## *Ad lectores*

In this first issue for 2015, the editorial "*Ad lectores*" makes room for celebrating the memory of Fr. Gabriele Allegra, the well-known sinologist, by way of "*collegite fragmenta, ne pereant!*". Thereby, too, there is commemorated the Antonianum's conferral on Fr. Allegra of the doctorate *honoris causa*. It was on the occasion of the inauguration of the academic year 1955-1956 that, at the initiative of the then Rector, Fr. Ferdinando Antonelli, this honour (rather rare in our case) was assigned to Fr. Allegra, who was at the time the Prefect of the Hong Kong Biblical Institute, and already famous for his translation of the Bible into the Chinese language. Earlier, in 1931, Fr. Allegra had been a student at the Antonianum, and it was here that he discerned his calling to be a sinologist.

"The year is 1928," Fr. Allegra wrote while a student in Rome "the year of the sixth centenary of the death of Blessed John of Monte Corvino, the first Archbishop of Peking and the true founder of the Church in China and of her ecclesiastical hierarchy. The Holy Father, Pius XI, sent a letter to our General; this letter was much spoken of in the College [...] to me personally there spoke of it only Fr. Cipriano Silvestri, who told me also of the audience had of the Holy Father [...]." To be sure, those were years of great missionary fervour. One of its most intimately persuaded protagonists was the Minister General himself, Fr. Klumper, who had sent to the members of the Order "a beautiful encyclical letter" on the subject (1922). As for his own classmates, Fr. Allegra remembers them as a "fine band of young Franciscans who, in the years 1926-1931, were studying in Rome in preparation for the missionary life"; most of them were then sent to China.

Of a series of lectures given at the Antonianum on John of Monte Corvino's missionary undertakings in China, Allegra was struck by a seemingly minor detail: The "translation into Chinese (or perhaps into the Mongol language) of the Psalter and of the Gospels," to which Fr. Silvestri's lecture made reference. This particular matter, though important in itself, might have taken a backseat in relation, for example, to the deep impression made by how uncommonly arduous the journey itself

had been, or perhaps the political and diplomatic role assigned to that missionary friar. "The effect on me," Allegra writes, "of the latter's (meaning Fr. Silvestri's) speech was like that of a lit fuse thrown into a powder keg." This detail is of interest in more than one way: It shows the young Franciscan intuiting even then, in some way at least, the course his own future mission will take, just as it points to the cultural dimension of the formation for the missionary apostolate imparted at the Antonianum. Indeed, it appears that pride of place was being given to in-depth study of the sources, especially of the Sacred Scriptures.

Struck by what he had heard from Fr. Silvestri of that earlier Franciscan mission, Allegra made enquiries of the Chinese members of the student body at the Antonianum. He was thus informed that John of Monte Corvino's biblical translations no longer existed, and that there was only a Catholic translation into Chinese of the New Testament. As for the Old Testament, he was told that the (Particular) Council of Shanghai (1924) expressed itself in favour of the appointment, as soon as possible, of a committee of experts to accomplish it. The Protestants, though, Allegra noted, in difference from the Catholics, "had their translation, or rather, a number of translations, some of which produced in, and for, the principal dialects of the immense Chinese nation.". The whole of this information that he acquired constituted for Allegra a further impulse, perhaps the decisive push, to pursue the plan he was forming. He himself describes it as "another powerful electric shock," impelling him forward.

To commemorate this illustrious student of our University, we are honoured to publish here, in Italian translation, the article that he himself published in this journal in Latin. At the same time we wish a blessed year 2015 to all and each one of the readers of our journal.

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