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**LOGOS, SARX AND AGAPE: THEOLOGICAL  
AND PASTORAL PERSPECTIVES FOR NOWADAYS**

**LOGOS, SARX Y AGAPE: PERSPECTIVAS TEOLÓGICAS  
Y PASTORALES PARA NUESTRO TIEMPO**

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*Abstract:* Since the growing plurality present in today's societies, this article draws attention to the place of theology. From a theological-pastoral reading of *Logos, sarx* and *Agape*, it aims to open perspectives to understand theology and pastoral action in an integral and integrative way. In this way, we will present ways of doing and thinking about these two areas without merging them, nor leading to antagonistic and/or opposing paths. Theology is presented here as an area of knowledge at the service of the *Logos* and, in this sense, it is possible to create spaces and interconnections between it and Pastoral action –being here the core of Theology as *sarx*–. Based on concrete examples, we will understand to what extent the essence of theology –*Logos*– and theological praxis –*sarx*– are currently assumed as a manifestation of the *Agape*, both for believers and non-believers.

*Keywords:* Hope; Incarnation; Love; Poor; Praxis; Practical Theology.

*Resumen:* Partiendo de la creciente pluralidad presente en las sociedades actuales, este artículo llama la atención sobre el lugar de la teología. A partir de una lectura teológico-pastoral de *Logos, Sarx y Agape*, pretende abrir perspectivas para entender la teología y la acción pastoral de forma integral e integradora. De este modo, se presentarán formas de hacer y pensar estas dos áreas, sin caer en una fusión de ambas, ni conducir a caminos antagónicos y/o contrapuestos. La Teología se presenta como un área de conocimiento al servicio del *Logos* y, en este sentido, es posible crear espacios e interconexiones entre ella y la acción pastoral –siendo esta el núcleo de la Teología como *sarx*–. a través de ejemplos concretos, se comprenderá hasta qué punto la esencia de la Teología –*Logos*– y la praxis teológica –*sarx*– se asumen actualmente como manifestación de *Agape*, tanto para creyentes como para no creyentes.

*Palabras clave:* Amor; Encarnación; Esperanza; Pobres; Praxis; Teología práctica.

## Introduction

In a plural society where theological questions are challenged daily to leave the academic sphere and become impregnated with reality, new ways of thinking and doing theology are emerging in different universities, faculties and institutes of theology. It is important to keep in mind that this is not a simple process. On the one hand, we have to pay attention to the doctrinal foundations and the theological systematization carried out over the centuries; on the other hand, we have to pay attention to the reality, of believers and non-believers, which today is very different from that experienced in other times. Particularly, practical theology or pastoral theology has been developing a very incisive internal reflection, where the question is raised, not only of what practical theology is (which can be understood as pastoral theology, or as theology that is done attending to the signs of the times, or even the theology that emerges from reality itself), but also about if it is possible to speak of theology without it being assumed as a concrete dimension that meets and/or emerges from reality.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from these broader and more theoretical reflections on the systematization of practical theology as an academic discipline and theological specialization, there are numerous expressions of the practice of theology today, some of which can serve as a starting point (and, perhaps, even as a point of arrival) about the specificity of practical theology and about how theology can and/or is being thought about today. This paper will seek to go to the essence of theology and, from there, to understand its relevance to society and religious experience today.

The first point will present the theological foundation of theology as an area of knowledge. First, attending to its biblical foundation, and then, according to its development through time. In a certain way, the starting point of theology will also appear as a point of arrival: the *Logos*. The second point will be about the *sarx*, a clear example of how theology can meet human reality - especially the most suffering - and, at the same time, from this,

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<sup>1</sup> “In recent years, reflection on pastoral theology and practical theology has been developing and, since there is no common position on what distinguishes these conceptions of theology, in this article I will use pastoral theology and practical theology as synonyms. The aim is to talk about theological praxis, whether it is situated in the pastoral sphere or understood as an academic discipline and one of the specific areas of theology.” Cf. A. Rocha de Souza, “Teologia Pastoral e Teologia Prática, além da postura eclesial”, *Revista de Cultura Teológica*, n.º. 91 (2018): 5-30.

gain new pastoral and academic development. In point 3, we will demonstrate how, starting from its essence and praxis, theology can assume and manifest itself as an expression of the force that animates it: the *Agape*, this manifestation appearing as proof of a theology not only studied, but, above all, lived. In the conclusion, inferences will be drawn about this way of thinking, doing and living theology in the concrete of today's reality.

