continued after Xavier departed, and the Jesuit missionaries who followed him witnessed impressive results. In the 1570s large numbers of Japanese began turning to Catholicism. Some fifty thousand in one region alone were baptized, and it is estimated that by the close of the sixteenth century there were some three hundred thousand professing Christians. This occurred despite a dramatic change in the Japanese political scene. Foreign missionaries were no longer welcome, and Japanese Christians faced severe persecution, sometimes resulting in death by crucifixion. In 1638 several thousand Christians took part in the Shimabara Rebellion, protesting persecution and exorbitant taxes. They finally took refuge in a castle where, after weeks of holding their own, they were defeated and slaughtered. But despite such setbacks, Catholicism continued to have an influence in Japan for more than two centuries.

Xavier returned to Goa following his departure from Japan, and from there he made plans to go to China, hoping to penetrate that land with the gospel. But it would be left to another Jesuit to pioneer the work there. For while Xavier was arranging entry, he contracted a fever and died on an island just off the coast of China, only ten years after his missionary career had begun.

Matthew Ricci

"Barbarians Not Welcome." This slogan, more than any other, spoke for China during much of its history. China was a proud and isolationist region that opposed the planting of Christianity on its soil. Attempts were made, but without success. Nestorians who traveled overland from Syria during the sixth century were the first known Christian missionaries to China. Their influence began to decrease by the thirteenth century when the first Roman Catholic missionary, Friar John, arrived. He found considerable freedom to preach under the protection of the Mongols who were then ruling China, and thousands were baptized. During the fourteenth century, when the Ming Dynasty came to power, however, missionaries were expelled. Not until the end of the sixteenth century did Christianity actually gain a permanent foothold in China, and it was an Italian Jesuit, Matthew Ricci, who "became and has ever remained the most respected foreign figure in Chinese literature who was most responsible for that breakthrough."[51]

Ricci was born in 1522, the year of Xavier's death. His father was an Italian aristocrat who sent him to Rome to study law. While there, however, young Ricci fell under the influence of the Jesuits, and after three years he turned away from his pursuit of a secular career and entered the Jesuit order. So distressed was his father when he heard the news that he left immediately for Rome to rescue his son. On the way, he became violently ill and was unable to go on. Fearing this was a sign of God's anger, he returned home. Ricci's acceptance into the Society of Jesus did not signal an end to his secular studies. He went on to study under a leading mathematician of his day, acquiring an education that later opened a door for him among the *literati* of China.

Accompanied by thirteen other missionaries, Ricci was assigned first to Goa, where Xavier had begun his missionary career. Like Xavier, they baptized and trained children, a ministry to which Ricci did not feel uniquely called. But after four years in India, he "received the marching orders for which he had been praying so long."[52] He was soon on his way to the Portuguese port city of Macao on the coast of China. His friend Ruggieri had gone there earlier; and even though he was depressed and hopelessly bogged down in language study, Ricci sailed for his new post with anticipation.

His arrival in China signaled the breakthrough that had long been awaited. Though missionaries had for some time resided in Macao, entering China proper had not been permitted. But when word of his expertise in such fields as mathematics, astronomy, and

geography reached Wang P'an, the governor of Shiuhing, he invited Ruggieri and Ricci to come and live in his province. Though they initially feared the invitation might be a ploy to kill them, they accepted the risk and went. It was not a trick, however, and Ricci quickly demonstrated the value of his secular learning in foreign missionary work. With him he brought a supply of mechanical gadgets, including clocks, musical instruments, and astronomical and navigational devices as well as books, paintings, and maps—all of which drew widespread interest from scholars. The maps were particularly intriguing for these men who had previously refused to believe that the world consisted of more than China and her immediate neighbors.

Ricci's primary aim was not to bring Western learning, but to bring the gospel. To make that point, both he and Ruggieri shaved their heads and took on the garb of Buddhist monks. After only two years there were converts, and the two missionaries dedicated a small church and private residence that they had built with the help of Chinese labor. In 1588, five years after they entered China proper, Ruggieri returned to Europe, and Ricci was left in charge of the work with several other Jesuits.

Before he left China, Father Ruggieri had become the focus of a sex scandal. A Chinese convert accused him of committing adultery with a married woman, whose husband concurred with the charge. "This was a classic case of shakedown," writes Jonathan Spence, "and Ruggieri was able to clear his name." Other priests faced similar accusations in this hostile climate where sexual promiscuity was commonplace. "Such rumors were constantly fanned by the Chinese, who staged plays on market days in the little towns, mocking the Christians and the Portuguese, who kept their swords and rosaries in action at the same time, and let their priests mix indiscriminately with local women. These plays were reinforced by comic prints attacking the Jesuits and their converts, which enjoyed a brisk sale."[53]

In the meantime Ricci changed his attire to that of a Confucian scholar. Confucianism was the religion of the Chinese intelligentsia, and Ricci was focusing his attention on that segment of the population. If the Chinese could view Confucianism as merely a philosophy, he reasoned, then they could accept Christianity as well and not be forsaking their traditional beliefs.

