

**"Mission in the face of Pluralism, Secularization and religious Diversity".
Workshop 1- Input**

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I - Pluralism, Secularization and religious Diversity in Italy

Italy is still often referred to as a "Catholic" country. This has not been true for a long time. The number of non-Catholic believers today is about 6 million people, or 10% of the Italian population. These are Muslims (over two million), Orthodox, mainly Romanians (about 1.5 million), Protestants (about 700,000), Jehovah's Witnesses (about 400,000), and others. In addition to the growth of religious plurality, the Catholic Church is also confronted with the phenomenon of secularization. Today, practicing Catholics are less than 20% of the baptized ones. The fact that Italy has the lowest birth rate worldwide (1.23 children per family) confirms the force of this secularization process.

But Italy's evangelical world is also polarized. On one side are the historic churches (Waldensians, Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, Salvation Army), united in the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy (Federazione delle chiese evangeliche in Italia - FCEI), in dialogue with Adventists and some Pentecostal networks. On the other side is the group of the Evangelicals that includes most Pentecostal churches and numerous independent churches. Dialogue between these two poles is not easy and is limited to issues in relations with the state. On other issues, especially of an ethical nature, communication proves extremely difficult.

II - The Protestant Voice in the Public Sphere

1 - Religious freedom

Relations between the state and individual religions are each governed by complicated and sometimes outdated nouns. The result is a hierarchy of recognitions and rights. At the top of this imaginary pyramid is the Catholic Church with its Concordat, which, among other things, provides for and funds Catholic religious education in all public schools.

On a second level are the denominations with an individually negotiated state treaty (Intesa), i.e., an agreement that, among other things, provides access to the distribution of a kind of "cultural tax" (eight-per-mil or otto per mille). Actually, there are 12 denominations with an Intesa, but to date there are no agreements with the numerous other denominations, namely Muslims, Romanian Orthodox and Jehovah's Witnesses. Thus, there is a difference between the social reality of religious pluralism and the legal recognition of this pluralism.

2 - Immigration

For almost 10 years, the FCEI has run a program for refugees and migrants; the Mediterranean Hope. It is structured in different projects: Reception of refugees in Lampedusa, a reception center in Scicli (Sicily), a social project in Calabria for migrants, an aid project in Bosnia - and above all: The Humanitarian Corridors.

The Humanitarian Corridors are the only alternative to the dead in the sea. It is pure hypocrisy to be moved in front of images with heartbreaking scenes of shipwrecked people, if we do not help to prevent these dramas and find legal and safe routes.

In the project "ETIKA - oranges in solidarity", oranges are organically grown in Rosarno/Calabria by companies that employ migrants regularly and respect their fundamental rights.

3 - Ecumenism and interreligious dialogue

Ecumenism and interreligious dialogue are inevitable issues in an increasingly pluralistic society. Moments of great ecumenical intensity and interreligious fraternity increase. Dialogues today start "from below", or with other words, "bottom-up". It is a matter of moving from theological dialogue to dialogue of daily life, to interpersonal exchange, to collaboration for the common good. From dia-logue to dia-practice.

As FCEI, we are concerned about the rise of theological fundamentalism and religious populism, which are becoming more and more divisive. We question and fight, for example, the idea of a Christian Occident threatened by Islam or the contempt and exclusion of LBGT persons who demand space in society and in our churches.

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