



ASIA/INDIA - Archbishop Menampampil, on the eve of the Bishops' Assembly, tells Fides: Hindu people respect religious symbols, youth are key to harmony

Guwahati (Agenzia Fides) – Archbishop Thomas Menampampil, Salesian, could not be happier: his Diocese of Guwahati - in a peripheral territory (state of Assam, in India in the Northeast), troubled by internal problems and conflicts - for the first time ever is hosting the Assembly of the Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), which opens tomorrow, February 24, with a Solemn Eucharist, and will end on March 3.

The episode of the publication of blasphemous portrait of Christ and the violence erupted in Punjab have disturbed his serenity, but the Archbishop "looks forward to a peaceful resolution," as stated in an interview with Fides: "Christians have protested peacefully in the political and think about a judicial path [to justice]. Also, we must pray and dialogue. These are our ways of living the situation."

Archbishop Menampampil adds: "One must be very cautious when touching on the point of religious symbols. This occurred with the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in Europe, and this is another similar case. I think that the majority of devout Hindus do not agree with this act. Hindu people are generally very respectful of their own religious symbols and those of others. Alongside the Christians, many Hindu religious leaders have condemned the blasphemous images and they have also been joined by Muslim leaders in India. I do not think that this story will have more serious consequences."

The Bishops, assembling in Guwahati, "will not dwell too much on this incident, which seems to have already passed," the Archbishop told Fides.

"The Assembly will indirectly touch upon the subject, as it will be focused on young people, who are often prey to extremism and materialism. The theme will be: 'Youth in the Context of the Emerging India.' We will discuss how to help them to live Christian values in this culture, in this society, amidst the challenges presented by the new technologies. We will consider how they can become instruments of peace and agents of evangelization."

Curiously enough, notes the Prelate, the recent clashes in Punjab were started by scuffles between groups of Christian and Hindu youth: "Young people have strong motivation, enthusiasm, and passion, even for the contents of faith. They are often manipulated and exploited by fundamentalist groups," he notes. "But, overall, we're very optimistic about the future of India, which is a very young nation."

The Archbishop concludes his interview with Fides in this message: "I want to remind young people and all Christians in India of the message that Jesus presents in the Gospel: Love your enemies. Even when you feel persecuted, humiliated, oppressed. It is not easy to do, but you can. Love can disarm the enemy. Our vocation is to build bridges and open doors of dialogue and hope for our nation." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 23/2/2010)