

FOR A THEOLOGY FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN

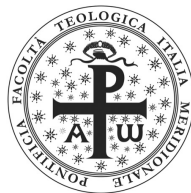
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The following text has come to light from ongoing theological experiments on the shores of the Mediterranean and from a path of research and exchanges that lasted several years. It is now proposed in the form of a manifesto to those who are interested in this thematic and who intend to get involved, in various ways, in the process initiated. According to the etymology of the word "manifesto" itself, we in fact intend to offer the Churches, the academic community and those who wish to cross our work a text that makes known some theoretical achievements and some landmarks from which we wish to work for a theology from the Mediterranean. It is therefore an open, dynamic text as is the process that we hope will unfold thanks to the delivery of this manifesto. Proposing a theology that can contribute to building networks between the Mediterranean Churches and to building a Mediterranean of peace represents an assumption of responsibility as male and female theologians.

1. THE MEDITERRANEAN IS OUR CONCERN

This document was born from listening.

What do we hear, what do we see, touch, experience by listening deeply to the Mediterranean?

Our listening cannot be limited to being a superficial listening. Directed towards the height of the heavens and at the same time towards the abysses of the earth, theology pushes us towards the depths of the Mediterranean and obliges us to cross its cities, its ports, its places of worship, its casbahs, its gates..., where blending occurs: fruit of encounters and conflicts, dialogues and compromises, receptions and rejections.

In the face of contradictions, social emergencies and the many challenges that arise, especially for believers, we cannot remain inert and silent. Those who do theology feel the responsibility to put all this into words with the eyes of faith. Aware that "teaching and studying theology means living on a frontier"¹, we are called to offer a different narrative of the Mediterranean, its stories and its faces, to share with those we meet a sapiential reading, according to the mysticism of hope, in solidarity with all the shipwrecked of history, through an evangelical style of dialogue, relational and prophetic.

The thousand coasts and numerous populations, the three continents (Africa, Asia, Europe) and the five shores (North Africa, Middle East, Black and Aegean Seas, Balkans and Latin Europe) overlooking the Mediterranean, so strongly characterized by cultural and social experience of shores - or by what the sea determines as lives, habits and choices, as exchanges and mixtures taking place at street junctions and along the squares - have been, over the centuries, favourable places for the unveiling of the meaning of the human and the divine.

¹ Pope FRANCIS, *Letter for the 100th Anniversary of the Catholic University of Argentina*, March 3, 2015.

The Mediterranean has also been a cradle of history, religions, migrations, economic and cultural exchanges, paths of peace and progress. However, today, the image of the shipwreck appears perhaps to be the one that best represents it, having become in fact, for many, a tomb: a place of injustice and inequality, deportations and massacres. A place where we are all shipwrecked: for what we are witnessing in the Mediterranean is a shipwreck of civilizations.

The Mediterranean has also been the belly that has seen the rise of believing thought, not just of Christian thought. Here, not without conflicts and martyrs, these theological models took shape which are still today a term of comparison for new theologies sometimes elaborated outside of it.

Our commitment is to a theology that, cherishing this thousand-year-old tradition, recognizes itself as a theology from the Mediterranean (or starting from the Mediterranean). We want to salute the masterful lesson that Pope Francis has given us in recent years, especially at the Naples Conference in 2019, at the meeting with the Bishops of the Mediterranean in Bari in 2020 and on many other occasions. We want to work towards a theology that, from the Mediterranean, can contribute to generating paths of fraternity, sharing and peace within communities of believers as well as dialogue with those who dedicate their energy for the construction of a fraternal world. This will be possible to the extent that the affective, relational and agapic dimension of Mediterranean humanism will be revalued.

We too are convinced that it is not possible to read the Mediterranean realistically "except in dialogue and as a bridge - historical, geographical, human - between Europe, Africa and Asia. It is a place where the absence of peace has led to multiple regional and global imbalances, and whose pacification, through the practice of dialogue, could instead greatly contribute to initiating process of reconciliation and peace »².

