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ASIA/SOUTH KOREA - Controversy between a priest and the Korean President: the Archbishop of Seoul invites priests not to get involved in politics

Seoul (Agenzia Fides) - The laity, not the clergy, have the responsibility of administering and participating directly in politics: this was confirmed in a statement sent to Fides Agency by the Archbishop of Seoul, His Exc. Mgr. Andrew Yeom Soo-jung, to calm down the controversy which broke out between a priest and the President of South Korea, Park Geun-hye. On 22 November, in fact, the "Association of Catholic priests for justice", in the Diocese of Jeonju, while celebrating a mass, called for the resignation of the Korean president in office. The priest Fr. Park Chang -shin, a member of the Association, in his homily urged President Park to resign after allegations of having manipulated government agencies, such as Secret Services, to steer the December 2012 presidential elections. He also said that it was "reasonable for North Korea to attack the island of Yeonpyeong", arousing sensation throughout the country. The controversy shook the nation. President Park Geun-hye responded publicly, sharply criticizing the priest and the Church. The Catholic community in Korea began receiving attacks from left and right-wing militants. There was even a false alarm - attack in Myeongdong Cathedral in Seoul, which created turmoil among the faithful.
As reported to Fides, during the closing Mass for the Year of Faith, on November 24, the Archbishop of Seoul, Msg. Yeom Soo- jung, had the opportunity to intervene, explaining that "Christians have an obligation to engage in politics", but specifying that this is a primary task which belongs to the laity.
The Archbishop quoted the Holy Father's words who urges Christians "to get involved in politics, because politics is one of the highest forms of charity, because it seeks the common good". But even in this field, "the task of a priest is to give spiritual and moral assistance to the lay faithful through the Word and Sacraments". Mgr. Yeom recalled the Catechism of the Catholic Church, explaining that "it is not the role of the Pastors of the Church to intervene directly in the political action and organization of social life".
"We must seek the path of truth, the common good and peaceful coexistence with other people", he said. "Instead of division and contradiction - he concluded - we should seek reconciliation, understanding, forgiveness and love". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 27/11/2013)

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