

Mission Today
Saturday, the 29.5.2021

Workshop 2: God's Mission: Understanding of Mission Today
Fulvio Ferrario, Rome

With this "impulse" we would like to read the first of the theses offered to us from the perspective of a Reformed Church in diaspora, in a European context: that is, in a context of radical secularization.

We have known for some time that Europe is the most de-Christianized continent on the planet, and semistaturally this has important consequences for any reflection on the theme of mission. Within the secularization of society, however, we are confronted with a self-secularization of the Church in the major Western traditions, Roman Catholic and Protestant. In most European countries, participation in the activities of the Church is very low: it is not uncommon for less than 10% to attend Sunday services; the same is true for the other activities, which are more or less traditionally organized by the local congregation. In general, and with a comparable sociological situation, the phenomenon is more accentuated in the Protestant Church than in the Catholic one. This weak participation in the life of the congregation by those who nevertheless continue to belong naturally reduces the permanence of the core congregation and increases the range of people who maintain a weak attachment to the church. This weakness makes it difficult to accept with continuity and awareness the proclamation of the Gospel and to witness in society the *missio dei* of which Thesis I speaks. Sociological studies then show that the departures from the Church come from this "circle of distant church members", which cannot be surprising. A diaspora situation, like the one I come from, shows dynamics that are partly different, but not in the essential point of a consequent self-secularization of the church.

What does this mean for our idea of mission? My first answer is very simple: the first addressees of mission today are the members of the church itself: that is, those who have not (yet) explicitly rejected the message of the gospel, but who live so far away from the church that they are *de facto* in a position of religious indifferentism. I want to make it clear right away that this is not to say anything against the classical idea of mission to society outside the church. However, any discourse on this last point remains abstract if the church is then so fragile that it cannot concretely welcome those who wish to approach it. When a person who wants to know the evangelical church, as sometimes happens in many situations in Italy, goes to worship and meets eight people in an empty church, this first contact may not be promising. I think it is no coincidence that within the Protestant and Catholic Churches the difficulties are less where there are still core congregations of a certain consistency, able to offer a meeting place to those who seek it.

It is not possible here to go into the details of pastoral proposals for mission of the kind outlined here. I confine myself to pointing out that in the last year there has developed what we can call telematic pastoral care. Again, this cannot be the magic solution to our problems. It is simply another tool that has proven effective in various situations.