## 1. The Theology at the service of the *Logos*

### a) The Theology thought of from the *Logos*

*Logos* has been a concept that has marked the development of knowledge since antiquity. Particularly for philosophy and theology, *logos* became a basic reference, going beyond its literal meaning of 'word' or 'reason'. For philosophy, the term became linked to the notion of wisdom and knowledge of the truth, while at the same time referring to the connection between God and human beings. As for theology, rooted in the Greek concept of *logos*, as opposed to anything rational or false, the concept was developed from the understanding of the prologue of St. John's Gospel (Jn 1:1-18).<sup>2</sup> There the idea of a divine *logos* emerges, as the Word of God incarnate. This *logos*, through incarnation, presents itself as accessible and, consequently, intelligible. The incarnate God is a God who gives himself as a word that can be received and with whom dialogue becomes possible. In a certain way, the incarnate *Logos* contains in itself something more than a strictly divine dimension. Besides this notion of a divine *logos*, there is also the notion of a human *logos*, as a theological discourse based on reason.<sup>3</sup>

It is in this perspective that theology has been developing: the *Logos* that, incarnating, reveals and manifests itself; and human reason that seeks to broaden its understanding and acceptance. In some way, theology unavoidably allies itself with philosophy, precisely because the search for access to truth appears to be a point of convergence between the two areas of knowledge. where it would only prefigure a kind of human *logos* devoid of plea humanity (a humanity imbued with transcendence). Without these phil-

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the strong influence of the logos Christology, especially during the first century after Nicaea, or even the impact it has on Rahner's Logos Christology.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. B. Pottier, « "Au commencement était le Verbe" (Jean 1,1). *Quelques aperçus de Grégoire de Nysse* », *Nouvelle Revue théologique*, vol. 121, n° 4 (1999): 543-556.

osophical roots, the ultimate meaning of *Logos* would be lost and theology would become a weak anthropology, where only the “I” would have expression. The Truth that inhabits the *Logos* would be consigned to an imaginary of subversion of meanings in view of a capricious ‘truth’, limited by human contingency.

In theology, the divine *logos* and the human *logos* meet, entering into an accessible and understandable dialogue, where the latter does not exist without the former. However, it is important to keep in mind that, in our days, this dialogue is under threat. On the one hand, the value of the given word has been lost and, consequently, thinking of the *logos* as the Word appears as something banal, losing its original force and meaning. If the Word has come to be understood as a “collection of words”, it is no longer received according to its specificity as *Logos*. On the other hand, since one cannot close one’s eyes to the fact that this Word, which is also Light and Life, has always been subject to human refusal (Jn 1:5), it becomes evident that we live in an age of words without Word. In this case, the *Logos* seems like an initial mythological illusion or a utopia with no possibility of being achieved. Keeping in mind these two major contemporary threats to the reception and understanding of the *Logos*, it would be fair to say that theology finds itself in this tangle of challenges where the *Logos* either appears to be a weak starting point for theological development, or simply fails to be recognized.<sup>4</sup>

Faced with the current challenges, theology seems to be condemned either to its suppression or to its radical reconfiguration. However, far from the apparent fatalism, it is important to keep in mind that the *Logos* for theology is not only the starting point; it constitutes the basis of identity. In this sense, because there is a first identity, the variations in meaning that can be produced in relation to the value of the word do not appear as an obstacle, but rather as a possibility for a renewed understanding and rediscovery of the Word - *Logos* - incarnate. Moreover, if it is true that, alongside the human intelligibility and capacity to accept/understand/accede to the *Logos* is a predisposition to refuse it (in favor of a human self-affirmation), this does not appear as a block to theology. On the contrary, it refers to the theological awareness that:

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. M. Van Treek, «El futuro de la teología: una perspectiva bíblica», *Carthaginiensia*, vol. 37, n.º. 71 (2021): 125.