To do theology in the Mediterranean means for us to choose to build a theology that is not neutral, but that has its bearing structures in the logic of the incarnation and in the mystery of Easter. A theology that recognizes in history not

2 Francis, *Theology after Veritatis Gaudium in the Context of the Mediterranean*, Naples, 21 June 2019.

a simple application space, but rather the place to understand the authentic meaning of the announcement of the Gospel.

2. A STYLE FOR DOING THEOLOGY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

2.1. Contextual and narrative theology

The Mediterranean needs a theology that fully lives its contextual dimension, recognized as its own and indispensable call. This requirement appears today as a constituent element, without being limited to being relegated to a few "original" and "marginal" proposals. The peoples of the Mediterranean, who have fostered the fruitful encounter between the traditions of the Jewish and Christian faith and Greco-Hellenistic thought, preserve, in their ways of understanding life and the world, the interpretation of theology as "affectus fidei". Consideration of the "affective" dimension, inseparably united to the "intellectual" dimension constituting its inner spring, can promote a reading that would not be extrinsic, but – so to speak – intrinsic, from within what happens in this context. Theology from the Mediterranean is, in this sense, an "immersive" theology that allows itself to be touched by the wounds and anxieties expressed by the Mediterranean contexts, nevertheless also knowing how to grasp the novum that emerges from it. It is from these wounds that the light of Jesus' Passover springs, a living criterion for continuing to interpret the movement of analogy that, over the centuries, has enabled the Church to read in the reality, creation and history links, signs and references to God's saving action.

The context as such, and this Mediterranean context in particular, must be recognized as having value not only in itself, but in perspective of the salvation wrought by Christ for the coming of the Kingdom. In this sense, the Mediterranean can be understood as a "theological place" that requires attention, peaceful and not superficial, towards the life stories of individuals and communities, biographies and experiences, for a more narrative theology.

2.2. A theology of listening...

A theology from the Mediterranean, like all theology, lives by listening to the Word of God and listening to the lives of human beings. It is a theology that does not remain insensitive to the cry of pain and the demands for justice that come from the many shipwrecked of history: from those who leave their countries, from those who are exploited in their work and humiliated in their dignity; by those who are deprived of the right to inhabit their own land, deprived of the possibility of a future. Its task is to give voice to the prophetic example contained in the "cry" of humanity which echoes that of Christ on the Cross (cf. Mk 15:34). We know that we must start from this listening which, more than yesterday, today takes the sound of silence and the cry of the overwhelmed and the unsaved, stories of resignation and redemption. We want to do so with the style of a humble theology, which does not give ready-made answers, but allows itself to be inhabited by the provocations of this sea and the lands it reaches. Rooted, like any authentic theology, in the *auditus fidei* and the *auditus hominis*, theology from the Mediterranean wants to practice the code of welcome that does not fear plurality, which makes it possible to consider the differences present in the "con-text" as an unprecedented "weaving of texts" that generates the novelty of life and thought, and not as an obstacle. It is a theology capable of a hermeneutic of mercy that knows how to promote knowledge of the other - whoever one may be: Jew, Christian, Muslim, believer differently or non-believer - in the richness one is carrying, opening paths of authentic exchanges in the Mediterranean global fabric, social and ecclesial. No longer Eurocentric, it is a theology capable of crossing cultures, attentive to recognize the other without fear of possible "contamination", capable of giving voice to the different shores that surround the Mediterranean: to the richness of the East from which came

the light of divine Wisdom - whose "seeds" are already present in life, in the religions of its peoples³; to that of the European West, with the richness of its speculative and humanist heritage, particularly nourished by the Judeo-Christian tradition; and that of the African continent rich not only in natural resources, but first of all in inestimable human qualities such as the deep religious sense - as it is lived in Islam in the Maghreb and in the mystical dimension of traditional African religions -, the sense of family, respect for life, community life and the acute sense of solidarity.

