khan, Kuyuk, was dead. He and his companions were received by the regent-mother, Ogul Gaimish, who sent them back with presents and a letter for king Louis. The insolent words of the letter marked the mission as a failure. The missionaries returned to the west between March, 1251, and May 1252. Although king Louis IX was disappointed with the results of this mission, the accounts that he had received of the existence of a large Christian population in the land of the Tartars were not altogether a failure (E. M. J. Campbell 1971, 1:909; 2002, 1:392; Dawson, xx).

In 1256 Andrew was in Tunis working for the conversion of the Sultan. We know nothing of his life after that, except that sometime before 1270 he returned to France, and there he died (J. D. Campbell 1967, 1:495; 2003, 1:406).

#### *WILLIAM OF RUBRUCK*

The dates of his birth and death are unknown, but probably he lived c. 1215-1295. It is possible that he was a native of Flanders, and that his name derives from Rubruc, near Cassel, France. William of Rubruck was a Franciscan pioneer missionary and a diplomat. He belonged to the Order of Friars Minor, and his mission to Central Asia was more religious in character than the earlier ones. He and his companions carried letters from St. Louis to the Khan, but "they were careful to insist that they were not ambassadors but men of religion whose sole work was to preach the Work of God and to instruct men to live by His will" (Dawson, xxi; see also Dawson, 88; M. W. Baldwin, 1967, 14:936; Baldwin 2003, 14:750).

Rubruck was better equipped for his mission than John of Plano Carpine, and at the beginning of 1253 he set out from Acre with another



Franciscan, Bartholomew of Cremona, a Syrian interpreter, and other envoy called Gosset. He and his crew arrived in the Great Khan's camp, south of Korakorum, in December, 1253. They were received courteously by the Khan. On January 4, 1254, they were granted an audience with the Great Khan, Mangku, but it was only a short interview. They remained in the court of the Great Khan until he ordered them to return to their own country, at about May, 1254 (Chambers, 137-8; E. M. J. Campbell 1971, 19:698; 2002, 12:665).

In the Court of Mangku Khan, at Korakorum, Rubruck found a colony of Europeans, most of them captives and artisans, and among them were Hungarians, Russians, Georgians, Alans, and Armenians. There, he was allowed to preach occasionally, resulting in the baptism of some 60 persons. Although he was permitted to preach at Korakorum, "his theology was intolerant and dogmatic and his arguments were academic and philosophical" (Chambers, 140; see also M. W. Baldwin, 1967, 14:936; 2003, 14:750), hence, the success that he could have had, greatly diminished.

Rubruck returned home in 1255 and wrote an extensive account of his experience. His is "the best eyewitness account of the Mongol realm". His companion, Friar Bartholomew, was given permission to stay at Korakorum because he was too sick to travel. He remained there for the rest of his life, and became the first Catholic missionary to die in the East (E. M. J. Campbell, 1971, 19:698; see also 2002, 12:665; Latourette 1929, 67; Chambers, 141).

Missiologically speaking, the mission of William of Rubruck was almost a failure, however, it brought a detailed and precise account of the Mongol society, describing their customs and religious ceremonies in their real context.

#### THE LAST MEDIEVAL MISSIONS TO CHINA

It was during the decline and fall of the Yuan dynasty that the last medieval mission to China came to an end. However, the impact and importance of the mission of John of Monte Corvino for Christendom is, with no doubt, worthwhile mentioning. Corvino was the founder of the Chinese Mongol mission, and it was under his leadership that

Christian Catholicism in China strengthened and gained many new converts. His success bore such good news that many other missionaries were sent after him, and the last was John of Marignolli.

*JOHN OF MONTE CORVINO*

John of Monte Corvino was born in Italy (presumably at Monte Corvino, Salerno), about the year 1246 or 1247. He is regarded as the first missionary to China, and was the founder of the earliest Roman Catholic mission to that country. He was also the first Roman Catholic Archbishop of Khanbalik (Peking). When Corvino was charged with the mission to go to China, he was already an experienced missionary. He took part in the Franciscan mission to Armenia and Persia about the year 1279-1289, and was there that he became familiar with the Armenian and Persian languages. Friar John and his companions started the missionary journey towards China in 1291. They stayed about one year in India, where about 100 persons were converted. In India, one of his companions, Nicholas of Pistoia, died. From there they “followed the sea route up the China coast, thence to the Mongol capital” (M. W. Baldwin 1967, 7:1061-2; see also 2003, 7:975; and *Early Catholic Classics* 1962, 217).

