

Catholics seen as threat: say Alencherry, the new Indian cardinal.



New Indian cardinal adds that radicals are a minority and that most Hindus 'live in harmony' with Christians.

Extremist groups in India see the growth of the Catholic Church as a “threat” and have successfully lobbied the government against Christians’ rights, the newly elevated Cardinal of the Syro-Malabar Church George Alencherry warned in an interview with ucanews.com in Rome.

Alencherry was among the 22 new cardinals created yesterday by Pope Benedict XVI in St Peter’s Basilica. Most of the new princes of the Church come from the Curia and from Europe. Only two – Alencherry and the bishop of Hong Kong, John Tong Hon – come from Asia.

In his homily, the pope warned the new cardinals that their duty is “serving God and others” and urged them to be “self-giving”, rejecting the “power and glory which belongs to this world.”

After weeks of document leaks inside the Vatican and rumors of power struggles, plots and even a possible resignation by the pontiff, Pope Benedict also asked cardinals to pray for him, that he “may continually offer to the people of God the witness of sound doctrine and to guide holy Church with a firm and humble hand.”

Speaking ahead of yesterday’s ceremony, Archbishop Alencherry said he looked at his entrance into the College of Cardinals – who will eventually be called to elect Pope Benedict’s successor – with a spirit of service.

“I am really searching what I can do for the Church, especially at the universal level.”

He said that though Christians in India are a small minority – Catholics account for only 1.9 percent of the population – their strong faith and their communion can send a strong message to the whole Church.

“The tradition is strong, the faithful are ready to pay any price for their being Catholic,” he said.

Archbishop Alencherry stressed that religious extremists are a small minority of India’s Hindus and

Muslims, but they have been responsible for “atrocious attacks.” He also cautioned that political parties often pander to them in an effort to attract votes.

“You cannot say that Hinduism is intolerant. The vast majority of Hindus live with us in harmony and peace, and they even welcome Christianity in India.”

While India’s constitution guarantees religious freedom, sometimes the state protects extremists as “certain political parties” try to “exploit” religious tensions “to gain more votes” by giving “patronage to these groups”.

The new cardinal also called on the government to reverse its policy that denies preferential status to people from lower castes that convert to Christianity. According to Alencherry, the official reason for this is that “there is no caste difference in Christianity.”

But while it is true that “there is no inequality in the Christian community,” the archbishop noted that “economic inequality subsists.”

“My reading is that they are afraid that if people who embrace the Catholic faith and are from the so-called lower caste are given equal rights, there may be a flow of people into Christianity, and that would be a challenge for the majority community.”

Even if no one says it explicitly, Alencherry suggested that “behind the scenes” many see Christianity “as a threat to the majority religion, Hinduism.”

Alessandro Speciale - UCAnews