# FACING THE ATTACKS TO DIGITAL MISSIONARIES

A framework of comprehension and action proposed by iMission

## Context

- Any person exposed to public visibility (sports, entertainment, politics, science, religion...) is subject to more or less virulent attacks and criticism. This is just a fact to assume.
- Moreover in the announcement of the Gospel, Jesus himself promised his disciples that following him ment being attacked and rejected even by the closest persons. It should not be a surprise! Jesus himself was accused of acting with Satan's power!
- • But this has worsened in our increasingly polarized society. Populisms have simplified the vision of reality, and people see the world in black and white, without shades. There is a lack of analysis and reasoning, and emotion is the preferred criterion to build opinions.
- Social media are fertile ground for this radicalization, due to:
  o Algorithms that favor confinement in bubbles of mental convergence
  o The speed to react and share (easy viralization of the contents), in relation to the rest of the media ecosystem
  o The thirst for visibility and likes on the part of many
  • Anyone who, in this context, tries to contribute nuances, reasoning, analysis, will face difficulties

## A polarized Church

Pope Francis is directing the Church according to the Second Vatican Council: maturity of the laity, co-responsibility in the mission, discernment and responsible freedom, an open and warm Church in dialogue with society. In the background beats a vision of the Pope as successor of Peter and the image of God revealed by Jesus, who did not want to use power. In his message of faith, he prioritizes the merciful presence of God towards all people regardless of their condition, and service to people in need.

A (minority but noisy) sector of the Church prefers a paradigm prior to the Council: a vertical model inspired in the Middle Age, in which the authority of the Pope and the Bishops is unidirectional and the laity and society are silent and obey. In the background beats a vision of the Pope as Emperor, and a vision of God as omnipotent Judge. In their message of faith, they prioritize aspects related to sexuality and family life as radical criteria of catholicity.

On social media, there are some powerful lobbies from the second group attacking strongly and coordinately the first one, including the Pope. Sometimes they do it from anonymity, other empowered by the means of communication at their disposal. Those receiving the attacks do not respond and continue their work.

## Negative consequences of attacks

- The personal suffering of each missionary, even assumed with humor and serenity, but which drains their energy and discourages some of them from continuing
- The doubts that are sown among those close to the missionary,
- The disorientation of the simple and of the people who would embark on the mission, bewildered by conflicting models within Catholicism

- The "normalization" of attacking others in the name of faith, which "creates a culture" contrary to the Gospel

## Us, iMission

- iMission is with Pope Francis, with the Second Vatican Council, with respect for the nuances and ways of following Christ, always in fidelity to the deposit of faith

- Assuming the complexity of the world without simplifications, harmonizing faith and reason

- Focused on people and their good

- Listening, dialoguing and welcoming people in their diversity, with openness and mercy.

### How to prevent, manage, counter

Even if it is natural that the most visible people receive attacks, it is possible to prevent and reduce them, without renouncing the courage of evangelization.

#### Prevent:

Choosing messages, images and content of the highest evangelizing value.

Choosing well the rhythm of messages that can awaken the attack.

Choosing well the tone and style of communication, which is not that of intimacy, but that of the crowds. (Jesus spoke differently to people, depending on their openness to the message and their love for Him. He spoke in parables to the crowds to arouse their interest and their desire to get closer and understand more. His intimacy was revealed to those who welcomed his message).

#### Manage:

Through technical measures, silencing or blocking bots and haters.

Wearing an "emotional raincoat" if possible, knowing that these attacks are now inevitable and have no foundation.

Receiving the support of those close to us, venting and expressing the pain that is felt, leaning on those who love us the most.

#### Counter:

With prayer and deepening the relationship with God, not only individually, but also as a community.

With campaigns like "Give heart to the network" promoting respect in social networks, or another about the joy of living the Gospel and following Jesus.