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Organo di informazione delle Pontificie Opere Missionarie
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ASIA/MYANMAR - The Archbishop of Yangon: religious freedom and peace are crucial for the future of Myanmar

Yangon (Agenzia Fides) – Religious freedom and peace are crucial elements and values to ensure the prosperous future of Myanmar: affirmed Archbishop Charles Bo of Yangon to Fides, commenting on the Message by the Holy Father, "Religious freedom, path to peace", contextualising it to the situation in Myanmar.
As reported to Fides, the contents of the Message were presented by the Archbishop to the Catholic faithful as well as to officials and representatives of the State authorities of Myanmar, in the course of meetings - such as that on the anniversary of the independence of Myanmar - where the Archbishop was able to point out the prospects for the new year, setting out and updating the words of the Pope.
The Prelate emphasized the words of the Message: "Every person must be able to freely exercise and to manifest, individually or as a community, their religion or faith, both in public and in private, in the teaching, in the practice, in the publications, in the worship and in the observation of rites" (n.5). This, emphasised Archbishop Bo, is a universal principle valid for all humanity and all nations.
The Archbishop recalled that in the XVII century some Christian colonizers imposed conversion on the Burmese Indians, stating that the cases and stories of "forced conversions" occurred in the history of Christianity but also in that of other religions such as Islam or Buddhism. Such forms, he assured, are always to be deplored and condemned, both for the past and when they occur today.
Archbishop Bo notes that today the Christian faithful of Myanmar, to be promoted to positions of a certain social level, must abandon their Christian faith; while in some tribal areas of Myanmar, Christian buildings and symbols such as crosses are removed due to the influence of Buddhist missionaries.
The Archbishop also noted, from the Message of the Pope, "the support that every religious community offers to society", recalling that before nationalisation which occurred in 1965, the Catholic Church in Myanmar ran various schools and hospitals throughout the Country, with optimal results and fruits: "In those times the education system in Mynamar was noted for its excellence throughout Asia. After nationalisation, however, it was forcefully depleted and deteriorated more and more: this is an undeniable fact." For this reason the Catholic Church hopes that - under the new Constitution and in accordance with State Authorities – they may be again granted permission to open and run schools and private universities.
Archbishop Bo emphasized, finally, the need to continuously improve dialogue between the civil and religious institutions, to contribute together to the common good, progress and prosperity of the nation of Burma. (PA)
(Agenzia Fides 15/1/2011)

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