

Matteo Ricci and the New Evangelization

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People tend to look upon events in history as things of the past, and leave them as such. While it is intellectually stimulating to learn about foreign cultures, this seems to be the summit of the purpose of history for people. There seems to be a lack of understanding for the significance that some events and people of the past can teach us. This is the case with the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci, one of the first Jesuits who evangelized in China during the sixteenth century. His methods and contributions to China have, in a sense, been forgotten by many including the Catholics as a whole. Due to this, there is much about what this man did that is applicable to our modern situation in America. His entering into a Chinese culture foreign to his own and raising that culture up through Christian ideologies is similar to what is needed of Christians today in an America culture that seems foreign to Christian ideologies. The case for evangelization in American culture is more necessary to be brought to light now than it has been at any time in the history of the United States. The reason for this is that many do not see America as being a country that needs to be evangelized either because it is already Christian in nature, or because it is moving so far away from the truths of Christianity that it is hopeless to resurrect Christianity in American society. This paper will argue that the evangelization methods of Matteo Ricci offer insight into how we can greet the challenges of evangelization in America today.

In order to see what Ricci is able to offer, an understanding of the circumstances must be laid out. It must be understood that all Christians receive a call to evangelize. After laying that framework we can then move into who is Matteo Ricci, and why is what he did in China important today? What happened during his time that made him so much different that special attention should be given to him? How does his example help us specifically in terms of American culture? In order to see this, we need to know what the state of American culture is,

and how it relates to that of the Jesuit missionary's case. Ultimately, Ricci showing us what it takes to evangelize successfully in modern America.

The Call to Evangelize

Since Vatican II, modern Catholics have heard of a universal call to holiness, a call that draws out of people a passionate desire to become saints. The perception of sainthood currently is one that gives no basis for the good of another though, and thus there is no basis for a need of evangelizing. The universal call to holiness is a very understandable thing to grasp when it comes to living a life of virtue (whether we successfully live virtuous lives or not). The reason that many people today see holiness as a life of virtue and not much else is because of the understanding of religion today as being something selfish; in the form of it being merely moralistic or existing for therapeutic reasons. The former of the two reasons being the key to holiness as a life of internal virtue and not external charity. The second being an indicator of religion as selfish and not something to be shared in the form of evangelization.

Religions today help to “provide people with strong moral foundations.”¹ Essentially, religion for people in America gives a basis for action, or non-action, in regards to morality rather than anything else. In the words of some American teenagers, their religion influences them in “the things I choose not to do, um, like bad things, like murder or something” or “without my faith, my life would be different, um, I’d go shopping on Saturday ‘cause they always have sales on Saturdays.”² Virtue in action comes from religion, but if religion for some

¹ Christian Smith, Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. (New York: Oxford University Press 2005) 125.

² Ibid. 139

only has a job of being a moral compass, then the need for evangelization is not necessarily prevalent.

Christianity as a religion is also selfish for some of its followers in the sense that the relationship between God and his people deals with what the people need, not what God calls of them. As Smith says:

What very few U.S. teens seem to believe, to put it one way, is that religion is about orienting people to the authoritative will and purposes of God or about serious, life-changing participation in the practices of the community of people who inherit the religiocultural and ethical tradition. As far as we could discern, what most teens appear to believe instead is that religion is about God responding to the authoritative desires and feelings of people.”³

In laymen’s terms, God exists to help each person achieve what they personally want rather than each person helping to achieve what God personally wants of them. Christianity has become selfish and thus forgets about the call to evangelize. For both adults and teenagers in America, Christianity has become a “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” in which God exists to give morals and a feeling of happiness, but not to actively partake in each person’s lives.⁴ This sense of God existing for personal gain and direction is one that fights against the new emphasis on the call that has existed since Vatican II to spread the news of Christ.

This universal call to become saints for Christ beckons of Christians something more than great Stoicism, or an understanding of the need to be healed. Both of these aspects are important in leading to a life of holiness insofar as they are true in the sense that a deep internal life and relationship with God is necessary. This internal strength of one’s soul is not for personal gain though, it is for the ability of that strong internal life to overflow and spread to

³ Ibid. 149.

