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SEMANÁRIO CATÓLICO DE MACAU | MACAU CATHOLIC WEEKLY

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STEPHAN ROTHLIN SJ, DIRECTOR OF THE MACAU RICCI INSTITUTE – WE AIM TO BUILD UP WITHIN TEN YEARS AN EVEN MORE COMPREHENSIVE LIBRARY

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– **Marco Carvalho**

It was one of the many consequences of the destruction unleashed by typhoon Hato in August 2017. Almost two years later, it still is one



of the few that has never been addressed. Two years ago, the Tomás Pereira Library was wiped out by the surging waters of the most powerful cyclone to hit Macau in decades. The Macau Ricci Institute (MRI) lost more than 25,000 books and magazines and computer equipment that had been acquired a few weeks earlier. Promises were made and guarantees given, but virtually no aid was received by the organism in order to help to set up a new library. Nevertheless, Stephan Rothlin, director of the MRI, hasn't thrown in the towel. He is confident a new and even more comprehensive library can be build over the next decade. The new Tomás Pereira Library will still focus on the cultural exchange between China and the West and on inter-religious dialogue, but paper won't be the only resource any longer. The development of a digital library is a priority.

One of the aims of the concert the Macau Ricci Institute promoted in the end of February was precisely to raise money for the reconstruction of the Tomás Pereira Library. Did the initiative help in that sense? How much money was raised?

The purpose of the concert jointly organized by Casa Ricci Social Services and the Macau Ricci Institute was, first of all, to feature symbolically our mission in the footsteps of Matteo Ricci SJ (1552 – 1610) who is dearly remembered as a genuine friend of China and the Chinese people. On top of the marvelous and unique concert – which combined the Chinese pipa with a western organ – we have also added some texts in order to highlight our common core mission which challenges us to constantly seek forgiveness in order to reach genuine friendship. The primary focus was thus not monetary. Only in about two, three weeks would I be able to be in a position to tell you how much money we were able to raise, given the fact that some of those that attended the concert promised us they would transfer some money. By doing so we have remembered the name giver of the library of the Macau Ricci Institute library which was actually named after the Portuguese Jesuit Tomás Pereira SJ (1645-1708) who was an organist, organ builder and diplomate at the Beijing court of the Kangxi Emperor.

The library was almost entirely destroyed by typhoon Hato. Were you able to save any books? Or you will have to rebuild it from scratch?



Typhoon Hato, which hit in August 2017, was a century typhoon. About 25,000 books and magazines, as well as newly purchased computer equipment, were temporarily stored in the basement of the University of Saint Joseph, at the Ilha Verde campus, because the Macau Ricci Institute was required to leave its previous premises, premises it occupied since 1999. All the books, magazines, computer and office equipment were completely destroyed. The library reconstruction plan is to build up a new *Tomas Pereira Library* strictly according to the profile of the Macau Ricci Institute. The primary focus is, first of all, on the cultural exchange between China and the West through the stories of missionaries in China as well as inter-religious dialogue between Christian Faith and Daoism, Buddhism and Islam, specifically through contemplation. The focus also of the newly launched Macau Ricci Institute Journal is on Comparative spirituality, moral leadership and social innovation. It is thus just not a matter of replicating the old *Tomas Pereira Library*. We recognize in this disaster a chance, a possibility to enhance our mission by aiming to build up within ten years an even more comprehensive *Tomas Pereira Library*.

Did the Macau Ricci Institute acquired any books already? Is the idea to substitute all those works that were lost? Or to build an entirely new library?

Given the lack of donations we haven't been able so far to buy any books. However, we have been approached by retired professors from Hong Kong who are willing to donate books to us. Even more serious than the lack of funds is the fact that up until now we still do not have any room which can be locked up and where we could eventually keep the books of our new *Tomas Pereira Library*. Thanks to the generosity and kindness of Bishop Stephen Lee a space for the *Tomas Pereira Library* should be available by the beginning of next year, 2020.

Do you have an idea about the amount of money that the Macau Ricci Institute will need to rebuild the Tomas Pereira Library? This is a task to be conducted over a significant period of time ...

I have set up a library reconstruction task force and a ten- year library reconstruction plan. I am confident that the Macau Ricci Institute will be able to build up a library within ten years which is again worthy of the name of Tomas Pereira SJ. I am deeply grateful



to mostly individuals from neighboring Hong Kong whom I accompanied on pilgrimages who made so far some contributions for this purpose.

When do you think will this work be done? Any perspective? Any help from outside entities, be they the Government or others?

This reconstruction work will also include the development of a digital library, an instrument which would significantly broaden the access to the documents we will host. Within ten years I do hope this work should be completed. The irony is that I received all kind of messages and offers for help from institutional entities. However, so far only my faithful pilgrims from Hong Kong and a priest friend from overseas did actually contribute their money for the reconstruction of the library. Given the paramount importance of the history of cultural exchange in Macau also in the context of the Belt-and-Road-Initiative we hope some institutions, firms, foundations and governmental agencies will finally wake up and give the Macau Ricci Institute a contribution to help to rebuild the *Tomas Pereira Library*.