



VATICAN - Letter from the Cardinal Secretary of State to the Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the encyclical Fidei Donum: "This method in time could become the norm for missionary co-responsibility "

Vatican City (Fides Service) - On 21 April, to mark the 50th anniversary of the encyclical Fidei donum issued by the Servant of God Pope Pius XII, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone Secretary of State, sent a letter to the Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples Cardinal Ivan Dias, the text of which we give below. The letter was read aloud during a Eucharistic Concelebration in St Peter's in the morning of Saturday 5 May presided by Cardinal Dias and attended by the participants at the Annual General Assembly of the Pontifical Mission Societies and about 500 Italian Fide Donum priests. At the end of the Mass the Pope received the participants in a private audience.

Here is the text of the letter:

Your Eminence,

Today April 21st is the 50th anniversary of the Encyclical Letter Fidei donum of Pope Pius XII, of venerable memory (cfr AAS XLIX 1957, 225-248). With that Document the Supreme Pontiff wished to turn the attention of the Bishops of the Church towards Africa, at a time when that Continent was opening to the life of the modern world and was living perhaps the most difficult years of its millennial destiny (cfr *ivi*, 227). Treating in Chapter 3 of the Church's triple missionary activity (prayer, concrete help and sending of personnel), Pius XII spoke among other things of a new form of missionary cooperation different from the traditional style. He wrote: "Another form of assistance, which is more burdensome, has been undertaken by some bishops who, despite the difficulties attendant upon so doing, have permitted this or that priest of the diocese to go and spend some time in working for the bishops of Africa. This procedure has the exceptional result of allowing the wise and well-planned establishment of specialized forms of the priestly ministry, such as taking charge of teaching the secular and sacred sciences for which the local clergy have not been trained. We are happy to encourage these timely and fruitful undertakings. If this course of action is taken with due preparation, very important advantages will accrue to the Catholic Church in present-day Africa, which has its full measure of both difficulties and hopes." (AAS, cit., 245-6). (73,74 fidei donum Encyclical)

That call from the Supreme Pontiff in favour of missionary activity in Africa, gave rise to a new missionary "agent", which from the Encyclical took its name fidei donum. The Papal document threw seed which found a fertile soil and germinated thanks to profound ecclesiological and missiological reflection of the Second Vatican Council and post-Council missionary teaching. Certain essential elements at the level of both principle and practice were acquired and contributed to define the identity and configuration of fidei donum missionaries. These elements can be formulated thus: the Church is by nature missionary; the universal Church is concretised and exists in the particular Churches; particular Churches are missionary from the moment of their constitution; in communion with all the other Churches they too are responsible for concrete evangelisation.

Since then 50 years have passed during which the particular Churches, first those of ancient foundation and then the younger ones, have continued to send diocesan priests and lay people to other Churches for mission ad gentes, for new evangelisation or simply to help meet poorer Churches needs of personnel and means. The form could in time become the norm for missionary co-responsibility. By means of this cooperation in fact the whole Church becomes effectively missionary since mission ad gentes is considered a duty and a responsibility for every particular Church.

On the occasion of this important anniversary the Pontifical Missionary Union, also at the request of the National

Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies, organised a Congress in Rome with two principal objectives: first of all to look at the ground covered with a critical analysis of the lights and shadows by which it was marked; secondly help confer a new and more authentic identity on fidei donum missionaries in the light of indications coming from experience, from papal teaching and from documents of Bishops' Conferences. In particular, it is opportune to rethink the Churches' communion and co-responsibility for mission, as well as the methodological implications, such as the necessity of common planning, insertion of fidei donum missionaries with specific tasks and roles, reinsertion in the Churches of origin, mutual exchange of personnel, means and apostolic methodologies, paths of formation for missionaries, the necessity to institute at the national level centres of missionary formation for the departing missionaries and of coordination to meet adequately the request for personnel and means. Another objective is to put young Churches, which now have to rely on the assistance of missionary institutes, in a condition to form and send their own fidei donum missionaries.

The Holy Father appreciates this initiative, he regards it with confidence and trusts it will help re-launch the missionary commitment promoted fifty years ago by Pope Pius XII with the Encyclical Fidei donum. In this sense he assures you he will make special mention in his prayers that the Congress may reach the set finalities and, while expressing deep gratitude to Your Eminence, your collaborators and those who promoted and organised the meeting, he gladly sends them, the National Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies, the delegates of Bishops' Conferences and all fidei donum missionaries a special Apostolic Blessing.

I am happy to take this opportunity to pay my respects to Your Eminence,
Yours in the Lord
Tarcisio Card. BERTONE Secretary of State
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