⁴ Ibid. 166.

others externally. This call to holiness demands of us loving charity, this charity coming in the form of evangelization. Charity is defined by the Catechism of the Catholic Church as, “the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God.”⁵ To truly love someone is to desire for them the ultimate good of everlasting life, otherwise known as heaven. Thus, we receive the mandate as Christians to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and Lo, I am with you always, until the close of the age.”⁶

The Catechism points out that “*Everyone* is called to enter the kingdom.”⁷ That kingdom being talked about is obviously the Kingdom of God. The means by which people enter into this kingdom though is through those that already encompass the Body of Christ. The church exists throughout history to bring those not directly linked to the Body of Christ, to become directly linked through baptism. The means by which this takes place is through everyday interactions between people of the Christian faith, and those not of the faith. It is the duty and responsibility of those already in communion with the church to spread that communion to everyone outside it. All people within the Church, despite their state in life receive a universal vocation to spread the Gospel message, or as Pope Saint John Paul II writes, “The call is a concern not only of Pastors, clergy, and men and women religious. The call is addressed to everyone: lay people as well are personally called by the Lord, from whom they receive a mission on behalf of the Church and the world.”⁸ Thus we see the missionary call is universal.

⁵ Catholic Church, CCC 1822

⁶ NRSV, Matthew 28:19-20

⁷ CCC 543

⁸ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*

Biblically the call to evangelize is seen in Matthew, when Jesus states in the parable of the vineyard, “You also go into the vineyard.”⁹ Pope John Paul II uses this parable in “*Christifideles Laici*” to set up the fact that Christ commands of us all to spread the message to people of every nation.¹⁰ By doing this we build up Christ’s kingdom where, “Christ stands at the heart of this gathering of men into the “family of God.” By his word, through signs that manifest the reign of God, and by sending out his disciples, Jesus calls all people to come together around him. But above all in the great Paschal mystery - his death on the cross and his Resurrection - he would accomplish the coming of his kingdom. ‘And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.’ Into this union with Christ all men are called.”¹¹

Many people see the case to evangelize America as something unique however. The uniqueness of the American situation in regards to evangelization is that some feel it is not necessary in American culture. There are two reasons for this. The first reason being that many consider America a Christian country. What I mean by this is that since America was founded on Christian values and is thus Christian in identity from the outside looking in on America. Because of this, it seems odd to Christians that Americans would have never heard of Christ and his saving message. So, many assume that in some way all Americans have heard of Christ’s saving message. Some see this as all the evangelization people need, and therefore find no reason to actively spread the message. There is a specific tendency to avoid evangelization in America since it brings with it, “uncomfortable images for Catholics—especially in the culture of the United States, where evangelism has sometimes meant only an individual response to enthusiastic preaching, a style of mass religion, a contrived way to recruit new members, or, at

⁹ NRSV, Matthew 20:4

¹⁰ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*

¹¹ CCC 542

its worst, a way to play on people's needs.”¹² The other reason some see America as a different circumstance is that many see American culture as far beyond the reaches of being saved. Due to the fact that America, which is undeniably a post-Christian culture, ignores the message of Jesus Christ leads many to believe that American culture is not worth saving. This reason is the one that this paper will look to confront. What will be argued is that if a Jesuit missionary named Matteo Ricci can successfully touch the culture of a completely foreign culture of the Chinese in the sixteenth century, then we too as American Christians should be able to collectively evangelize our homeland that is foreign to Christ’s message. As the United States Council of Catholic Bishops puts it, “We must evangelize because the Lord Jesus commanded us to do so. He gave the Church the unending task of evangelizing as a restless power, to stir and to stimulate all its actions until all nations have heard his Good News and until every person has become his disciple.”¹³

