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Fondata nel 1927

ASIA/INDIA - Bishops of India say they are offended, but do not desire a law against blasphemy

Guwahati (Agenzia Fides) – "We are deeply offended by the blasphemous image of Christ used on school books and on posters. We feel sad and indignant for this act of sacrilege. We support the legal actions taken by the government in the states of Meghalaya and Punjab, towards the perpetrators. We appeal to the central government, asking that it promote, protect, and defend respect for religious symbols of all communities of believers throughout India." With these comments sent to Fides, the Indian Bishops have spoken officially on the case of the dissemination of a blasphemous image of Christ, passing a resolution during their meeting in Guwahati, being held February 24- March 3.
As Fides learns from the Conference, the Bishops in India have welcomed the withdrawal of the textbooks in question from Indian schools and the legal proceedings initiated by the state of Megahalaya (Northeast India) against the publisher, as well as those of the state of Punjab (Northwest India) against the groups that have printed and distributed posters with the sacrilegious image.
The Bishops welcomed the public apology issued by the publisher, Skyline Publications (stating that it had been an "oversight and human error" in the layout of the text) and express their hope that such incidents will not occur in the future, in any publication circulating in the country.
However, on the news that the state of Meghalaya is considering enacting an "anti-blasphemy law," the Indian Church shows its open disagreement, noting that this already exists in the Indian Penal Code, in an article on penalties for those who "hurt the religious sentiments of people." Furthermore, they add, this type of law would lend itself to distortion and manipulation by fundamentalist groups (as occurs in neighboring Pakistan), who would not use it to seek the good of believers. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 25/02/2010)

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