

Easter in China Marked by Thousands of Baptisms

Excerpt from Asia News by Bernardo Cervellera

Thousands of people were baptized into the faith in Catholic churches across China on Easter night. In Beijing alone during the Easter Vigil, the number of adult baptisms numbered in the thousands!

[Ed. Note: When USCCB's 11th Religious Study Tour was in China on March 18th, we also witnessed hundreds of converts taking part in the RCIA program at the Shanghai Diocesan Cathedral.]

The wave of religious rebirth and conversion to Catholicism is so great that the Christian community is having some difficulty in finding godparents to accompany the new catechumens. In the capital it is almost standard that any one godparent will have at least a dozen newly baptized to follow. The situation is analogous in most of China's large cities: Shanghai, Xian, Guangzhou, Chengdu, Xiamen, Shenzhen...

A priest and seminary professor points out to AsiaNews that contemporary Chinese society is marked by many open wounds: "the materialism of daily life... unbridled individualism, which generates selfishness and a lack of interest in other people, the future, the world around us". The Church continues the priest "answers the silent cries of these people's hearts, the thirst for God which is spreading throughout China". Moreover, Christians are showing that "a healthy collaboration between faith and reason improves human life and promotes respect for creation".

For the most part, the newly baptized tend to come from upper class backgrounds; they are materially wealthy, high level civil servants who despite having secured a comfortable lifestyle for themselves remain unsatisfied. "Only Christianity – one of them notes – has been able to sate my spiritual needs". Among those baptized are also University professors and students, people who question the meaning of existence and for whom [the teachings] of Buddhism and Taoism, while fully respectable, have been unable to provide answers to scientific or rational exigencies.

The neo-converts also count the poor and immigrants, young people who have come to the cities from the country, in search of some monetary relief for their families. In the world of Chinese economics they are treated like slaves, underpaid, sometimes even unpaid and forced to work illegally.

Forgotten and oppressed, they find help, friendship and support from the Church. In a modern China without social welfare, Chinese Catholics are dedicated to bringing charity to many fronts: orphans, the elderly, Aids sufferers, medical care to the poor. This solidarity provided by the Church, official and non official, is viewed with approval by Beijing as it fills the void of social needs that the government can't or won't provide.

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