History of Ricci

The Society of Jesus was founded by St. Ignatius of Loyola on August 15, 1534 when a group of young men joined Ignatius to partake in a retreat and devote themselves to poverty, chastity, and obedience. The order became official in 1540 under Pope Paul III.¹⁴ Particularly, this order entrusts their obedience to the worldwide mission.¹⁵ The worldwide mission being that of whatever the Pope calls of the order to do. During Ricci’s time, this call was often times to engage in Counter-Reformation going on in Europe, but also to spread the Catholic faith to

¹² Catholic Church, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *What is Evangelization? - Go and Make Disciples*. 2018

¹³ Catholic Church, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Evangelization*. 2018

¹⁴ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “Jesuit Religious Order” in Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Jesuits>. 2017.

¹⁵ "About Us The Jesuits." Welcome to the Society of Jesus in Canada and the United States. <http://jesuits.org/aboutus>

foreign lands such as Asia. This spreading of the faith to foreign lands is what Matteo Ricci would partake in.

Matteo Ricci was born in Italy in the year 1552.¹⁶ He studied philosophy, theology, music, math, cartography, cosmology, and astronomy when he entered into the Society of Jesus.¹⁷ Essentially, he was the jack of all trades. In 1577, Matteo Ricci was accepted by his Jesuit superiors to be commissioned for mission in the Far East where they would stop in Goa for a while so that Ricci could finish his studies to become a priest.¹⁸ Goa is located on the west coast of India. After this pit stop, Ricci would enter into China with the approval of the Ming Dynasty. Many had tried before him to enter into China without success, including arguably the most well-known Asian missionary St. Frances Xavier who died awaiting the Chinese Emperor's approval.¹⁹ Before unfolding what Ricci did though, background to the time of Ricci must be portrayed first.

During the years of Ricci's life, there are several things to take note of taking place in history, those being the Protestant Reformation, the colonization efforts of European countries due to more trade opportunity, and the rulers of China at this time in history. These three events set the stage for what Ricci would need to do in order to evangelize successfully in China.

The Protestant Reformation is popularly known to officially begin with the nailing of Luther's 95 Theses in 1517. This is only a few years before the birth of Ricci. The Protestant Reformation led to extreme political and spiritual tension within Europe. Unfortunately, some of

¹⁶ Jean Paul Weist, "Matteo Ricci: Pioneer of Chinese-Western Dialogue and Cultural Exchanges." in *INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN OF MISSIONARY RESEARCH* 36, no. 1 (January 2012) 17.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ambrose Ih-Ren Mong, "The legacy of Matteo Ricci and his companions." in *Missiology: An International Review* 43, no. 4 (October 13, 2015) 386

¹⁹ Ibid.

the most notorious events of the Reformation were the many wars that took place in Europe during this time. Vast amounts of blood were shed in European lands over religious beliefs, but the bloodshed did not stop there. Religious tensions spread throughout the world when colonizers and traders coming from Europe took it upon themselves to force the conversion of indigenous peoples just as was being done in their homelands. This is seen wherever Europeans go to inhabit foreign lands. An example would be the devastation of the Aztecs at the hands of the Spanish. The example that will be looked at here though is the intolerance at the hands of Portuguese explorers in Asia. In Goa, where Ricci was stationed before his true mission, there were many persecutions taking place. "In this Portuguese outpost, Ricci had witnessed the worst of religious intolerance when 17 were burned at stake after being forced to walk through the streets in tunics impregnated with sulphur. Many of them were Jews forced to embrace Christianity (conversos) but were suspected of secret adherence to Judaism.. In spite of the diversity of people in Goa with a large number of Hindus and Muslims, the Portuguese only allowed the practice of Catholicism in the city."²⁰ So here, we see the forced conversions of indigenous peoples at the hands of Christians coming out of Europe. The political strife did not remain on the European continent. Instead, this tension spread to other areas of the world as well.