[T]he Bible has a wealth of meaning that cannot be fully grasped in a systematic theology or be imprisoned by it. One of the main functions of the Bible is to launch serious challenges to theological systems and to continually remind them of the existence of important aspects of divine revelation and human reality, which are sometimes forgotten or neglected by systematic reflection.<sup>5</sup>

The *Logos*, which is the identity and unavoidable foundation of theology, is not a static reality or a theorization. It is flesh, it is life and, in itself, a challenge and motor for theological development. In this sense, theology is required to leave the theoretical structures and the pretension of a complete and absolute understanding of this *Logos* that gives itself as revelation, revealing itself. Identity is not forged in literary structures, and the *Logos*, as sung by St. John, is much more than spoken word - it is Word incarnate and Life, begetter of life in abundance (Jn 10:10).<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the *Logos* plays an active role in theology, without which it is nothing more than a mere explanation of concepts and perspectives. Without the *Logos*, theology becomes a collection of words, far removed from the Word. Thus, theological identity is corrupted and we will be faced with a knowledge more in line with occultism and mysticism than with an actual theological knowledge.

#### b) The return to the *Logos*: theological paths towards an incarnate theology

The return to the *Logos* is a *converging circular* urge. It cannot be done outside of theological study, and theological study depends on it to exist. Only in this movement *to* and *from* the *Logos* can the identity fidelity of theology be recovered. In the *Logos* God and human being meet through a movement of giving/receiving, and the claim to reverse this movement, giving primacy to the human, narrows/destroys theological thinking. For this reason, at the present time, “a Christian in-group mentality took over and theology became a preaching to the choir”<sup>7</sup>, where theology is left, almost exclusively, to seminaries, universities and religious institutes. Linking almost solely theology to the exercise of a ministry has corrupted its development, making it more of a list of doctrinal presuppositions than a theology,

<sup>5</sup> Pontificia Comisión Bíblica, *La interpretación de la Biblia en la Iglesia* (Città del Vaticano: Ed. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), §39.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Van Treek, «El futuro de la teología», 126.

<sup>7</sup> J. Moltmann, «The Future of Theology», *Ecumenical Review*, vol. 68, n° 1 (2016): 4.

which, being an academic area, is neither detached from reality nor limited to the structuralism of academic or ecclesial institutions.<sup>8</sup>

By this I do not mean to say that candidates for the ordained ministry or religious life should withdraw from theological reflection! On the contrary, this is a necessary dialogical dynamic for good ecclesial exercise, and therefore a unique contribution to theology as a whole. However, the essence of the *Logos* cannot be lost from the horizon - a *Logos* that touches the reality of the world in an incarnate way. Not only within the ecclesial spheres, but in the concrete situations that are most demanding of a Christian, pastoral, and profoundly theological action. Only in this perspective of a theology that, little by little, also becomes flesh, can we consider that “the profound and organic study of philosophy and theology is the most suitable instrument for acquiring the *forma mentis* that allows one to face the questions and challenges that arise in the exercise of ministry, interpreting them from a faith perspective.”<sup>9</sup>

Now, what is at stake here is precisely the need to go out to meet those who, even if they do not share the same faith, live in search of this Light that is the *Logos*.<sup>10</sup> This is an arduous path that in the last decades has been forgotten. However, because the *Logos* is identity and working dynamism, some steps have been taken. The contributions of pastoral/practical theology have been noticed inside and outside the ecclesial spheres. This is a theology that has been breaking away from the more traditionalist perspectives of this area of knowledge. It has been affirming itself as theological praxis, going beyond what can be understood as specifically pastoral. In doing so, it has not only “touched the suffering flesh”, but it has also provoked reactions and restlessness within ecclesial and academic structures.