Monte Corvino was still in India when “he wrote home, in Dec. 1292 or 1293, the earliest noteworthy Western account of the Coromandel coast.” From there, he spent about one year traveling through India and Mongolia en route to the Mongol capital (Khanbalik). Friar John arrived at Khanbalik, China, in the final part of 1293, shortly before the death of Khubilai Khan, or early in 1294. He presented to the new emperor, Timur Khan (1294-1307), the letters from the pope, and was welcomed by him. There (in Khanbalik) he settled down to work. He met many difficulties especially because the Nestorians were suspicious of his work, but he did not lose courage. For a while he worked among the Onguts, whose king George was converted to the Catholic Faith, and was also received into Minor Orders (Beazley and Wolter 1971, 15:779-80; see also Outerbridge 1952, 59; Latourette 1929, 69; Moorman 1968, 236; Moffet 1998, 334-5).

At Khanbalik Friar John soon won the confidence of Timur Khan.

There he built a church and a convent with the support of the emperor. In his letter from Khanbalik, of the kingdom of Cathay, January 8, 1305, he wrote that he had “purchased by degrees forty boys, of the sons of the pagans, between seven and eleven years old, who as yet knew no religion” (Dawson, 225). His intention was to teach these boys the Catholic Faith, the Psalters, and hymns, so that they could become faithful members of the church, and eventually missionaries in that vast land.

About 1305 Friar John had baptized six thousand converts according to his reckoning. He translated the New Testament and Psalter to the Tartar language. His 11 years alone, in the capital city of the Mongol empire, were years of fruitful work, and what he accomplished was a real triumph. The work progressed and the mission grew stronger under Monte Corvino’s guidance. About 1303 he received his first Franciscan colleague, Friar Arnold of Cologne, whose help was much appreciated. In 1307 the pope (Clement V) appointed him as Archbishop of Khanbalik (Peking) and Patriarch of the entire orient. An expedition force of seven bishops was sent to China, but only three of them reached the Mongol capital. They consecrated Friar John as Archbishop of Khanbalik and stayed there to help with the work of the Chinese Mongol mission (Latourette, 69; Moorman, 237-8; Beazley and Wolter 1971, 15:779; 2002, 8:280; Ocker 2001, 412).

The life of this great missionary ended around 1330. In his death, both heathen and Christians came together to honor him. He was certainly the father of Catholic missions to China, and by his vision and work the Chinese Christian mission was established. Monte Corvino “is by no means the greatest of Christian apostles, but for single-hearted devotion and quite persistence he deserves to be ranked with the foremost pioneers of all faiths and times” (Latourette, 72). And, on hearing of his death, the chiefs of the Alani described him as “a valiant, capable, and holy man” (Moorman, 238).

*THE CHINESE MONGOL MISSION*

The Chinese Mongol mission initiated by John of Monte Corvino

was strengthened with the arrival (1307) of three bishops from the church of the West. Two of them, Perugia and Peregrine, remained in Khanbalik for some time, and helped to further the work initiated by Monte Corvino. In 1311 the pope sent three more bishops to the Chinese mission, but only one, Peter of Florence, reached the capital city of the Mongol empire. Around the years 1322-1328, another Friar, Odoric of Pordenone, was in China helping Monte Corvino's mission. At that time the Franciscan mission had established a Cathedral and two houses in Zaytun, the medieval port of Southern China, near Amoy (Latourette, 70; Dawson, xxxiii).

The Franciscan Christian mission was maintained mainly among the Oriental Christians, Nestorians, Alans, and Armenians, who resided in the cities where the mission had been extended. The Chinese mission flourished for about twenty years under the leadership of Friar John, and continued to grow for another forty years under the guidance of his successors (Dawson, xxxii; see also M. W. Baldwin 1967, 9:934).

In 1333 the pope named Nicholas, a professor of theology, to be the successor of Archbishop John. Nicholas seemed to have died on the way, because of the fact that he never reached China. During his missionary years in China, Friar John converted the Alans, a distinguished group of people from the Black Sea region, to the Catholic Faith. In 1338 the Alans sent an embassy to Rome "asking for a bishop and complaining that they had been left without spiritual guidance and without a superior since the death of John of Monte Corvino." This resulted in the sending of the last important medieval mission to China, the mission of John of Marignolli, who left Avignon in 1338, and arrived in Khanbalik (Peking) in 1342. The Chinese Mongol mission came to an end about the same time of the decline and fall of the Mongol empire. In 1362 the Bishop of Zaytun was martyred when the Chinese nationalists took the city of Khanbalik. All the Christians were expelled from that city in 1369, and they did not return until the coming of the Jesuits in the sixteenth century (Latourette, 72; Dawson, xxxiii-xxxiv).

