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ASIA/INDIA - Catholic Church attacked in Kerala: "We are exposed to different extremism", says the Bishop

Quilon (Agenzia Fides) - A Catholic church was attacked and devastated by vandals wearing masks in the diocese of Quilon, in South Kerala (Southern india). This is what His Exc. Mgr. Stanley Roman, Bishop of Quilon tells Fides, who is "concerned that, as Christians, we are exposed to the growth of different religious extremism, especially that of Hindu but also Muslim background" . The Bishop, who yesterday went to the church dedicated to Our Lady of Vailankanni, in the village of Kottenkulangara, tells Fides that, on Sunday evening, September 4, a group of about 20 men, with there face covered, broke into the small church, forcing doors and windows. The vandals destroyed the altar, the vestments, the confessionals. Some Catholics who live nearby went to the church because they heard noises, but the criminals threw them out threatening them, and then they escaped.
The Bishop explains to Fides that "in the area there is a very lively and large Catholic community. This is why we plan to build a larger church. Perhaps this project has alarmed the Hindu extremist groups that already, indirectly, seek to intimidate us . We have had, in recent years, a growth of these Hindu extremist groups in Kerala and we begin to suffer the consequences. But it is also true that, consequently, small Islamic groups are proliferating. And all this could endanger social peace and religious identity that has always characterized Kerala ".
Visiting the community, the Bishop invited the faithful to remain calm, "not to react, to endure violence and persecution with patience". "We will act - he explains - according to the law: we have reported the incident to the police, we are confident in the work of the police and hope that they can identify the culprits and bring them to justice as soon as possible".
Mgr. Roman concludes: "As far as we are concerned, we will continue our pastoral work and the message of Christ through the joyful witness of the Gospel and serving others".
Kerala is the Indian state with the highest density of Christians, the faithful are about 20% of the population, and the community is very visible, appreciated and deeply rooted in society. Muslims are 25% and the rest of the population (55%) belong to the Hindu religion. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 06/09/2011)

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