Due to this tension spreading, the Ming dynasty was closed off to any kind of European influence other than trade. This spiritual tension along with the fact that China under the Ming dynasty was more focused on taking care of themselves led to outside influence being nearly forbidden. The Ming dynasty was focused on their own cultural prosperity since they are the first dynasty to arise out of the rule of the Mongols. For once they had their own people united, and they sought to keep it that way. These two aspects combined to be the main reason the Christian

²⁰ Ibid. 386-387

religion was not welcome in China, nor was any other kind of European cultural influence. There was not a space for open dialogue between European countries and Chinese countries unless it had to do with economic gain. This made evangelizing China especially difficult during this time in history. Something new was needed if Catholicism was to penetrate into Chinese society, and that tolerant style came from Matteo Ricci's example.

Let us consider the nature of Ricci's time. During this time in history, much of what is taking place in Europe is affecting the rest of the world. The Protestant Reformation is at large, and European colonization is taking place as well. Many countries are trying to open up their markets, and also spread the Christian faith to those foreign lands as well. This is the case with Portugal and Asia. Essentially, with European countries trying to spread their influence to other places they bring with them both the good and the bad. It is no surprise then that China was not open to any European involvement other than economic involvement. They allowed trade, but they refused to have their culture tampered with. Ricci then shows us two things in regards to his circumstance; that there can be found a place for conversation when there seems to be none, and the most effective methods of evangelization is working with what is given.

China was not open, and actively sought to keep out Catholic missionaries. Ricci not only entered into China, but he also befriended many important figures in China and laid the groundwork for a Christian culture that is still alive today in that area. As Pope Saint John Paul II says about Ricci, "And just as the fathers had done centuries before in the encounter of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Greco-Roman culture, Father Ricci made this insight the basis of

his patient and far-sighted work of inculturation of the faith of China, in the constant search for a common ground of understanding with the intellectuals of that great land.”²¹

Ricci effectively evangelized because he knew the situation he was in, and what was needed to be able to blend Christian thought into this Asian society. Practically, his method was not to spread to an illiterate peasant culture that seemed to bounce from many beliefs with ease. Instead, he decided to use a strategy that approached the high class, and then wanted their conversion to trickle down into the lower classes. In order to convert high ranking officials he needed to prove that he knew what he was doing and that he belonged. This is why he chose to blend Confucianism with Christianity. In order to be somebody in China, one had to be educated, and this education was based on Confucian teachings. Ricci needed to be fluent in the Chinese language, customs, and even the intellectual side of this society if he was to produce any fruit. He took this to such an effective extreme as he dressed like a Confucian, talked like one, and even took on a new name, Li Madou (which translated means the Matthew). By divulging into this culture, he was accepted in. Matteo Ricci himself says, “Only when our virtue and ambitions are alike will a friendship be solid.”²²

Ricci entered into China thinking that the transcendent aspects of Buddhist thought were the best ideas to try and meld into the transcendent aspects of Christian thought. What he learned from his mistake though is that the transcendent aspects need good soil to grow from. Thus, upon him entering the second time, Ricci focused on Confucian philosophies. Many of these philosophies can be recognizably Christian such as the concept of filial piety, Confucius’

²¹ John Paul II, “Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Fourth Centenary of the arrival in Beijing of the great missionary and scientist Matteo Ricci, S.I.”

²² Matteo Ricci, *On Friendship: One Hundred Maxims for a Chinese Prince*, trans. Timothy Billings (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009) in Ronnie Po-Chi Hsia, *Matteo Ricci and the Catholic Mission to China* 83.

Doctrine of the Mean, and respect for neighbors. With a strong foundation, the evangelistic style that the Jesuit wished to put into use was much more affective.