At the academic level, systematic and biblical theology seems to be confronted with its methodology. Can these areas of knowledge develop at the margin of the concrete reality of our world? This questioning leads the theological community to rethink theology and to seek that all of it, without losing its specificity, has a practical dimension, capable of dialoguing and saying something to the present world. At the ecclesial level, pastoral care is called upon to go beyond what I might call “maintenance pastoral care”. In fact, it is called not only to transmit the contents of faith (as if it were

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Van Treek, «El futuro de la teología», 123.

<sup>9</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, «The gift of the priestly vocation. *Ratio fundamentalis*», AAS 62 (1970), §118.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, «The gift of the priestly vocation», §121.



information to be given to believers), but to be able to communicate them, that is, to enter into a dynamic dialogue based on the faith professed both with believers and with non-believers. Consequently, pastoral theology is “pushed” outside of ecclesial structures in view of a dignification of the *human structure*.

This movement, which has been gaining space in many ecclesial and academic spheres, has achieved two essential milestones. The first concerns the way of doing pastoral (theology), the second concerns the relationship with ecclesial orientations and priorities. Moving in the social space, rather than within the confines of the Church, theology and pastoral work can no longer be developed by a small group of people trained exclusively in theology, but rather by expanding its scope to the multidisciplinary present in society in general. Moreover, theology is faced with a new reality: the non-believers, the poor and the most excluded in society are inhabited by the same *Logos* and, consequently, are an indispensable contribution to theological knowledge and to the way of carrying out a long-term pastoral plan.

When I say that a new reality is presenting itself, I am referring to the way of thinking about theology and the *Logos* itself. In fact, this is a surprising newness well described in the book of the Acts of the Apostles in Peter’s meeting with Cornelius (Acts 10:34-48). In this sense, this new way of *theologizing* and *pastoring* is a return to the origins (Nouvelle Théologie, the Ressourcement movement, etc.), a response to the calls of the Church of the first centuries and, admirably, a way of meeting the ecclesial guidelines of today. It is enough to see the insistence of Pope Francis in the call for the recovery of a “Church going forth” (EG, 20-24), which inherently means the rediscovery of a “theology going forth”. With the documents *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis traces a path of theological incarnation: “the Church going forth and the interconnection of all that exists, placing nature (Creation) and the situation of poverty and social exclusion (the human being) at the center of theological reflection.”<sup>11</sup>

These priorities of Francis for theology imply a return to a reading of Scripture beyond an exegetical rigorism that at times seems to point more to a ‘single and correct’ perspective than to a revelation in the making. The contribution of exegesis to the understanding of Scripture is unequivocal, but the *Logos* is not limited to this methodology. Scripture, as the active Word of God, is more than a collection of contents. Therefore, the *Logos*

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<sup>11</sup> B. Pérez Andreo, «El futuro de la teología, la teología del futuro. Presentación», *Carthaginensia*, vol. 35, n.º. 68 (2019): V.

is not only received from the human intellect, it derives from an assent of faith that enables the integral human (in its intellectual dimension, but also its corporeal, psychological, affective, etc.) to receive it. In a way, this becomes the only way for the *Logos* to be foundation and living identity, since faith configures ways of being and living and not only theological contents susceptible of academic study. From this point of view, so that, in our days, theology continues its journey in favor of the Word becoming flesh, “it is not enough for theology to be inspired by the Second Vatican Council or by the ‘signs of the times’ (...). It is necessary for it to decisively confront the question of poverty, inequality and exclusion.”<sup>12</sup>

## 2. The incarnate theology and openness to the Incarnation

To speak of *sarx*, in a theological context, is precisely to go towards the most glaring realities of our days. In fact, if, as Paul VI argued, theology is an expert in the humanities, this can only be done outside of structures and in contact with reality.<sup>13</sup> In this area, it is important to keep in mind, on the one hand, the corporeal sense of existence and, on the other, the wounded corporeality that provokes and demands a theological development. It should be emphasized that when St. John states that ‘the Word [*Logos*] became flesh’ (Jn 1:14a), this is associated with the ultimate meaning of the reason for the incarnation: ‘[the incarnate *Logos*] came to dwell among us’ (Jn 1:14b). In a sense, this is an indispensable connection and symbiosis, without which, it ceases to make sense to speak of incarnation.

