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Intervention of the Holy Father Francis at the meeting on the theme: “Theology after *Veritatis gaudium* in the context of the Mediterranean”, promoted by the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Southern Italy (Naples, 20 to 21 June 2019)

At 7.50 this morning, the Holy Father Francis left from the Vatican heliport, destined for Naples on the occasion of the meeting on the theme: “Theology after *Veritatis gaudium* in the context of the Mediterranean”, promoted by the Pontifical Theological Faculty of Southern Italy (Naples, 20 to 21 June 2019).

After landing in the sports field of the Parco Virgiliano in Naples at 8.40, the Holy Father transferred by car to the Pontifical San Luigi Faculty. Upon arrival he was received by the archbishop of Naples and Grand Chancellor of the Pontifical Faculty, His Eminence Cardinal Crescenzo Sepe; by the bishop of Nola, H.E. Msgr. Francesco Marino; by the Prepositor General of the Society of Jesus, Fr. Arturo Sosa Abascal, S.J., by the Deputy Grand Chancellor of the Faculty and provincial Superior of the Jesuits, Fr. Gianfranco Matarazzo, S.J.; by the head of the Faculty, Don Gaetano Castello; by the deputy head, Fr. Giuseppe Di Luccio, S.J.; by the Superior of the Community, Fr. Domenico Marafioti, S.J.; and by the rector of the Pontifical Seminary of Campania, Fr. Francesco Beneduce, S.J.

The public session of the Meeting took place in the square in front of the Faculty. After the various interventions on the second day of the meeting, the Holy Father gave an address. At the end, the Pope greeted the lecturers of the Faculty and the Jesuit community. He left the Theological Faculty and, at 13.12, departed by helicopter for the Parco Virgiliano in Naples to return to the Vatican.

The following is the Holy Father Francis’ address, pronounced during the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father Francis

Cardinals,

Dear brother bishops and priests,

Dear professors and dear students!

I am glad to meet with you today, and to take part in this conference. I warmly reciprocate the greeting of the dear brother Patriarch Bartholomew, a great precursor of *Laudato si'* – a precursor by many years – who wished to contribute to the reflection with his personal message. Thank you Bartholomew, dear brother.

The Mediterranean has always been a place of transit, exchange, and sometimes even conflict. We know of many. This place today raises a number of questions, often dramatic. They can be translated into some questions we asked ourselves at the Abu Dhabi interreligious meeting: how can we care for one another as one human family? How can we nurture a tolerant and peaceful coexistence that translates into authentic fraternity? How can we ensure acceptance in our communities of the other and of those who are different from us since they belong to a religious and cultural tradition different from ours? How can religions be forms of brotherhood rather than walls of separation? These and other questions demand to be interpreted on several levels, and demand generous commitment to listening, to study and comparison to promote processes of liberation, peace, brotherhood and justice. We must convince ourselves: it is about initiating processes, not making definitions of spaces, occupying spaces... Initiating processes.

A theology of justice and dialogue

During this conference you first analyzed contradictions and difficulties in the space of the Mediterranean, and then you asked what the best solutions would be. In this regard, you asked what theology would be adequate to the context in which you live and work. I would say that theology, particularly in such a context, is called to be a theology of acceptance and to develop an authentic and sincere dialogue with social and civil institutions, with universities and research centres, with religious leaders and with all the women and men of goodwill, for the construction of the peace of an inclusive and fraternal society and for the protection of creation.

When the Proemio of *Veritatis gaudium* mentions the deepening of *kerygma* and dialogue as criteria for renewing studies, we mean that they are at the service of the journey of a Church that increasingly places evangelization at the centre. Not apologetics, not manuals – as we have heard – evangelizing. At the centre there is evangelization, which does not mean proselytism. In the dialogue with cultures and religions, the Church announces the Good News of Jesus and the practice of evangelical love which He preached as a synthesis of all the teaching of the Law, of the visions of the Prophets and of the will of the Father. Dialogue is above all a method of discernment and proclamation of the Word of love which is addressed to each person and which in the heart of each person wants to take up residence. Only in listening to this Word and in the experience of the love that it communicates can the actuality of the *kerygma* be discerned. Dialogue, understood in this way, is a form of acceptance.

