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Letter to Robert P. Maloney (February 4, 2000)

Angelo Sodano

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Dear Father Maloney,

The Holy Father has learnt with joy that the Congregation of the Mission is celebrating the Third Centenary of its presence in China. He is spiritually united with you and all the Vincentians in giving thanks to the Lord for three centuries of evangelization in China in fidelity to the charism of consecration and service left to you by your Founder, Saint Vincent de Paul.

Since the first group of missionaries, led by Father Ludovico Appiani, arrived in China on October 14, 1699, the Vincentian Fathers have been tireless in preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ and particularly in the work of priestly formation. Generous cooperation with other missionary congregations and involvement in scholarly pursuits characterized their creative approach to making known the good news of salvation. Great was their joy when in 1926 the first group of Chinese Bishops included two Vincentians and one taught by them.

For love of Christ, many Vincentians have undergone suffering and trial and have known privation and imprisonment. Some have paid with their blood for their fidelity to Christ and his Church. Their martyrdom “is the most eloquent proof of the truth of the faith, for faith can give a human face even to the most violent of deaths and shows its beauty even in the midst of the most atrocious persecutions” (Incarnationis Mysterium, 13). The Church honours the memory of martyrs such as Saint Jean Gabriel Perboyre and Blessed François Regis Clet whose supreme testimony is a sign of that greater love which sums up all other values and is a source of encouragement and hope to those who continue to suffer for their faith.

Today the Congregation gives joyful praise to God for the love for the Chinese people reflected in the lives of their confreres. The Holy Father encourages the Vincentians to look to their example as they face the new challenges of evangelization. During this Jubilee Year the Christian community is called “to lift its eyes of faith to embrace new horizons in proclaiming the Kingdom of God” (Incarnationis Mysterium, 2). In a special way, His Holiness prays that as the Vincentians celebrate three hundred years of presence in China they will be invigorated and renewed in their commitment to making known to the great Chinese family the mystery of God’s will “which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all thing in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1: 9-10).

With these sentiments, His Holiness entrusts the Congregation of the Mission in China to the heavenly intercession of Mary, Mother of the Redeemer, and he cordially imparts his Apostolic Blessing to all who join in the Anniversary celebrations.
With the assurance of my own prayers and good wishes on this special occasion, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ

+ Angelo Card. Sodano
Secretary of State

The Reverend Robert P. Maloney
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