

31 May 2025

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

“The witness of the apostles and the present crisis of mission” (III)

In addressing today the question of whether there are signs suggesting that Leo XIV is leading the Church back onto the right path, in accordance with Sacred Scripture and Tradition, I will focus primarily on the theme of mission, which we have discussed in the last two meditations.

We have a first speech by the new Pontiff related to the theme we are dealing with. This is the ‘address to ecumenical and interreligious delegations’ he gave on 19 May 2025. I will quote some important excerpts for the topic at hand:

“Aware, moreover, that synodality and ecumenism are closely linked, I would like to assure you of my intention to continue Pope Francis’ commitment to promoting the synodal nature of the Catholic Church and developing new and concrete forms for an ever stronger synodality in ecumenical relations.”

It is striking that, since the beginning of his pontificate, Leo XIV has repeatedly referred to his predecessor, Francis. This should not only be understood as a gesture of courtesy and respect, but also shows that he will continue along the path that Francis had taken with the Church. So far, in his frequent mentions and praise of Francis, there is not the slightest hint of criticism of his pontificate and its missteps.

Let us listen to another passage from his speech: *“One of the strong emphases of Pope Francis’ pontificate was that of universal fraternity. In this regard the Holy Spirit really “urged” him to advance with great strides the initiatives already undertaken by previous Pontiffs, especially since Saint John XXIII. The Pope of Fratelli Tutti promoted both the ecumenical path and interreligious dialogue. He did so above all by cultivating interpersonal relations, in such a way that, without taking anything away from ecclesial bonds, the human trait of the encounter was always valued. May God help us to treasure his witness!”*

Here I must clearly contradict Leon. It is true that Francis carried forward the openings of his predecessors, but this dynamic led him, among other things, to the unfortunate statements I quoted in my previous meditations (Abu Dhabi and Singapore). Therefore, Pope Francis cannot have been prompted by the Holy Spirit to embark on this path of universal fraternity, ecumenism and the promotion of interreligious dialogue, given that the latter ended in a renunciation of evangelisation.

The aforementioned ecclesial bond — and therefore with the Magisterium and Tradition of the Church — would have prevented Francis from taking such disastrous steps, which now loom like a paralysing shadow over the Church and her mission. If Leo XIV had distanced himself prudently but clearly from this path, a new situation would have arisen that would have nourished the well-founded hope for a change with regard to the mission. Instead, unfortunately, we hear him say that we should treasure Francis' testimony. The following excerpt from his address to ecumenical and interreligious delegations reaffirms this once again:

"You have witnessed the remarkable efforts made by Pope Francis in favour of interreligious dialogue. Through his words and actions, he opened new avenues of encounter, to promote 'the culture of dialogue as the path; mutual collaboration as the code of conduct; reciprocal understanding as the method and standard'" (Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together, Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019).

I believe we can say without a doubt that, on this point, the new Pontiff will continue seamlessly along the path of his predecessor, in which the proclamation of the Gospel is replaced by the "culture of dialogue". However, this dialogue does not aim to bring the message of the Gospel to the hearts of those who belong to other religions with sensitivity and delicacy, but rather claims its own value, which is centred on the pursuit of other goals, such as the universal fraternity of all men.

The main objective of such encounters and dialogues is no longer the proclamation of the Gospel to all people, regardless of their religion. On the contrary! This goal has even been abandoned, as we saw in the disastrous Abu Dhabi Declaration, in Francis' statements in Singapore, and in Archbishop Bruno Forte's speech regarding the mission to the Jews (see: Meditation of 30 May).

To answer the initial question, there are no signs that the current Pontiff will change course on this issue. Otherwise, he would have to make this clear and unequivocal in order to begin to heal the painful wound caused by his predecessor's apostate statements on the mission. But Leo XIV did not do so. Could he not have uttered words such as these to the joy of the faithful?

"Dear brothers and all who seek God, for some time now I have been observing the efforts of the Church to engage in dialogue with representatives of other religions. However, I have found that the proclamation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who brings salvation to all men, has been relegated to the background and, in some cases, even abandoned. But this must not be so, for the Church must fulfil her mission. Therefore, the time has come to examine everything in the light of faith and bring it into harmony with the testimony of the apostles and the Church's previous path."