



ASIA/ISRAEL - Father Bouwen: the election result opens new perspectives also for Christians

Jerusalem (Agenzia Fides) - "If the outcome of the Israeli elections favors an opening to peace, Christians will feel less uncomfortable as citizens of the State of Israel." This is what was said to Fides Agency by Belgian Fr. Frans Bouwen, a missionary of the White Fathers, who has been living and working in Jerusalem for 44 years. "The profile of the Christian community in Israel is changing," notes father Bouwen "but the majority of Christians still belongs to the Palestinian Arab minority. Other Christians are mostly immigrant workers and their stable roots remain to be verified. In addition, there is the problem concerning Russian immigrants who came to Israel without revealing their Christian faith. It is known that they exist, they go to church, visit monasteries, but they do not want to be identified as Christians, and no one can say how many they are. "

The election results, according to Father Bouwen, could open up new scenarios: "One has to wait for Netanyahu's moves. Probably a big coalition will be formed, which also includes the ultra-Orthodox Parties." According to the Belgian missionary, citizens of Israel, however, gave a strong signal: "With the success of the Party of Yair Lapid, a position that I would define realistic and pragmatic has been established. The Israelis have said: we want to live a normal life, without ideological struggles. Likewise, peace is one of the things that one needs in order to live a normal life. So a pragmatic and not idealistic approach can emerge, which could be beneficial, if it is not denied in the negotiations over the division of power."

Engaged in ecumenical dialogue, the historical editor of *Proche Orient Chrétien*, father Bouwen is a highly regarded analyst of the presence of Christian communities in the geo-political Middle East context. (GV) (Agenzia Fides 26/01/2013).