

# Aleteia

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## Father Antonio Aurelio, a global missionary



*Domitille Farret of Astiès / September 01, 2018*



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With children in Sudan.

*"Go! From all nations make disciples," says the Gospel of Matthew. From its origins, the Church's vocation is to proclaim the Gospel. Asia, America, Africa, Europe ... Every continent is mission land. During the month of August, Aleteia offers to show you different faces of missionaries. Discover Father Antonio Aurelio Fernández, Spanish Trinitarian priest, who works for the liberation of captives around the world.*

Egypt, Sudan, China, Syria ... At age 52, Father Antonio Aurelio Fernández, Trinitarian, travels the planet. He is president of SIT (Trinitarian International Solidarity), whose head office is in Rome. His order was founded in the XII<sup>th</sup> century, at the time of the

Crusades, to redeem captives Christians in Moorish prisons to repatriate then in Europe. "It's our vocation, we were created for it," says the committed Spaniard.



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Today, the SIT, in collaboration with the Trinitarian family, helps prisoners of all kinds and defends persecuted Christians. The organization supports two types of projects: those that are emergency - in places where Trinitarians are not present - and those with a permanent presence, where missions already exist. The beneficiaries of the actions carried out are numerous: slave children in tea plantations in Assam (India), Christian students in Aleppo (Syria), displaced families from Maiduguri (Nigeria) ... In some countries, missionaries can work in the open. Elsewhere, they are forced to hide and act in secret.

### Faith and freedom, the inseparable pair

Father Antonio Aurelio grew up near Cordoba, Andalusia, in a Catholic environment. As a child, a Trinitarian convent was located near his parent's home. "At that time, I wanted to have a family, to be normal", he testifies without rant. The call comes while he is studying at the

university. "I wanted freedom and I remembered the Trinitarians." Because for him, faith and freedom are intimately linked. "The Trinitarians are the Order of freedom," he continues. But the freedom of man is not to do what he wants, but to follow the ways of the Lord. He who really knows God can not do anything but follow him. " The Andalusian felt that his freedom was to fulfill the will of God. He was ordained a priest in 1995 at the age of 30.



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From 2000 to 2003, the Cordovan religious left for Cairo. There, along with two other brothers, he founded a mission, which became an ideal base for traveling to northern Sudan (which adjoins Egypt from the south), where religious can not settle. Indeed, the country is torn by a civil war between the north and the south. The northern Sudanese are generally Arab and Muslim, while in the south, the inhabitants are black and predominantly Christian and animist. Many South Sudanese, mostly women and children, trafficked into slavery, are captured and sold as slaves in the north or out of the country.

## Children often orphans

From Egypt, Father Antonio Aurelio sets out to free Sudanese children sold by Islamic slave traders. He creates an association of Sudanese Christians; teachers, priests or doctors, with whom he works closely. He describes the situation: "We had contacts in the country. When they saw a group of mercenaries with women and children, they warned us. We entered the country in secret with a private plane that we rented [the Westerners are not allowed to buy slaves, note] and, thanks to our contacts, we gave them an appointment to buy the children from them [it costs about 300 euros for a boy and 250 for a girl]. Then we tried to find the members of their tribes if possible. In the majority of cases, however, these children have no family because the soldiers killed or sold their relatives. However, thanks to its teams and the infrastructure at its disposal, the organization takes care of them, feeds them, cares for them and educates them. To release the children, the members of the Order also resort to justice, but the difficulty is to find witnesses.





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## Many persecuted areas

Fr. Antonio Aurelio then leaves the Middle East to return to Europe, where he strives to find funds to fight. He performs various missions at the service of the Order, before being appointed president of SIT in 2015. Today, he travels the globe and raises money for his missions. "What we need most, he says with conviction, is schools to take children off the street." And tirelessly continue: "We are also present in Syria, Iraq, China and other Persian Gulf countries whose name I can not reveal. We stay in touch with local churches. In some areas, it is more persecution than slavery. In Qaraqosh, the village was completely Christian. After the invasion of Daesh, the inhabitants who remained were treated as slaves. It evokes Maaloula, a predominantly Christian village located 40 kilometers northeast of Damascus, Syria. There, Aramaic is still spoken in the streets. In 2013, the small

city fell into the hands of the Islamists, who devastated it, before it was liberated in April 2014. The Trinitarian brothers joined the local population and helped to rebuild the houses. In China, where persecution is very strong, priests are forced to hide to celebrate Mass. "We are in contact with the ACN [Aid to Church in Need] , providing information on the situation, " he says.



© Solidarietà Internazionale TrinitariaIn Iraq.

## **"Their faith is transparent"**

Fr. Antonio Aurelio indulges: "The most difficult thing is to be always in touch with suffering. Before, people were good. Then the war came into their lives. I met people completely destroyed, both psychologically and physically. He also shares his joys: "The most beautiful thing," he confides with admiration, "is hope. People do not lose faith and continue to believe that God is with them. I get a lot where I go. In Europe, we have a taste for study and reflection. There, there is no need to demonstrate the presence of God. People know that there is a God and that the end of life on earth is only the beginning of true life. Their faith is transparent, obvious and profound.