

The reception of «Fiducia supplicans»: the Dicastery's press release.

The Declaration [«Fiducia supplicans»](#) (for a first comment on this site, click [here](#)) has aroused various reactions and resistance in the Catholic world, even in part of the episcopate. Thus, although the document explicitly stated that «beyond the guidance provided above, no further responses should be expected about possible ways to regulate details or practicalities regarding blessings of this type» (para. 41), on 4th January the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith returned to the topic with a [press release](#), signed by the Prefect Víctor Manuel Fernández and the Secretary for the doctrinal section Armando Matteo.

The text of the press release recommends a «full and calm reading of the Declaration so as to better understand its meaning and purpose» and highlights the need for a «more extended period of pastoral reflection». Therefore, it is specified that the possible blessing concerns «irregular couples» as such and not «unions». In this regard, it is important to underline that the Declaration refers specifically to «couples in irregular situations» and to «couples of the same sex», while the press release speaks only about of «irregular couples», certainly including, by this last expression, same-sex couples too.

The press release underlines how the reactions to the Declaration by some Episcopal Conferences cannot be interpreted as «doctrinal opposition», because they concern practical aspects. In fact, the indications offered by the Dicastery demonstrate practical needs.

The two key-principles in the application of «Fiducia supplicans» are: «prudence» and «attention to the ecclesial context and to the local culture».

Declaration's «real novelty» is not the possibility of blessing irregular couples, but the distinction between «liturgical or ritualized» blessings and «spontaneous or pastoral» ones. These second forms of blessings are placed within the promotion of the «popular pastoral care» of Pope Francis, who invites us to «value the simple faith of the People of God who, even in the midst of their sins, emerge from their everyday lives and open their hearts to ask for God's help».

The «pastoral blessings» must have certain features:

a) they are «very short», «a few seconds, without an approved ritual and without a book of blessings», «we are talking about something that lasts about 10 or 15 seconds».

b) they present a simple prayer in which «one simply asks the Lord for peace, health and other good things for these two people who request it (...), one asks that they may live the Gospel of Christ in full fidelity and so that the Holy Spirit can free these two people from everything that does not correspond to his divine will and from everything that requires purification»;

c) they should never be imparted «in concurrence with the ceremonies of a civil union, and not even in connection with them»;

d) they must not «take place in a prominent place within a sacred building, or in front of an altar».

In short, the central point of the Declaration «Fiducia supplicans» is not a supposed ecclesial recognition of the blessing for irregular couples or same-sex couples. More specifically, it is a broadening of the Church's magisterium on the meaning of the blessing and of the «pastoral blessing». The last are not a «an endorsement of the life led by those who request them» or an «absolution», but rather a “pastoral channel” helping faithful to «give expression to their faith, even if they are great sinners».

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