We cannot claim that all the peoples of all continents, expressing the Christian faith, imitate the paths adopted by the peoples of Europe at a given moment in their history, because faith cannot be confined within the limits of the understanding and expression of a particular culture. It is indisputable that one culture does not exhaust the mystery of Christ's redemption.⁴

2.3. ... and dialogue

A theology from the Mediterranean translates into its practice the principle of "dialogue in all fields"⁵ (VG, 4b). The dialogical instance, moreover, cannot be considered as a simple optional choice among many others, but must be assumed from the characterization of the very dynamic of revelation: God is dialogue and dialogue is the place of God. Dialogue with other religious traditions must be accompanied by dialogue with cultures and with different approaches to knowledge of the profound issues that concern the lives of human beings. Affirmations of faith, rooted in the living tradition of the Church, must be assumed and communicated with the care to highlight their dialogical potential in relation to other Christian confessions (Armenian, Orthodox, Protestant...)⁶ and religious traditions. This commits the theologians of the Mediterranean to foster a dynamic interaction between theological and cultural centres, the "networking" (VG, 4d) with the different expressions of ecclesial and religious realities and with the many others that promote culture and social commitment.

3 Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Postsynodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, 1995, 42-43.

4 FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Rome, 2013, 118.

5 FRANCIS, Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*, Rome, 2017, 4b.

6 Protestants whose numbers are increasing, especially with migrations from Africa sub-Saharan society.

2.4. A theology that goes beyond the divorce of praxis

Precisely because it allows itself to be challenged by the context, a Theology from the Mediterranean is in itself oriented towards the concrete life of the believing community. Pastors and theologians, as well that the rest of the People of God, wish to overcome what the Pope Francis has repeatedly called the "divorce" between theology and pastoral action. It's time to break through old barriers and foster new fruitful synergies. Without attention to ecclesial experiences, theology would be reduced to activities of laboratory, abstract, cold, impersonal, self-referential, unfit to cooperate with all the People of God in the evangelizing mission. Theology from the Mediterranean recognizes ecclesial experiences as a place generating its reflection and intends to exhort ecclesial communities to constantly verify fidelity to a hermeneutic oriented towards a fruitful dialogue between the Word of God and the stories of the men and women of our time. Hence the proposal of academic backgrounds that value the stories born of the ecclesial practices and accompany a formation aimed at their renewal.

4.5. A theology that values popular religiosity

A theology of the Mediterranean cannot fail to enhance the popular religiosity as the faith of the people and religious experience rooted in a believing tradition. One cannot ignore the strong meaning of symbols, rites and cosmovisions spread among the peoples of the Mediterranean, when we read them again on a hermeneutic horizon of shared faith. Popular religiosity in the Mediterranean is a privileged space for the mutual fertilization and hospitality of different religions and cultures. And it is a place of expression of this "intercession" that characterizes the Mediterranean style of relationship. No reducible to pure folklore, popular religiosity needs to be understood in depth, in its traditional forms as well as in the religious sense of the life it allows to emerge. Starting from the centrality of the announcement of the kerygma, in the style specific to dialogue, makes it possible to recognize the evangelizing impact of the popular faith and put a end to its possible excesses.

2.6. An "in-between" theology

A theology from the Mediterranean cannot fail to realize that it is a space of the "in-between". The deepening of the Mediterranean reality, a result of interconnections and mutual fertilizations, can help to rediscover the dialogical dimension of what we are, which is defined and constructed by placing oneself "on the threshold" of the other, by removing one's sandals "before the sacred ground of the other (cf. Ex 3, 5)⁷". If one of the tasks of theology is traditionally to grasp the link of mysteries between them, in a world where "everything is connected"⁸, the theologian must be able to grasp today the references, relationships, interconnections between themes, knowledge and methodologies also in dialogue with other sciences. In a word: the theology of the "in-between" exercises a "complex" rationality, aware "that logic is an instrument of verification useful for sectoral and compartmentalized truths, but that the deepest levels of the reality escape it. [...] By its own movement [complex rationality] connects knowledge, connects what is human to life, to nature, to the planet, to the Universe"⁹. The theology of "the in-between" is therefore the exercise of a rationality open to the mystery of world, therefore inseparable from what crosses and exceeds reason: love¹⁰. In this sense, theology from the Mediterranean must be understood as a "science of borders" in which the sea becomes a classic metaphor for "navigation", open to research and never satisfied, and "bridges", "roads" and "squares" of the ancient world, which become symbols of the encounter between different cultures. In principle what theology from the Mediterranean rejects, is the legitimacy of the construction of ideological "walls" in particular. Openness to multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary, brought about by the Mediterranean context, becomes essential. It requires new educational pathways allowing students open to the future to acquire new skills and specific.

