



## PRELATE CONSIDERS CHINA'S OPENING TO FAITH

### Cardinal Pell Addresses Convention on Ministry to Chinese Overseas

SYDNEY, Australia, OCT. 28, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- China is showing signs of a growing openness to faith, with some officials considering that Catholicism is a force for political unity, says Cardinal George Pell.

The archbishop of Sydney spoke about China's evolving attitude toward faith when he addressed the 4th Worldwide Overseas Chinese Pastoral and Evangelization Convention (WOCPEC). The Oct. 11-15 convention focused this year on the evangelization of Chinese descendants. Cardinal Pell lauded the theme: "We must hand on the treasures we possess to our young ones. We don't want them picking up bad Australian habits, as not every young Australian is interested in religion."

Cardinal Pell gave the homily at the opening Mass for the WOCPEC IV convention. He reflected on what is happening with Christianity in China.

He noted that some estimates put the total number of Christians in China today at 130 million (though he mentioned that official government figures only had the number at 21 million in 2006).

"Chinese public opinion on religion differs from the terrible days of the Red Guards and Maoist hostility, with one survey showing one third of the population believes religion is important," the archbishop said, citing "God Is Back: How the Global Revival of Faith Is Changing the World" by John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge.

Predictions put China as the largest Christian and Muslim nation in the world by 2050, though Cardinal Pell noted that the future of China "is full of uncertainty and even if present trends continue such predictions might make more sense in 2075 or 2100."

In any case, the cardinal added: "Many in the Chinese leadership recognize that a commonly accepted moral code, or codes, is needed to build a harmonious society. In October 2007, with the approval of President Hu, the Chinese constitution was amended to include the following exhortation that members are to 'rally religious believers in making contributions to economic and social development.'

"In 2002 a Chinese government economist Zhao Xiao wrote an essay titled 'Market Economies With Churches and Market Economies Without Churches' and concluded that America was commercially successful not because of natural resources, financial system or technology, but because of its churches.

"He acknowledged that the market economy discourages idleness, but it can encourage people to lie and injure others. A moral underpinning is needed to bolster and regulate the economy; 'only through faith can the market economy have a soul.'"

Cardinal Pell went on to note that "apparently a majority in the Chinese politburo see Christianity, and especially Catholicism, as unambiguously compatible with modernity and therefore potentially a significant force for good, for social cohesion and political unity. On Dec. 18, 2007, all 23 members of the Politburo had a day-long seminar on Christianity and announced publicly it was doing so."

The Sydney archbishop cited Francesco Sisci in "First Things," affirming "one of the great ironies of our time. An officially atheist government looks to religion to fill the void that its discredited Communist ideology was once assumed to have eliminated and it asks the Catholic Church, the old enemy of Communism, to provide the best and most modern form of social cohesion."

"Life is sometimes stranger, and more beautiful, than fiction," the cardinal said.

WOCPEC held its first meeting in 2000. Its aim is to help the various Chinese Catholic communities learn from each other's experiences. The next gathering will be held in Peru in 2012.

Keynote speakers at the Sydney meeting included Bishop Ignatius Wang, retired auxiliary

bishop of San Francisco, and Hong Kong-born Salesian Father Savio Hon, an ordinary member of the Pontifical Academy of Theology.