



The Holy See

**LETTER OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO CARD. TOMKO ON THE OCCASION
OF THE SEVENTH CENTENARY OF
GIOVANNI MONTECORVINO'S ARRIVAL IN BEIJING** *To my dear Brother*

Cardinal JOZEF TOMKO

Prefect of the Congregation

for the Evangelization of Peoples I am very pleased that you will preside at special ceremonies in Taiwan to commemorate the singular missionary achievement of Giovanni da Montecorvino, first evangelizer among the Chinese people and first Archbishop of Khambaliq, the present-day Beijing. In fact, seven centuries have passed since the great Franciscan missionary arrived in Khambaliq, after a journey which lasted five years, carrying with him a letter of Pope Nicholas IV to the ruler of the vast territories of the Far East. From his own letters and from the writings of contemporaries we know that his apostolate in China produced abundant fruits, to the point that Pope Clement V in 1307 raised him to the rank of Archbishop and granted him extended faculties to establish and organize the Church in that distant region. His ordination took place in 1310 in the presence of the Khan, when the Bishops sent to consecrate him finally arrived in that Capital. By the time Giovanni da Montecorvino died in 1328, his thirty-four years of wise and untiring missionary activity in Khambaliq had given rise to a numerous faith-filled Christian community and a wide network of churches, convents, schools and other institutions. The celebration of the seventh centenary of Giovanni da Montecorvino's arrival in Beijing offers me the occasion to direct my thoughts to the present Chinese Catholic community, which is the continuation and growth of that first plantatio Ecclesiae on Chinese soil. I am indeed happy to reaffirm my deep affection and esteem in our Lord Jesus Christ to all the Catholic sons and daughters of the great and illustrious Chinese family. With all the ardour of my heart I feel spiritually present among them, and I assure them that I am especially close to those who have remained faithful to Jesus Christ and to his Church in the midst of difficulties of all kinds, and have testified and continue to testify, even at the cost of deep and prolonged suffering, that the principle of communion with the Successor of Peter, whom the Lord constituted his Vicar and the 'permanent and visible source and foundation of unity of faith and fellowship' (*Lumen gentium*, n. 18), cannot be renounced by a Catholic who desires to remain such and to be recognized as such. I am aware of the thriving growth of many fervent communities in different parts of the country and, in fulfilment of the mission received from Christ of confirming them in faith, in hope and in love (cf. Lk 22:32), it is my desire to foster among them fidelity, understanding and reconciliation, and to gather them all into the communion which binds us together in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Inviting all the sons and daughters of the Catholic Church in China to live this communion in truth and love (cf. 2 Jn 1:3), my fervent prayer is that it can be manifested in an increasingly visible way. Religious faith and practice is a dynamic source of commitment in the spheres of social and civil responsibility. There can be no opposition or incompatibility between being at one and the same time truly Catholic and authentically

Chinese. I pray that these celebrations in Taiwan will hearten the Bishops, priests, religious and laity of that cherished community, which I hope to meet as soon as Divine Providence allows. May it encourage them to be ever more faithful disciples of Christ and generous co-operators of their Chinese brothers and sisters on the continent. As a sign of my ardent desire to embrace the entire Chinese Catholic family, I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing. *From the Vatican, 8 September 1994.* **JOHN PAUL II**

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