7 FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Rome, 2013, 169.

8 FRANCIS, Encyclique *Laudato si'*, 2015, 117.

9 Edgar MORIN, *L'aventure de La Méthode*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2015, p. 114.

10 *Ibid.*

3. THE CONTRIBUTION OF THEOLOGY TO THE LIFE OF THE PEOPLES OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

If theology is never an end in itself, this is all the less the case for a theology from the Mediterranean. Deeply rooted in ecclesial experiences, it wants to be the leaven and especially the leaven of a Mediterranean narrative, "in which it is possible to recognize oneself in a constructive way, peaceful and full of hope"¹¹. The preferential option for the least and the poor dictated by the Gospel thus becomes a preferential option for minorities.

3.1. For the promotion of social justice and full citizenship

To do theology in the Mediterranean means to recall that the proclamation of the Gospel is a commitment to the promotion of justice and the overcoming the inequalities that cause marginality, that it requires the protection of the most vulnerable. It is not possible to do theology without recalling the need for non-inhuman and wise management of migratory flows, which does not use migration as a pawn on the chessboard of international geopolitics, but knows how to accept its provocation for a real awareness of the challenges of our time and for the affirmation of a broader sense of citizenship. It is not possible to do theology without assuming the commitment to defend in our societies the right to "full citizenship"¹², going beyond "the discriminatory use of the term minorities which engenders feelings of isolation and inferiority" and "paves the way for hostility and discord."¹³. One becomes a full citizen when given the means to contribute in all

¹¹ FRANCIS, *Theology after Veritatis Gaudium in the Context of the Mediterranean*, Naples, 2019.

¹² FRANCOIS AND Ahmad AL-TAYYEB, *HUMAN FRATERNITY FOR WORLD PEACE AND LIVING TOGETHER*, Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019.

¹³ *Ibid.*

respects to the life of the country in which one lives and as perceived as one's own and when every man or woman is guaranteed the same rights. Everyone must be recognized this possibility, regardless of the culture one belongs to or the religion one professes. Full citizenship also implies the right to religious freedom that is too often trampled underfoot or denied. Full citizenship also means active citizenship, the only one capable of breaking the logic of resignation or addiction and of preventing the multiplication of systems of corruption in political and economic life.

3.2. For a synodal journey of the Churches of the Mediterranean

Doing theology in the Mediterranean means helping to weave a network between the Churches of the Mediterranean and, through them, between peoples of the countries bordering this sea. Theology from the Mediterranean is at the service of the network of relationships that is being built between the bishops of the Mediterranean through the meetings of Bari, Florence and Marseilles. We are deeply convinced that it is only together that it is possible to face the challenges of the Mediterranean contexts and that communion and the "exchange of gifts" between the Churches of the different shores help to rediscover the profound meaning of the Church in the continuous regeneration of its mystery, in the changes and dramas of history. It is a synodal style, animated by sincere feelings of fraternity, which must be cultivated in relations between the Churches of the Mediterranean countries and lived in dialogue with sister Churches and with representatives of other religious traditions. The path of ecumenical dialogue, however arduous, must be proposed and supported by experiences of encounter, confrontation and collaboration in listening together to the Spirit. This is the legacy we believe we shall accept from many martyrs of dialogue in the Mediterranean.

Authentic ecumenical synodality can be a first and important sign of the credibility of Christian witness in the Mediterranean countries and a sign of hope in a context torn apart by multiple tensions.