While he was seeking to contextualize Christianity in China, another Jesuit missionary, Robert de Nobili, was doing the same thing in India—in essence, becoming a Brahmin to reach that caste for Christ. He observed the laws and wore the clothes of the Brahmin caste, and he disassociated himself from the existing Christian church—not, however, without a barrage of criticism. Both he and Ricci were highly controversial figures within Roman Catholicism.

Ricci's effort to make Confucianism compatible with Christianity appealed to the Chinese and paved the way for conversions. But critics insisted that he was not being true to the basic tenets of Christianity. For the name for God, for instance, he used the term Lord of Heaven (*T'ien* for heaven and *Shang-Ti* for sovereign lord) from the ancient classics. Likewise, Ricci did not insist that converts abandon ceremonies honoring ancestors. He argued that such traditions only indicated a healthy respect for deceased family members.

Not surprisingly, his methods came under fire almost immediately, especially from competing orders, the Dominicans and Franciscans. Jesuits had maintained a virtual monopoly on spreading Catholicism in China for a number of years, and the other two orders were quick to find fault. By the early seventeenth century the issue had blown up into what became known as the Chinese Rites Controversy, probably the most heated debate ever to confront Roman Catholic missions. Papal pronouncements generally took the side of the Dominicans and Franciscans, forbidding Christians to sacrifice to Confucius or to their ancestors. The Chinese emperor, on the other hand, took the side of the Jesuits,

threatening to expel those who opposed ancestor worship. The controversy raged for centuries without being fully resolved.

In defense of Ricci, it should be noted that he had not sought controversy, and his leniency toward Confucianists may have been influenced by the intellectuals with whom he associated. “It is conceivable,” writes A. J. Broomhall, “that to them the ceremonial, civic and political aspects of these rites could have been distinct from the religious and superstitious, but not to the average Chinese with his animistic beliefs.”[54]

For Ricci himself, the acceptance of Confucianist ideas came naturally. As he studied and translated the Chinese classics, he developed great respect for what this ancient culture had to offer. He dismissed the doctrine of the *tabula rasa*—the belief that non-Christian philosophies and religions must be entirely eradicated before Christianity can be effectively introduced. Such also was the conclusion of Xavier after he came in contact with the Japanese and their highly developed culture. Earlier, in India, he had sought to debunk non-Christian systems and had little success. The policy of accommodation thus became a pattern for the Jesuits, and the debates have continued to the present day. It was a pattern of contextualizing the gospel that was viewed by some as syncretism—a heretical mix of Christian and non-Christian beliefs.

Ricci’s great respect for the Chinese people and his eagerness to share his scientific knowledge with them brought him unusual opportunities that have been accorded few other foreigners before or since. In 1601, at the invitation of Wan Li, he was permitted to locate in Peking and continue his mission work near the emperor’s palace, while living on a stipend from the imperial government. With him he brought a large striking clock that he presented to the emperor, and he and his fellow priests became the official clock-winders of the imperial court. “When enemies tried to oust him,” writes Broomhall, “the powerful palace eunuchs were afraid they could not keep it going and saw to it that Ricci was not expelled.”[55] “It is a miracle of the omnipotent hand of the Most High,” wrote Ricci, and “the miracle appears all the greater in that not only do we dwell in Peking, but we enjoy here an incontestable authority.”[56]

Ricci ministered in Peking until he died in 1611, nearly ten years after he arrived in that city. During that time a significant number of scholars and government officials professed faith in Christ, among them Paul Hsü, one of China’s leading intellectuals and a member of the Imperial Academy. His faith was real, and he passed it on to his children who kept it alive for generations. His daughter devoted her time to training professional storytellers to take the gospel out into the villages. Two other female descendants of Paul became famous through their marriages—one became Madame Sun Yat-sen, and the other, Madame Chiang Kai-shek. Though the number of Chinese converts at the time of Ricci’s death (some two thousand) was miniscule in comparison to China’s vast population, their influence was far greater because of their high status in society, and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Christianity continued to grow, despite periodic outbreaks of violent persecution. During the half-century following Ricci’s death, the church increased a hundredfold.

Ricci was above all else a faithful Roman Catholic, as were his converts. In his journal, he writes of Paul Hsü bowing “before the statue of the Blessed Virgin” before he entered the residence of one of the Jesuit priests and how, after he was baptized, “he attended the sacrifice of the Mass every day” and “found a great consolation in going to confession.”[57] Amid the ritual was the gospel message, and according to Broomhall, “much pure doctrine was taught, whatever else was added.”[58]

One pamphlet on God written by a Jesuit priest during this period was widely circulated in the provinces and later used by Protestant missionaries, and it was just such