I would like to reiterate that “spiritual discernment does not exclude existential, psychological, sociological or moral insights drawn from the human sciences. At the same time, it transcends them. Nor are the Church’s sound norms sufficient. We should always remember that discernment is a grace – a gift. ... Ultimately, discernment leads to the wellspring of undying life: to know the Father, the only true God, and the one whom he has sent, Jesus Christ (cf. *Jn 17:3*)” (Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate*, 170).

The schools of theology are renewed with the practice of discernment and with a dialogical way of proceeding, capable of creating a corresponding climate, both spiritual and in terms of intellectual practice. It is a dialogue both in posing problems and in the search for solutions together. A dialogue capable of integrating the living criterion of Jesus’ Pasch with the movement of analogy, which reads links, signs and theological references in reality, in creation and in history. This involves the hermeneutical assumption of the mystery of the journey of Jesus that leads him to the cross and to the resurrection and to the gift of the Spirit. It is indispensable to assume this Jesuit and Paschal logic to understand how historical and created reality is questioned by the revelation of the mystery of God’s love. Of that God who in the history of Jesus manifests Himself – every time and within every contradiction – to be greater in love and the ability to recover from evil.

Both movements are necessary, complementary: a movement from below upwards that can dialogue, with a

sense of listening and discernment, with every human and historical demand, taking into account the full range of the human; and a movement from above to below - where “on high” is Jesus raised on the cross – allowing, at the same time, to discern the signs of the Kingdom of God in history and to understand prophetically the signs of the anti-kingdom that disfigure the soul and human history. It is a method that allows – in a constant dynamic – to compare each human instance and to understand which Christian light illuminates the folds of reality and which energies the Spirit of the Risen Crucifix is inspiring, from time to time, here and now.

The dialogical way of proceeding is the way to arrive where paradigms, ways of feeling, symbols, representations of people and peoples are formed. To arrive there - as “spiritual ethnographers” of the soul of peoples, let’s say – in order to be able to dialogue in depth and, if possible, contribute to their development by announcing the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, whose fruit is the ripening of an increasingly broad and inclusive fraternity. Dialogue and the proclamation of the Gospel, that can take place in the ways outlined by Francis of Assisi in the *Regula non Bullata*, just the day after his journey in the Mediterranean East. For Francis there is a first way in which one simply lives as a Christian: “One way is that they do not make quarrels or disputes, but are subject to every human creature for the love of God and confess to being Christians” (XVI: FF 43). Then there is a second way in which, always docile to the signs and action of the Risen Lord and to his Spirit of peace, the Christian faith is announced as a manifestation in Jesus of God’s love for all men. I am struck by Francis’s advice to the friars: “Preach the Gospel; if necessary also with words”. This is witness!

This docility to the Spirit implies a style of life and proclamation without a spirit of conquest, without the will to proselytize – this is the plague! – and without an aggressive refutation. A method that enters into dialogue “from within” with men and their cultures, their stories, their different religious traditions; a method that, consistent with the Gospel, also includes witness up to the sacrifice of life, as shown by the luminous examples of Charles de Foucauld, the monks of Tibhirine, the bishop of Oran Pierre Claverie and so many brothers and sisters who, with the grace of Christ, were faithful with meekness and humility and died with the name of Jesus on their lips and mercy in their hearts. And here I am thinking of non-violence as a horizon and knowledge of the world, to which theology must look as its constitutive element. The writings and practices of Martin Luther King and Lanza del Vasto and other “artisans” of peace help us here. He helps us and encourages the memory of Blessed Giustino Russolillo, who was a student of this Faculty, and of Don Peppino Diana, the young parish priest killed by the Camorra, who also studied here. And here I would like to mention a dangerous syndrome, the “Babel syndrome”. We think that the “Babel syndrome” is the confusion that originates in not understanding what the other says. This is the first step. But the real “Babel syndrome” is that of not listening to what the other says and believing that we know what the other person thinks and what the other person will say. This is the plague!