3.3. Building a future of peace

Doing theology in the Mediterranean means not ignoring the different social, political and religious tensions, often at the root of conflicts. The horizon of universal fraternity demands the work of a theology of peace and for peace, which rigorously seeks the foundations and conditions of possible paths capable of renewing the links between the peoples where death now reigns and to foster experiences of coexistence and social friendship. There is a strong sense of connection in the Mediterranean contexts: a richness on which it is good to build. However, relationships are not always open to welcoming those who do not belong to their entourage or strangers. In Mediterranean countries, the sense of welcome and hospitality often coexists with the desire to lock oneself into one's own family or group. Theology can help avoid the risk of this familism and encourage the actions and feelings of mutual solidarity that reveal, in the strong sense of family, the feeling of belonging to the only human family and to the one family of God's children. The "in-between" that the Mediterranean suggests, if listened to to the end, is an "in-between" that unites, includes, connects diversity; An "in-between" that is a incitement to peace and an antidote to war.

There can be no peace or genuine social friendship if one remains deaf to the cry of the land and the sea. Going beyond the logic of collective interests requires that the environmental issue be taken seriously. The Mediterranean is one of the places where the alteration of environmental balances, with its recurrent disasters, is the most dramatic. It is not only people who die at sea, there is also a sea that dies. Many of the ongoing wars are due to consequences of environmental imbalances or at least exploit them: drought and water shortages, increasing desertification, situations of misery and hunger, use of basic products necessity as a weapon. It is the theology's duty to remind people of the Mediterranean that only an integrated development, in harmony with the environment, as has often happened in many places in the Mediterranean, is destined to generate a future and that the creation is not a place of plunder, but a common home to be cared for, unlocking its potential for good.

3. 4. For a "hospitable" religious experience

Doing theology in the Mediterranean can breath new life to attention to religious experience, understood as an experience of God and therefore itself a meeting place between believers of different traditions, but also an essential reference point for a theological foundation that starts from the revelation of God and the resulting experience. The mystery of Christ, the Incarnate Word, and of his Passover for the salvation of the multitude, impels us in this direction. Look at the other, his or her faith, from the perspective of religious experience, can help to make it a 'hospital space' in which the sensitivities specific to traditions and individual confessions may be welcomed and recognized, with a view to mutual enrichment. It is a matter of assuming the understanding that the other has from his or her own experience of God and his or her own faith, to expand the sacred space by learning to conceive and live it not as a space to defend by occupying it, but as a dynamic and active place, a mobile and modular border that moves its boundaries without cancelling them to create a spacious welcome. Such a perspective of understanding opens the possibility to come and share with other believers the experience of the presence of God. Demilitarizing religions means "demilitarizing the human heart"¹⁴ and help demilitarize cultures so that mutual hospitality becomes a cultural and thought paradigm, a criterion of life and social action.

We know that we must ask pardon, as believers, for justified closures in the name of faith, for sustained conflicts for religious reasons, for the lack of courage in denouncing the evils caused by ideological and power systems. On the contrary, we want to be taught by the experiences of so many communities that have been renewed and converted from acceptance of the foreigner and who have rediscovered the living meaning of their faith by becoming welcoming to the faith of the other. It is in these experiences that we can indeed recognize the revealing and innovative action of Spirit: "See, I am doing a new thing: now it springs up; do you not perceive it?" (Is 43:19; cf. Rev 21:5) This is the novum that the Mediterranean still tells.

¹⁴ FRANCIS, *Discours Founder's Memorial*, Abu Dhabi, February 4, 2019.



We therefore commit ourselves, as theologians of the Mediterranean space, to cultivate every opportunity for encounter, exchange and reflection for the relaunch of a theological proposal that helps the Mediterranean to rediscover itself as a bridge, a sea of blending, and to build itself as an ark of peace, "sea of fraternity".

We commit ourselves to put ourselves at the service of a theology which, from the the Mediterranean may become a critical body and a factor in promoting a humanism of welcome and fraternal coexistence for the peoples of the Mediterranean and for all those who still look at the Mediterranean with a particular attention.

We commit ourselves to work with pastors, in a relationship of mutual support. May theologians perceive the recognition of their diakonia of understanding the faith. May pastors feel accompanied and encouraged in their delicate service of discernment and of ecclesial responsibility. Together with our communities, we want to renew the courage of proclamation and witness. Finally, we call those involved in the delicate work of research, teaching and training to continue their commitment with even more enthusiasm and motivation.

May the Mediterranean once again become a matrix of hope: matrix and promise of possible brotherhood.