I do not want to dwell on an exegesis of John’s verse, not least because this leads to a more convergent reflection on the person of Jesus Christ, as *Logos*, *Sarx* and *Agape*, which now, for a better systematization of ideas, should be left in the background, returning to this idea at the conclusion of this article. What I would like, for now, to emphasize is the relevance of this way of thinking about the incarnation, as a reality *for* and *in* reality. Only in this way can conclusions be drawn about a theology that also wants to be incarnate. In effect, in the light of John 1:14, it seems clear that “Trying to answer the question ‘who I am’ requires first answering the question ‘where I am’. We can therefore affirm that ‘I am [someone]’ because ‘I am [some-

<sup>12</sup> Van Treek, «El futuro de la teología», 135.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Paolo VI, «Discorso ai partecipanti al Congresso internazionale sulla teologia del Concilio Vaticano II», *AAS* 58 (1966), 892s.

where]’ here and now. Moreover, I am not only in a body, but also in a place.”<sup>14</sup> Now, if this is so, it is up to theology to reflect not only on the members of *its* body (in the specificity of each of its areas of specialization), but also on the *place* where this theology is found (where it starts from, where it takes place, and where it is headed).

This reflection leads to two fundamental pillars of theology. The first, the awareness that “the body is not a ‘thing’ that we possess or can possess, but it is something that we are (...). So, then, I am a body. Now, the place - the here or there - does not affect only the body, but also the soul or spirit.”<sup>15</sup> In this case, the perspective that theology is not something possessed by oneself, nor something impermeable to the reality that surrounds it, makes one free of any tendency to circumscribe this area of knowledge either to certain ecclesiastical publics or to certain structures and/or ways of doing theology. The second pillar is that of revelation through corporeal fragility. Here we move away from the idea of holding absolute truths, to allow the *Logos* to act and manifest in the relations proper to human life - in the concreteness of everyday life.

This is not a new experience. If we think about it, the People of Israel were only able to welcome the revelation - to reach the promised land - by functioning with the vulnerability proper to a body. The People, throughout their journey through the desert, were tempted by despair. Here there was nothing, and everything seemed to be a danger and a risk to life. The threat of death, the incomprehension between the different ways of living this moment of trial, and even the different way of relating to God brought revolt, and many succumbed by not letting themselves be touched by the *Logos* that freed them. And so, this was not the end. Little by little, and despite the many adversities, the people allowed themselves to be cared for and guided, allowing the *Logos* to be realized in their lives and context. Basic needs were assured, and the arduous and challenging journey was converted into hope and full happiness (the encounter with a *land where milk and honey flow* - cf. Ex 33:3). In the same way, just as the people of Israel in the desert found themselves cared for and guided, having everything they needed, so

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<sup>14</sup> M. Porcel Moreno, «La liturgia como mediación de la eternidad en el tiempo. Un acercamiento fenomenológico desde el pensamiento de Jean-Yves Lacoste», in M. Porcel Moreno – M. Córdoba Salmerón (eds.). *Del Logos al Agapè. En torno al giro teológico de la fenomenología* (Granada: BTG, 2020), 25.

<sup>15</sup> Porcel Moreno, «La liturgia como mediación de la eternidad en el tiempo», 25.

theology has to make room for the action of Providence, making this its liberating paradigm.<sup>16</sup>

a) The poor: challenges and opportunities for theology and ecclesial life

One of the most transversal realities of contemporary society and the one that causes most concern within theology - appearing particularly challenging for practical theology - is the reality of the poorest. They may be believers or non-believers, they come from distinct particular situations (immigrants; members of disintegrated families; refugees; races and/or ethnic groups discriminated by society; etc.), but they constitute a unique human group, especially privileged for listening, living, and dialoguing about God, the meaning of existence, and the way of being a person in the contemporary reality.

