



ASIA/INDONESIA - The work of fundamentalist Christian preachers at the root of inter-religious violence

Jakarta (Agenzia Fides) – At the root of the violence in Temanggung (three churches attacked) “there is discontent, disharmony, discomfort, and verbal violence coming from Christian fundamentalist preachers,” explains Father Benny Susetyo, Executive Secretary of the Commission for Interreligious Dialogue of the Indonesian Bishops Conference. “These are Protestant Christian preachers, often makeshift, from evangelical and pentecostal denominations, who have no respect for other religions. Their preaching and their language are typical of sects: 'Islam is evil, 'convert or go to hell'. All this results in anger and hatred among the population, which then explodes into anti-Christian violence.” This is what happened in Temanggung, where Antonius Richmond Bawengan, accused and imprisoned for blasphemy, is a Christian who had no hesitation in spreading material which is offensive to Islam. “On the other hand,” notes Fr Susetyo, “there are Islamic extremist groups, of the Wahhabi ideology, which constitute the other side of the problem. They are both small groups, but when fanatics collide, the whole society and all the faithful pay for it.”

These groups of Protestant Christian derivation are conducting a massive campaign of proselytism in Western and Central Java, and throughout Indonesia, causing the angry reaction of radical Islamic groups. In the middle is the Catholic Church, which continues to pursue a fruitful dialogue with the major Muslim organisations in Indonesia, such as Nadhlatul Ulama (60 million members) and Muhammadiyah (40 million), who have always demonstrated the peaceful face of Islam.

Unfortunately with these groups, notes Fr Benny Susetyo, it is not even possible to engage in constructive dialogue, as “they are uncontrollable and refuse to attend the big official sessions of interreligious dialogue, “just like in the last few days, during the 'Week for Harmony between religions'.”

In any case, concludes Fr Susetyo, “the government is absent and does nothing to stop these different extremists, or to protect human rights and the spirit of Pancasila, which is the basis of peaceful coexistence between religions.” (PA) (Agenzia Fides 9/2/2011)