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ASIA/JAPAN - Religious awakening in Japan, wounded by the disaster: impact on society for the future

Tokyo (Agenzia Fides) – In Japan, wounded by the terrible natural events and struck by the nuclear disaster, we can see signs of a religious awakening: reports Fr Olmes Milani, CS, Scalabrinian missionary living in Tokyo, to Fides. Fr Milani has been intently observing the Japanese situation: There is an evident return to prayer and spiritual values, in a society which would normally be considered materialistic and focused on production and profit," notes the missionary. According to research – he continues – 86% of Japanese don't believe in anything, but "the catastrophe which struck the Country has awoken consciences and spiritual needs and values. The people are stopping to pray in Shinto and Buddhist temples. They all pray that: the emergency volunteers and the victims of the tsunami will be helped. Also in our Catholic churches there is an influx of non-Catholics that stop to pray," recounts Fr Olmes. "Values such as fraternity and solidarity are making a comeback in the face of the exaggerated individualism that dominates social relations." This is why "everyone is convinced that this tragedy will have a profound impact on Japan's society in the future. The Japanese will be more open and sympathetic to others, even to strangers."
Awake to the fact that this could be an opportunity for evangelisation, the missionary tells Fides that "the Christian faith remains, at a cultural level, a foreign religion and therefore it will be difficult to overcome that barrier. But in the meantime there is growing cooperation and collaboration between believers of different religions to consciously contribute to the wellbeing of society."
With the alarming news about the nuclear disaster (which has perhaps reached alert level '7'), "fears, anxiety, the sense of helplessness and insecurity rise among the Japanese people,". Fr Milani emphasises that the solidarity from all the dioceses is much appreciated, for the reception of refugees from the tsunami and also for the continuing support pledged to Caritas Japan through the Help Centre established in Sendai. "We must remember," says the missionary "that the immigrants, staying in Japan to share the fate of the nation, were among the first to offer help as volunteers to victims in areas affected by the disaster." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 12/4/2011)

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