The idea of filial piety is known in Confucianism as Xiao or Hsiao. It deals with having the proper respect for both dead ancestors, but also for living elders and authority figures.²³ This idea can be translated into Christian terms using two ideas one of them found in the Ten Commandments and the other one seen in burying the dead and venerating Saints. The first one being to “Honor your father and your mother”²⁴ which is famously one of the Ten Commandments. This would apply more so with the idea of respecting authority figures such as parents and grandparents that are alive. The Analects see it similarly as “Meng Yizi asked about filiality. The Master said, ‘Never disobey.’ Fan Chi was driving the Master’s chariot, and the Master told him, “Meng Yizi asked me about filiality and I replied, ‘Never disobey.’” Fan Chi said, ‘What did you mean?’ The Master said, ‘While they are alive, serve them according to li. When they are dead, bury them according to li; sacrifice to them according to li.’”²⁵ (Li is meant as ritual or proper conduct).²⁶ This passage from the analects shows a respect toward both elders that are alive and dead. This sense of veneration from the dead can be thought of as that same veneration given to saints, or any ancestor that has passed away.

The Confucian idea of the Doctrine of the Mean is one that deals with ultimate virtue or a high sense of human goodness called Jen (which we in the West would call virtue).²⁷ This doctrine is very similar to an idea in the West which is called the exact same thing, and attributed

²³ Arthur Waley, *The Analects of Confucius*. (New York: Random House Inc., 1989) 38.

²⁴ Exodus 20:12 NRSV

²⁵ *Analects* trans. by Robert Eno. Book 2 Chapter 5. 2015 Accessed April 2018.
[http://www.indiana.edu/~p374/Analects_of_Confucius_\(Eno-2015\).pdf](http://www.indiana.edu/~p374/Analects_of_Confucius_(Eno-2015).pdf)

²⁶ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica “Li Chinese Philosophy” in Encyclopedia Britannica.
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/li-Chinese-philosophy>

²⁷ Waley, *Analects*. 27

to Aristotle. Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean is the ethical doctrine that states, "every virtue is a state that lies between two vices, one of excess and the other of deficiency."²⁸ Both of these Doctrine of the Means deal with the pursuit of the same thing, virtue. The highest virtue dealing with human action to be exact. Here we see something unique though, this is not just a Christian value being blended into Chinese thought, but rather it is a value of the West before Christianity being brought into Eastern philosophy. Christianity which took a truth before its time is using a preexisting truth in China and refining it.

Another idea of Confucian philosophy that was used to blend Christian ideas with Chinese ideas was the principle of reciprocity. The Analects say, "Zigong said, 'What I do not wish others to do to me, I do not wish to do to others.' The Master said, 'Si, this is a level you have not yet reached.'"²⁹ This is extremely analogous to the famous Christian idea of the Golden Rule where Christ himself says, "do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets."³⁰ One can easily see how this idea was accepted with ease into Confucian thought.

Ricci saw the good that was in Chinese culture and sought to raise this good higher without dismantling the preexisting culture. Another example of how he did this was by writing his analects. These analects were written in the style of Confucius' own Analects. These analects which are teachings of Christianity (such as the Golden Rule) and other Western philosophical thoughts (such as Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean) were presented in such a way that the indigenous people would recognize them as didactic and read them accordingly. Ricci did not

²⁸ Richard Kraut, "Aristotle's Ethics" in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-ethics/>

²⁹ *Analects*, Eno Book 5 Chapter 12.

³⁰ Matt. 7:12 NRSV

simply preach, because this style would have no use to the Chinese people. Instead, he wrote and spoke in a way familiar to the native people.

These examples of Christian ideas and Confucian ideas melding together illustrate ways in which Matteo Ricci was able to take the truths of a culture before Christianity and refine these truths to their fullest potential. He did not bully his way into forcing a religion upon indigenous Chinese as we see traders doing in the illustration of forced conversion in Goa. Rather, he met the culture where they were at and worked with it accordingly.

Ironically, much of the criticism that Ricci received during his time was that he was too lackadaisical with the Chinese culture. One can see how Europeans thought this since many were physically coercing conversion. This is a misinterpretation of what Ricci was doing in China though. There are certain instances in which the Jesuit missionary refused to debate with Chinese men because he understood that some aspects were too far from the path of Christianity. There was no common ground, so he refused to accept theories that he did not believe to be true at all. We see his resilience to push the envelope too far of blending Chinese culture into Christian culture in his dialogue with a Buddhist apologetic.³¹ He refused to debate with the man unless the Buddhist was willing to admit that there was a Lord of Heaven, because otherwise there was no common ground for them to walk along. Ricci was not willing, even in theory or in a hypothetical situation, to dismiss such an important aspect of the Christian truths. He knew that if there was no rich soil, then what he was trying to do would grow no roots.

