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ASIA/SOUTH KOREA - "Korea needs to build bridges not walls," Archbishop of Kwangju tells Fides, in wake of Obama visit

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) – Korea needs bridges, not walls: there is an urgent need to work for "reconciliation with our brethren of the North," to end the "Cold War and the 'Iron Curtain', remnants of the last century." This is what Archbishop Andrew Choi Chang-mou of Kwangju, member of the special Commission for Reconciliation within the Korean Bishops' Conference, has told Agenzia Fides in a recent dialogue.
According to the Archbishop, who was interviewed by the Fides at the Plenary Session of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, "in this process, much depends on the international community and major powers involved: USA, Russia, China and Japan." In light of the recent visit of U.S. President Barak Obama, to Seoul, the Archbishop recalled "the good results of the sunshine policy inaugurated by the late leader Kim Dae Jung," which led to strong signals of openness and historical rapprochement between North Korea and South Korea. "It would be a political boost at all levels," notes the Archbishop.
In the years of President Kim Dae Jung, Archbishop Choi Chang-mou notes, "a journey of initiation (the so-called sunshine policy) had been begun, which unfortunately has been interrupted since the end of Kim's mandate. It was something that came from politicians and the current government, which is more conservative and rigid. The Church, even with her internal pluralism, shared and supported that set-up."
The Archbishop sends a message to President Obama: "20 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, looking at that historic event, I would say: Korea needs bridges, not walls. We need to work in this direction."
"The Church - he explains - supports the policy of dialogue, which in the past has given excellent results and great signs of hope. To contribute to the reconciliation of the Korean people, we have established a special Commission for Reconciliation at the Episcopal Conference. Considering the situation of North Korea, the conflict sedimented for half a century, we recognize that the path of rapprochement should be gradual. We can not talk about 'mission', but dialogue and reconciliation. Everything starts from considering the North Koreans our brothers, to love people, beyond the ideology and oppressive power they are subject to."
The Church in South Korea has among its pastoral priorities, help and solidarity to the brothers in the North, the Archbishop said. "We work there through Caritas and social operations, as the people of the North live in conditions of extreme poverty. It is an issue of humanitarian aid and human development, so it expresses the love of neighbor."
Making reference to the presence of "seeds of Christian faith" in North Korea, the Archbishop underlined: "In North Korea, after the persecutions of the past decades, there is the so-called 'Silent Church': a community of people who have not let the flame of the Spirit extinguish, but who do not have the freedom of professing their belief in Christ. It is a Church that suffers, which must be encouraged and gradually awakened, not abandoned."
(PA) (Agenzia Fides 19/11/2009)

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