Examples of dialogue for a theology of hospitality

“Dialogue” is not a magic formula, but certainly theology is helped in its renewal when it takes it seriously, when it is encouraged and favoured between teachers and students, as well as with other forms of knowledge and with other religions, especially Judaism and Islam. Theology students should be educated in dialogue with Judaism and Islam to understand the common roots and differences of our religious identities, and thus contribute more effectively to building a society that values diversity and fosters respect, brotherhood and peaceful coexistence.

Educate students in this. I have studied in the time of decadent theology, of decadent scholasticism, at the time of manuals. Between us it was a joke, all the theological theses were tried with this scheme, a syllogism: 1. Things seem to be like this. 2. Catholicism is always right. 3. Ergo ... That is a theology of a defensive, apologetic type, enclosed in a manual. We joked like that, but they were the things that were presented to us at that time of decadent scholasticism.

Seeking a dialogic peaceful coexistence. With Muslims we are called to dialogue to build the future of our societies and our cities; we are called to consider them partners to build a peaceful coexistence, even when there are shocking episodes by fanatical groups who are enemies of dialogue, such as last Easter’s tragedy in Sri Lanka. Yesterday the Cardinal of Colombo told me this: “After I did what I had to do, I realized that a group of people, Christians, wanted to go to the Muslim neighbourhood to kill them. I invited the Imam with me, by car,

and together we went there to convince the Christians that we are friends, that those are extremists, that they are not ours". This is an attitude of closeness and dialogue. Forming students to dialogue with Jews implies educating them in the knowledge of their culture, their way of thinking, their language, in order to better understand and live our relationship on a religious level. In theological faculties and ecclesiastical universities courses in Arabic and Hebrew language and culture are to be encouraged, as well as mutual understanding between Christian, Jewish and Muslim students.

I would like to give two concrete examples of how the dialogue that characterizes a theology of hospitality can be applied to ecclesiastical studies. First of all, dialogue can be a method of study, as well as teaching. When we read a text, we dialogue with it and with the "world" of which it is an expression; and this also applies to sacred texts, such as the Bible, the Talmud and the Koran. Often, then, we interpret a particular text in dialogue with others of the same epoch or of different epochs. The texts of the great monotheistic traditions in some cases are the result of a dialogue. You can give cases of texts that are written to answer questions on important life issues posed by texts that preceded them. This is also a form of dialogue.

The second example is that dialogue can be accomplished as a theological hermeneutics at a specific time and place. In our case: the Mediterranean at the beginning of the third millennium. It is not possible to read this space realistically if not in dialogue and as a bridge – historical, geographical, and human – between Europe, Africa and Asia. It is a space in which the absence of peace has produced multiple regional and global imbalances, and whose pacification, through the practice of dialogue, could instead greatly contribute to initiating processes of reconciliation and peace. Giorgio La Pira would tell us that it is a question, for theology, of helping to build a "great canopy of peace" over the entire Mediterranean basin, where the different children of the common father Abraham can live together in mutual respect. Do not forget the common father.

A theology of hospitality is a theology of listening

Dialogue as theological hermeneutics presupposes and involves conscious listening. This also means listening to the history and experiences of the peoples who face the Mediterranean space in order to be able to decipher the events that connect the past to today and to be able to capture their wounds along with their potential. In particular, it is a matter of grasping the way in which Christian communities and individual prophetic existences have known – even recently – how to incarnate the Christian faith in contexts sometimes of conflict, minority and plural coexistence with other religious traditions.

This listening must be deeply internal to cultures and peoples also for another reason. The Mediterranean is precisely the sea of hybridization – if we do not understand this fusion we will never understand the Mediterranean – a geographically closed sea with respect to the oceans, but culturally always open to encounter, dialogue and mutual inculturation. Nevertheless, there is a need for renewed and shared narratives that – starting from listening to the roots and to the present – speak to people's hearts, narratives in which it is possible to recognize oneself in a constructive, peaceful and hope-generating way.