One of the reasons that Matteo Ricci is remembered throughout history is because he is seen as “the pioneer in introducing Western learning to China. It is Ricci (and his partners) who

³¹ Ronnie Po-Chi Hsia, *Matteo Ricci and the Catholic Mission to China 1583-1610: A Short History with Documents*. (Hackett: Indianapolis)

brought to the Ming Dynasty the scientific knowledge prevailing in Renaissance Europe, such as world geography, Western astronomy, mathematics, and surveying and mapping. This knowledge broadened Chinese people's horizons."³² This is the perfect example of how one can bring to light the truths and beauties already present in a culture, and then raise it to even higher truths. The even more incredible aspect of how this education was done though was the dialogue that took place between individuals. Ricci made friends with the people of China and this is how the evangelization took place.

A notable man that Li Madou converted is Qu Rukui. This conversion required patience. Ricci spent two years with the man before Rukui agreed to baptism. This is incredible in itself, but even more so is what Ricci did with this man for two years in order to get Qu Rukui to become Christian. They spent their time together studying science and astronomy. Ricci did not beat Christianity into Qu's head, but rather he used similar interests to foster a friendship that bore much fruit in the end. As Qu Rukui recalls about Ricci, "I met the Venerable Li [Matteo Ricci's Chinese name] in Zhaoqing. The moment I saw him, I was struck by his look of distinction...I studied numerical correspondence between heavens and earth with him for two years before departing."³³ This perseverance and friendship on Matteo Ricci's part is what led to successful evangelization. He did not force conversion, rather he used similar interests to get at the heart of people. All of these methods laying the groundwork for current China which is and unknown hotbed for a rising Christian religion. "Foreign scholars estimate that there are 67

³² Chen Hong, "On Matteo Ricci's Interpretations of Chinese Culture" *Coolabah*, No.16, 2015, ISSN 1988-5946, Observatori: Centre d'Estudis Australians / Australian Studies Centre, Universitat de Barcelona. <http://revistes.ub.edu/index.php/coolabah/article/viewFile/15426/18600>. 88.

³³ Qu Rukui's preface to Ricci's *On Friendship*, in *Li Madou zhong wen zhu yi ji*, in *Matteo Ricci and the Catholic Mission to China* 77.

million to 100 million Christians in China — compared with 87 million Communist Party cadres. Yang estimates that China will be home to 250 million Christians by 2030.”³⁴

The American Situation

Catholics and Christians alike live in a day and age that sees a growing secular culture consume more and more of everyday life. This makes it difficult to thrive in American culture as Christians. Many times it can seem daunting, if not impossible, to bring the Catholic faith into a secular arena such as modern America. The problem for us is not just that there is little breathing room for conversation, but there is also a strong resilience and active hate of conversations dealing with faith of any kind and particularly Christian faith. Dr. Edward Sri puts it best when he says, “It’s hard to stand up against a powerful river. And similarly, it’s hard to stand up against the current of our culture. There is not a lot of support from our secular, relativistic world for living a good Catholic life. In the media, in the workplace, and sometimes even in our own families, we do not get a lot of encouragement for going deeper in our Catholic faith, for building a strong marriage and raising godly children for the Lord. Quite the opposite. Many forces are constantly working against us, distracting us from what is most important in life and trying to knock us down in our pursuit to follow Christ.”³⁵ This leads to an environment that is hostile to any conversation taking place. Ultimately, what this intolerance has led to is the ceasing of dialogue amongst people. Without dialogue, relativism has grown rampant.

