

Theologian says China to have largest Christian population

During a recent book launch in Rome, a noted theologian said that China will be home to the majority of the world's Christians within the next two decades.

“Interfaith dialogue is something that China, which will have the world's largest Christian population in 20 years, lives with every day,” said Harvey Cox during the presentation at the city's Jesuit Gregorian University.



Cox presented the book “Catholic Engagement with World Religions: A Comprehensive Study, in dialogue with its two editors” on Nov. 30 with Cardinal Karl Josef Becker, a German theologian of the Vatican's the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

The editors include Ilaria Morali of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, who also presented the book, and Cardinal Becker.

Cox, who teaches at the Harvard Divinity School in Massachusetts, said the new book “will play an invaluable role” in determining “where we've been in the past, where we are now, and where we're headed.”

“There are two world phenomena happening right now,” he added. “The first is that we can't recognize Christianity as a western religion anymore and the second is that countries with the fastest growing number of Christians don't have a Christian culture or traditions.”

Ilaria Morali, a Harvard professor who teaches theology at the university and specializes in dialogue with Islam, noted that the “starting point of the book was the experience we had in different contexts.”

“I’ve been seven times to Turkey where I met a Muslim professor and we discussed many topics concerning our religions,” Morali said.

“I told him about the need for young students to have an instrument to help them understand and deepen their theological knowledge and the Catholic theology’s attitude toward non-Christian religions.”

According to her, it’s fundamental that people keep their identity.

“We have to acknowledge that we have different ways of considering the Divine and we can’t avoid these differences, but I believe our identity is many times the instrument necessary to enter into a deeper dialogue,” she said.

Morali reflected that interreligious dialogue is important because “it’s the unique way today to overcome some tensions and to know each other.”

The book launch was part of a two-day session of talks at the Gregorian University on missiology to mark its 80th anniversary of the faculty of missiology, the study of missionary work.

Mexico native Father Fernando Velázquez, who also attended the book presentation, told CNA he believes interreligious dialogue to be “one of the most important issues” that the Church faces today.

“Dialogue has a great future and the Church is heading it being extremely opened to it because it’s not afraid,” he noted. “Prof. Cox has refreshed our minds and we need to go back to Jesus Christ’s main message and what he did when he would meet someone different.”

“Jesus always met with people who were different to him,” Fr. Velázquez said, adding that fear and misunderstanding often comes from the media, “which only portrays a tiny part of what other religions are and, unfortunately, people don't inform themselves better.”

“The solution,” he emphasized, “is to meet with people of that other religion and share your faith from a personal experience.”

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