

Presentazione del documento
Il Vescovo e l'unità dei cristiani: vademecum ecumenico

Sua Eminenza il Cardinale Luis Antonio G. Tagle
Prefetto della Congregazione per l'Evangelizzazione dei Popoli

Sala Stampa della Santa Sede, 4 dicembre 2020

The Relevance of
THE BISHOP AND CHRISTIAN UNITY. AN ECUMENICAL VADEMECUM

In the name of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, I would like to thank and congratulate Cardinal Kurt Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and his collaborators on the publication of an Ecumenical Vademecum for Bishops. We will certainly communicate this Vademecum to the Bishops of the local Churches that are vitally linked to the CEP. Allow me to highlight some aspects of the Vademecum that are relevant to the work of CEP and to share our experiences that validate some points raised by the Vademecum. My presentation is far from being exhaustive.

First, it is good that in many sections of the Vademecum the Bishop's ministry of unity is depicted as a service to the identity and mission of the Church. St. Pope Paul VI once said that the nature or identity of the Church is missionary. The mission of evangelization is the proclamation of Jesus who is the Good News through the preaching of the Word of God, prayer, the testimony of personal lives of holiness, the service of charity and the witness of community. In places where Christians are a minority and where baptized Christians are drifting away from the Church, the lack of unity among the followers of Jesus, sometimes publicly manifested as mutual animosity, undermines evangelization and obscures the person of Jesus. The non-Christians are confused. How many Christs are there? The question of St. Paul in I Corinthians 1:13 is still relevant, "Has Christ been divided into parts?" Jesus himself said, "Father, I pray that they may be one in us that the world may believe that you sent me" (John 17:21). Faith in Jesus is a grace of the Holy Spirit but it is evoked and nurtured when his followers are united in Him. In some places, non-Christians do not know the distinction between Lutherans, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Orthodox, Catholics and so forth. But their bad experience with one Christian hurts the face of Christ and all Christians. Whereas a good experience with one Christian leads to openness to Christ and to the Christian community. We appreciate the reminder in paragraph 34 of the Vademecum that in our *missio ad gentes*, Christian missionaries should not transplant their original divisions to new territories. Keeping the difference between inter-religious dialogue and ecumenical dialogue as rightly stated in paragraph 40, it is sad to note that in the experience of some Bishops it is sometimes easier to

dialogue with leaders and followers of non-Christian religions than with those of non-Catholic communities.

Secondly, the Vademecum asserts that the ecumenical engagement of the Bishop requires of him to be a person of dialogue. For our Dicastery, this is a call to further explore dialogue as a mode of evangelization. Since the local Church is the subject of evangelization, all the baptized, pastoral workers, educators, catechists, religious men and women and the ordained need formation in dialogue as a mode of evangelization. The Bishop must make sure that spaces for pastoral and missionary dialogue are available in the Diocese. He must find a mechanism by which the wealth of the Church's teaching, agreements and experiences in ecumenical dialogue is shared with and received by the different sectors of the faithful. The whole Part 2 of the Vademecum opens a whole range of possibilities to the faithful and pastors for involvement in ecumenical dialogue.

Thirdly, in the formation of newly appointed Bishops and in the continuing formation of Bishops, we might need to include practical seminars or sessions on how to handle or manage differences and conflicts and how to promote the healing of memories and forgiveness. The different types of dialogue will be productive only if done in the context of human friendships, human encounters. The friendship forged by Bishops with the leaders and members of non-Catholic communities helps eliminate prejudices. The good relationships we cultivate now will later be the good memories that would heal the wounds of the past.

+Luis Antonio G. Cardinal Tagle