Relativism is defined as “The doctrine that knowledge, truth, and morality exist in relation to culture, society, or historical context, and are not absolute.”³⁶ This belief of not

³⁴ Emily Rahaula, “Christians in China feel full force of authorities’ repression” in the Washington Post. Dec. 23, 2015.

³⁵ Dr Edward P. Sri “Virtue and “The Art of Living” in Focus Equip: Equipping You for the New Evangelization.

³⁶ Oxford English Dictionary, “relativism”

absolute truth has found its way into Christianity in America. As Smith puts it, “for teenagers’ relating to religion is that most teens embrace a very strong ethos that forswears judging any ideas or people that may be different.”³⁷ There is no right answer for many people in America today regarding religion.

Much of what is at the heart of the American situation has to do with a strong sense of individualism which has been ingrained within the citizens of the United States’ hearts and minds. The term is first used in the beginning of the American Republic by Alexis de Tocqueville in “Democracy in America” and is again referred to by Hoover during his time in office as “rugged individualism”.³⁸ It is best described by saying, “Individualism is the core of American culture and the most representative integral part of American values. It is a moral, political and social philosophy, emphasizing the importance of personal, self-contained virtue as well as personal independence.”³⁹ While this idea of individualism can shed light on certain truths of the human person, especially that of their God-given free will, it can also lead to mistakes in how to value ones freedom. This is what is taking place today.

Individualism in modern America has evolved into the idea that everyone decides for themselves, thus the idea of relativism as noted before, but also an understanding of autonomy in every aspect. This autonomy has caused American’s to act in certain selfish ways (abortion, gender modification, etc.) and also refuse to address other’s actions autonomy even when they may be negative. We see this silence to guide each other’s actions with examples such as allowing an alcoholic friend continue to drink even though they clearly shouldn’t, or enabling

³⁷ Smith and Denton, 144.

³⁸ Herbert Hoover, “Rugged Individualism” <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/rugged-individualism/>

³⁹Zhang Yuxian, "The Embodiment of Individualistic Values in American Nationality." *CSCanada* 4, no. 3 (2013) 36.

someone to have intercourse with a stranger because it is their body and they can do what they want with it. Even if the consequences are known, no action is taking place to prevent these negative consequences. There is a freedom from oppression of any form that is prevalent in American culture.

This individualism also takes on a form of self-reliance in aspects of one's life. If every person is completely autonomous, they think they can do things on their own including get to truth and conclusions about life's biggest aspects. "Consequently, certain traditional religious languages and vocabularies of commitment, duty, faithfulness, obedience, calling, obligation, accountability, and ties to the past are nearly completely absent from the discourse of U.S. teenagers. Instead, religion is presumed to be something that individuals choose and reaffirm for themselves based on personal need and preference."⁴⁰ Nobody feels a need for someone to help them in matters of ethics or religion so nobody wants to be helped either then as a consequence. By helped I mean this assuming the case of the American culture growing secularly, and not being driven toward truth in religion. Thus, the need for evangelization is ever-present.

Ricci as an Example for America Today

The Jesuit missionary's success in China does not stand as something just to behold as a great accomplishment in history. Rather, we should learn from his example since we too live in an age and culture present in America that actively tries to segregate itself from Catholicism. As American society continuously segregates Christianity from itself, the need for evangelization rises accordingly. The example we should look to on how to blend Christianity back into American culture is that of Matteo Ricci. Just as Ricci was able to confront and convert a foreign

⁴⁰ Denton and Smith, 144.

culture, so too should we as American Christians be able to bring Christianity back to the forefront of an alien American realm.

The first thing Matteo Ricci shows us for our situation in America is that a place for conversation can be held even though it seems that there is no willingness for dialogue from a culture as a whole. The difficulty of dialogue in our modern times resonates from the same situation of Ricci in China. Recall that Ricci had to deal with a Chinese culture and dynasty in the Ming that was not open to outside influence. This is largely due to the fact that forced conversion at the hands of European Christians was being practiced globally at this time. Additionally, the two cultures had little in common with each other. This did not prevent Ricci and his followers from making an impact though. He found common ground in basic principles as was mentioned above. More importantly though, he befriended people by using similar interests of science and other academics in order to create friendships that would foster into successful evangelization.