The multicultural and multi-religious reality of the new Mediterranean is formed with these narratives, in the dialogue that comes from listening to the people and texts of the great monotheistic religions, and especially in listening to young people. I am thinking of the students of our faculties of theology, of those of the "lay" universities or of other religious inspirations. "Once the Church – and, we can add, theology – sets aside narrow preconceptions and listens carefully to the young, this empathy enriches her, for 'it allows young people to make their own contribution to the community, helping it to appreciate new sensitivities and to consider new questions'" (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*, 65). To appreciate new sensitivities: this is the challenge.

The deepening of the *kerygma* is achieved with the experience of dialogue that comes from listening and which generates communion. Jesus Himself announced the kingdom of God in dialogue with every type and category of people of the Judaism of his time: with the scribes, the Pharisees, the doctors of the law, the publicans, the learned, the simple, the sinners. He revealed to a Samaritan woman, in listening and in dialogue, the gift of God and His own identity: He opened to her the mystery of His communion with the Father and of the overabundant

fullness that flows from this communion. His divine listening to the human heart opens this heart to welcome the fullness of Love and the joy of life. Nothing is lost with dialogue. You always earn. We all lose in monologue.

An interdisciplinary theology

A theology of acceptance which, as an interpretative method of reality, adopts discernment and sincere dialogue, needs theologians who know how to work together and in an interdisciplinary form, overcoming individualism in intellectual work. We need theologians - men and women, presbyters, lay people and religious – who are historically and ecclesially rooted and, at the same time, open to the inexhaustible novelties of the Spirit, who know how to escape the self-referential, competitive and, in fact, blinding logic that often also exists in our academic institutions and is very often hidden in theological schools.

In this continuous journey of going out of oneself and meeting with the other, it is important that theologians are men and women of compassion – I highlight this: that they are men and women of compassion – touched by the oppressed life of many, by the slavery of today, by social wounds, violence, wars and the enormous injustices suffered by so many poor people who live on the shores of this “common sea”. Without communion and without compassion, constantly nourished by prayer – this is important: theology can only be done “on one’s knees” – theology not only loses its soul, but loses its intelligence and ability to interpret reality in a Christian way. Without compassion, drawn from the Heart of Christ, theologians risk being swallowed up in the condition of the privilege of those who place themselves prudently outside the world and share nothing risky with the majority of humanity. Laboratory theology, pure and “distilled” theology, distilled like water, distilled water, which knows nothing.

I would like to give an example of how the interdisciplinarity that interprets history can be a deepening of the *kerygma* and, if inspired by mercy, can be open to trans-disciplinarity. I refer in particular to all the aggressive and belligerent attitudes that have marked the way of inhabiting the Mediterranean space by peoples who called themselves Christians. Here we find the colonial attitudes and practices that have shaped the imagination and policies of these peoples, and the justifications for all kinds of wars, and all the persecutions committed in the name of a religion or an alleged racial purity or doctrinal. We have also carried out these persecutions. I remember, in the *Chanson de Roland*, after winning the battle, the Muslims were lined up, all, in front of the baptism pool, on the baptismal pile. There was one with a sword there. And they made them choose: either we baptize you, or goodbye! You go the other way. Or baptism or death. We have done this. Compared to this complex and painful history, the method of dialogue and listening, guided by the evangelical criterion of mercy, can greatly enrich interdisciplinary knowledge and interpretation, also bringing out, by contrast, the prophecies of peace that the Spirit has never failed to inspire.