#### *JOHN OF MARIGNOLLI*

John of Marignolli was born in Florence, around the year 1290.

A Franciscan Friar, Marignolli was a man of a strong determination. He left his teaching position at Bologna, went to the papal court at Avignon, and joined the Catholic mission to China. He and his companions left Avignon in December, 1338. The journey to China lasted almost four years, but they finally arrived at Khanbalik (Peking) in May or June, 1342. The reception that the papal envoys received at the court of the reigning Khan (Toghun Temur, 1332-1370) was impressive. They entered the imperial presence in full vestments, with cross, candles, and incense, and singing the Nicene Creed. Marignolli presented the letters from the pope and also many gifts to the Great Khan. The impression the papal envoys made on the emperor was so great that he encouraged them to stay there, and also supported them for the next three or four years (E. M. J. Campbell 1971, 14:876; 2002, 7:846-7; Moorman, 431-2; Kwartan, 297; Latourette, 72; see also Ocker 2001, 421).

Marignolli's work in Khanbalik must have been of the same nature as that of Monte Corvino because it seemed to have created an excellent impression upon the Great Khan's court. In his last encounter with the Khan, Toghon Temur, Marignolli was told to ask the pope to send more missionaries, especially the kind of men like John of Monte Corvino. The Roman Catholic Church would certainly do this, but that was not the case anymore, especially because of the soon decline and fall of the Mongol empire (Yuan dynasty). John of Marignolli left China in 1347, and in 1353 he arrived at Avignon, bringing good news from the Mongol Christian mission in China. He mentioned that the Franciscan mission had a cathedral and other churches in the city of Khanbalik, and another three rich and elegant churches, of the Friars Minor, in the city of Zaytun (Moorman, 432; Latourette, 72-3; Dawson, xxxiv).

The last successful medieval mission to China, as far as it is known, was the one of the Friar and Franciscan missionary, John of Marignolli.

#### CONCLUSION

Although the accounts that we have about the experiences of the earliest missionaries to China do not tell the whole history, "it is

impossible not to be impressed by the dedication and faith of these Friars” (Whyte, 47). These first ambassadors sent by the pope to China (Asia), had a political as well as a religious mission, and despite of all the opposition and uncertainties that they faced, what they accomplished was a real miracle.

There is no doubt that “if there had been more men of similar courage and faith to carry on this work in the same spirit” as these missionaries to Asia did, “the whole history of the world, and especially the relations between Europe and the Far East, might have been changed” (Dawson, xxxv). With the arriving of John of Monte Corvino in China, Christianity made a significant impact even among the rulers of the Mongol empire. For more than 60 years the Chinese Mongol mission was a source of influence and a witness of the gospel of Christ to the non-Christians of China.

Although many missionaries lost their lives trying to bring Christianity to China, the fruits of their work were many. Thousands were baptized, many churches very built, the New Testament and Psalms were translated, and hymns that could be sang by the local people were composed.

The Chinese Mongol mission was established and flourished greatly because of the concept of mission that the Franciscan Friar John of Monte Corvino had. He “was a devout imitator of St. Francis, rigorous and severe with himself, and a fervent teacher and preacher.” He believed “that only the most solid men should be sent” as missionaries. These men “had to be willing to give themselves as examples rather than seek their own glory.” The missionaries “chosen as bishops for China were to be Friars minor, born to the virtues, approved by experience, and learned in the scriptures” (Daniel 1975, 110).

The Christian mission founded and established by Friar Corvino in China, and continued under the leadership of his successors, is a demonstration of what can be done by Christ’s messengers under such hostile and very difficult circumstances.

China had its opportunity. For a time she opened her arms and received the Christian Faith, but that would not last for a long period.

The decline and fall of the Mongol empire was one of the main reasons that caused the Chinese Christian mission to come to an end. The missionary enterprise of the Catholic Friars to China lasted more than a hundred years, and despite of its tragic end, it has continually inspired other missionaries to follow on the same track.

The challenges of the past still remain, mostly as a way for modern missionaries to learn from and to model after. As the opportunities in China are now opening for the modern Christian and the Seventh-day Adventist missions, are we ready to commit ourselves as the missionaries of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries did?

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