As was mentioned earlier, Ricci focused on Confucian philosophies rather than trying to blend Christianity with Buddhist transcendent ideas. This is because Ricci understood the necessity of laying a strong foundation of simply human values before transcendent theological aspects of Christianity are introduced. If there is no emphasis on individual virtue, then how can one live a life of excellence and charity in dealing with other people? Laying a virtuous foundation with virtues such as temperance or prudence is the key to being able to build up to transcendent virtues such as faith hope and charity. Ricci knew this, and thus gave the example of evangelization of building from the ground up, rather than jumping straight to the top. Holiness is built off of virtue internally which forms one to be able to live a beautiful external Christian life that influences others.

Another lesson that Ricci shows us with this understanding of working with foreign philosophies is derived from the fact that he did not extend the dialogue between the two cultures beyond what it was capable of. When he refused to address the Buddhist apologetic, as was mentioned earlier, he shows us today that we cannot afford to give in to certain cultural aspects and expectations. This is a lesson we can learn from Ricci, that there are lines as Christians we are not to cross if we want to fulfill our call as missionaries. For if we cross these lines, then the example we try to put forth will seem skewed. For example, it is one thing to go out to get a beer or two with friends in order to show your friendship, it is another thing to go out and drink until the world is spinning and your choices have led you to throwing up in a public bathroom toilet right next to that friend you are trying to call into Christ's love.

Often times in our American minds we imagine evangelization as some guy preaching down upon other people, and those listeners miraculously transforming their lives and accepting God's invitation. This is very unrealistic for us now though. Evangelization requires love, and love requires persistence even in the most desolate of times. This is especially true in America today due to the strong sense of individualism we hold in our hearts. Many times people in this culture find themselves as being independent and capable of doing everything on their own. The independence engrained within American society requires a personal approach to be able to breach the hearts of people. Something very similar to that of Matteo Ricci's example above. People are not formed to the Christian heart overnight, it takes dedication to a heart and a tender firmness to be able to guide it to resemble Christ's heart. The problem that individualism brings about is that nobody feels as though they need to be saved, or they need to be transformed into someone that Christ calls of them. Nobody wants to admit on a reliance of someone or something outside themselves, thus nobody wants to form to someone they see as external in

Jesus. The Holy Spirit can penetrate the heart though, it just takes time as Ricci shows us. He shows us this through his example of friendship as was given above between himself and Qu Rukui. Friendship is at the heart of what it takes to evangelize, and to love others as God loves each of us. Most people do not need someone to philosophically argue with them on how moral relativism is not true. They do not need someone to show them how their philosophies and theologies are wrong. Those conversations will come in due time, and they come naturally when one heart invests in another's heart. Ricci loved Qu because he was able to give him two years of his life since that is what it took to bring him into communion with the rest of the Body of Christ. Then as an American, one must identify that with each "completely autonomous individual" one comes across, there is a need for that person to be shown what commitment looks like. True love takes commitment to be able to reach the hearts of others. Practically this can come in many forms such as friendship through sport, friendship in joining clubs, or any other kind of social interaction; but ultimately what evangelization boils down to is meeting the heart of each individual as is needed to bring them into communion with other Christians.

In conclusion, the modern American world is one in which evangelization is needed evermore. American culture continues to grow more secularized each day, and is now at the point of refusing Christian ideologies. Due to this refusal to be open to Catholicism and Christianity, some believe that re-evangelizing the United States is not worth the time and effort. The Jesuit Missionary Matteo Ricci is an example current American Christians can look to in order to confront this idea of not evangelizing America. If he was able to influence Confucian Ming China during the time of the Protestant Reformation and European colonizing pressures,

then Americans today should be able to effect positively a post-Christian American society. Thus we fulfill our ultimate call as Christians to “go therefore and make disciples of all nations.”⁴¹

⁴¹ Matt. 28:19 NRSV

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