Interdisciplinarity as a criterion for the renewal of theology and ecclesiastical studies involves a commitment to continually revisit and re-examine tradition. Revisit tradition! And question it again. In fact, listening as Christian theologians does not take place by starting from nothing, but from a theological heritage that – right inside the Mediterranean space – has its roots in the communities of the New Testament, in the rich reflection of the Fathers and in multiple generations of thinkers and witnesses. It is that living tradition that has come down to us that can help illuminate and decipher many contemporary issues. Provided however that it is re-read with a sincere desire to purify the memory, that is, knowing how to discern how much was the vehicle of God’s original intention, revealed in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and how much instead was unfaithful to this merciful and saving intention. Let us not forget that tradition is a root that gives us life: it transmits life so that we can grow and flourish, and bear fruit. We often think of tradition as a museum. No! Last week, or the other, I read a quote by Gustav Mahler that said: “Tradition is the guarantee of the future, not the keeper of the ashes”. That is nice! We live tradition like a living tree, it grows. Already in the fifth century, Vincenzo di Lérins had understood it well: the growth of faith, of tradition, with these three criteria: *annis consolidetur, dilatetur tempore, sublimetur aetate*. It is tradition! But without tradition you cannot grow. Tradition is necessary to grow, like the root of the tree.

A theology in a network

Theology after *Veritatis gaudium* is a theology in a network and, in the context of the Mediterranean, in solidarity with all the “castaways” of history. In the theological task that awaits us, let us remember Saint Paul and the path

of early Christianity that links the East with the West. Here, very close to where Paul landed, it cannot be forgotten that the Apostle's journeys were marked by obvious critical moments, such as in the shipwreck in the middle of the Mediterranean (*Acts 27: 9ff*). Shipwreck that makes one think of that of Jonah. But Paul does not flee, and may even think that Rome is his Nineveh. He may think of correcting Jonah's defeatist attitude by redeeming his escape. Now that Western Christianity has learned from many mistakes and critical issues of the past, it can return to its sources hoping to be able to bear witness to the Good News to the peoples of the East and of the West, of the North and of the South. Theology – keeping the mind and heart fixed on the “merciful and compassionate God” (cf. *Gn 4: 2*) – can help the Church and civil society to resume the road in the company of many castaways, encouraging Mediterranean populations to refuse any temptation to reconquer or to close up their identity. Both tendencies are born of, feed on and grow out of fear. Theology cannot be carried out in an environment of fear.

The work of the theological faculties and ecclesiastical universities contributes to the building of a just and fraternal society, in which the care of creation and the construction of peace are the result of collaboration between civil, ecclesial and interreligious institutions. It is first of all a work in the “evangelical network”, that is in communion with the Spirit of Jesus which is the Spirit of peace, the Spirit of love at work in creation and in the hearts of men and women of good will of every race, culture and religion. Like the language used by Jesus to talk about the Kingdom of God, so, similarly, interdisciplinarity and networking make it possible to favour discernment of the presence of the Spirit of the Risen One in reality. Starting from an understanding of the Word of God in its original Mediterranean context, it is possible to discern the signs of the times in new contexts.

Theology after “Veritatis gaudium” in the context of the Mediterranean

I have emphasized *Veritatis gaudium* greatly. I would like to publicly thank here, because he is present, Msgr. Zani, who was one of the authors of this document. Thank you! What then is the task of theology after *Veritatis gaudium* in the context of the Mediterranean? So what is the task? It must be in harmony with the Spirit of the Risen Jesus, with His freedom to go around the world and to reach the peripheries, even those of thought. Theologians have the task of always encouraging the meeting of cultures with the sources of Revelation and Tradition. The ancient frameworks of thought, the great theological syntheses of the past are mines of theological wisdom, but they cannot be applied mechanically to current questions. It is a matter of treasuring them to find new ways. Thanks to God, the first sources of theology, that is, the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, are inexhaustible and always fruitful; therefore one can and must work in the direction of a “theological Pentecost”, which enables women and men of our time to listen “in their own language” to a Christian reflection that responds to their search for meaning and full life. For this to happen some assumptions are indispensable.

First of all, we need to start from the Gospel of mercy, that is, from the announcement made by Jesus Himself and from the original contexts of evangelization. Theology is born in the midst of concrete human beings, who meet the gaze and heart of God, Who goes in search of them with merciful love. Even engaging in theology is an act of mercy. I would like to repeat here, from this city where there are not only episodes of violence, but which preserves many traditions and many examples of sanctity – as well as a masterpiece by Caravaggio on the works of mercy and the witness of the saint doctor Giuseppe Moscati – I would like to repeat what I have written to the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Argentina: “Good theologians too, like good shepherds, smell of the people and of the street and, with their reflection, pour oil and wine on the wounds of men. Theology is the expression of a Church that is a ‘field hospital’, which lives her mission of salvation and healing in the world! Mercy is not only a pastoral attitude, but it is the very substance of the Gospel of Jesus. I encourage you to study how, in the various disciplines – dogmatics, morals, spirituality, law and so on – the centrality of mercy can be reflected. Without mercy, our theology, our law and our pastoral care run the risk of collapsing into bureaucratic pettiness or ideology, which by its nature seeks to domesticate mystery”¹. Theology, through mercy, defends itself from the domestication of mystery.

Secondly, a serious *assumption of history* within theology is needed, as an open space for the encounter with the Lord. “The ability to glimpse the presence of Christ and the path of the Church in history make us humble, and they take away from us the temptation to take refuge in the past to avoid the present. And this was the experience of many, many scholars, who started out not I would say as atheists, but a little agnostic, and then found Christ. Because history cannot be understood without this strength.”².

Theological freedom is necessary. Without the possibility of experiencing new paths, nothing new is created, and no room is left for the newness of the Spirit of the Risen One: “For those who long for a monolithic body of doctrine guarded by all and leaving no room for nuance, this might appear as undesirable and leading to confusion. But in fact such variety serves to bring out and develop different facets of the inexhaustible riches of the Gospel” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 40). This also means an adequate revision of the *ratio studiorum*. On the theological freedom of reflection I would make a distinction. Among scholars, we must move forward with freedom; then, ultimately, it will be the magisterium that says something, but a theology cannot be done without this freedom. But in preaching to the People of God, please do not hurt the faith of the People of God with disputed questions! The disputed questions remain only among theologians. It is your job. But to the People of God it is necessary to give the substance that nourishes the faith and that does not relativize it.

Finally, it is essential to have light and flexible structures, which show the priority given to reception and dialogue, to inter- and trans-disciplinary work and in networks. Statutes, internal organization, teaching methods and the organization of studies should reflect the appearance of the “outbound” Church. Everything must be oriented to the times and so as to promote as far as possible the participation of those who wish to study theology: in addition to seminarians and religious, also lay and religious women and men. In particular, the contribution that women are giving and can give to theology is indispensable, and their participation must therefore be supported, as you do in this Faculty, where there is a good participation of women as teachers and as students.

This beautiful place, home of the Theological Faculty dedicated to Saint Aloysius, whose feast is celebrated today, is a symbol of a beauty to be shared, open to all. I dream of theological faculties where the conviviality of differences is lived, where a theology of dialogue and acceptance is practiced; where theological knowledge is experienced as multi-faceted instead of as a static and disembodied sphere. Where theological research is able to promote a challenging but compelling inculturation process.

Conclusion

The criteria of the *Proemio* of the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis gaudium* are evangelical criteria. *Kerygma*, dialogue, discernment, collaboration, network – I would also add *parrhesia*, which has been cited as a criterion, which is the capacity to be at the limit, together with *hypomoné*, to tolerate, to be at the limit to go forward – these are elements and criteria that translate the way in which the Gospel was lived and announced by Jesus and with which it can also be transmitted today by His disciples.

Theology after *Veritatis gaudium* is a kerygmatic theology, a theology of discernment, mercy and acceptance, which is placed in dialogue with society, cultures and religions for the construction of peaceful coexistence of people and peoples. The Mediterranean is the historical, geographical and cultural matrix of kerygmatic acceptance practiced with dialogue and mercy. Naples is an example and a special laboratory of this theological research. I wish you good work!

[1] Letter to the Grand Chancellor of the “Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina” on the centenary of the Faculty of Theology, 3 March 2015.

[2] Address to participants in the conference of the Association of teachers of Church history, 12 January 2019.