In a world so marked by the “hunt for the poor”, that is, by the refusal to accept within societies people who contribute nothing to the growth of the GDP<sup>17</sup>, these find refuge in ecclesial contexts that, in one way or another, seek to share life with them and make room for dialogue and listening. Taking advantage of this work that is done in so many parish, missionary, and/or institutional contexts, theology has sought to develop a “theology of the poor” in order to academically articulate the mission of the Kingdom (cf. Lk 6:20; Mt 11:5; Lk 4:18) with the socio-political reality that we live in today.<sup>18</sup> This theological development, however, has been taken up as a “theology for/about the poor”, where Christian responsibility is called upon to work for the poorest - as a principle and essence of the Gospel itself.

Despite this theological growth that has the problem of poverty at its center, sometimes it has appeared as a kind of *theological theorization*, where the poor are taken either as a simple object of study or as an abstract reality (from the generalized concept of poverty). Against this way of thinking and doing theology, and so that practical theology becomes the practice of theology, a new methodology has been developed in recent years, in which the poor are neither assumed as an abstract entity, nor as a simple ‘object of study’. On the contrary, they are active agents in the

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. I. Angulo Ordorika, «Hacia a una cultura del cuidado», in E. Estévez López – P. Depalma (eds.), *Ventanas a la Sinodalidad* (Estella: Verbo Divino, 2023), 129.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. A. Cortina, *Aporofobia, el rechazo al pobre. Un desafío para la democracia* (Barcelona-Buenos Aires-México: Paidós, 2017), 13-14.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. B. Keeley, *Income Inequality: The Gap Between Rich and Poor* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2015).

reflection and theological development, not so much *about* the condition of the poor and their place within Christianity; but, above all, assuming the poor as the privileged receiver of the gospel message (cf. Lk 6:20; Lk 10:21), to develop *with* the poor a theology about God, salvation, suffering, and all the dimensions proper to theology (often worked on in a theoretical-doctrinal perspective, where the expression of human reality appears in an abstract and/or reduced way).<sup>19</sup>

One of the academic centers that has most addressed the problem of the poorest people is the Facultés Loyola Paris<sup>20</sup>. Here, practical theology becomes the practice of theology, since what is sought to be developed is not a theology *about* the poor, but to open doors so that the poor can ‘do theology’. Thus, starting from the certainty that “ God does not reveal himself only to the poor. Is reveals himself *as poor*”<sup>21</sup>, the journey of sharing life and listening, is not done from a common methodological perspective. On the contrary, given the different areas of theological knowledge (practical/pastoral theology; biblical theology; systematic/dogmatic theology; etc.), research is developed not *in view of* the poor, but *starting from* them and *with* them. This is not only a theology that configures the reality and the way of systematizing theological development. This is a methodology that transforms the way of being an academic theologian. Indeed, “many theologians [who] have listened to the poor, have sought to understand them and have perceived ‘the mysterious wisdom that God wants to communicate to us through them’” (EG 198).”<sup>22</sup>

It is not a matter here of seeking that theology says something to reality, but that reality says something to theology, provoking new theological paths and developments. It is true that one could divert the centrality of the problem by making a speech about who are the poor of today, and dissertate on the innumerable forms of poverty (material, spiritual, intellectual, relational, etc.), but, for the working team of Facultés Loyola Paris, the answer seems to be clear, leaving no room for abstractions or ambiguities. In the light of Lk 18-19; Acts 2:42-46; and Acts 4:32-37, it is assumed here that the concept of the poor in its most original expression - the poor are those

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. F. Odinet. *Vivants grâce à Dieu. Comment les personnes très pauvres écoutent-elles la parole de Dieu?* (Montreal/Paris: Novalis-Lumen Vitae, 2018), 30-32.

<sup>20</sup> Ex-Centre Sèvres.

<sup>21</sup> F.-M. le Méhauté, *Révéle aux tout-petits. Une Théologie à l'écoute des plus pauvres* (Paris: Cerf, 2022), 365.

<sup>22</sup> Le Méhauté, *Révéle aux tout-petits*, 361.

who live in a situation of great precariousness.<sup>23</sup> From then on, these became companions/researchers in the development and revelation of theology on the most different questions in this area of knowledge.

b) Theology at the *school of the poor* – a proposal for a theology practice

The work methodology that has been developed at the Facultés Loyola Paris involves accompanying people living in extreme poverty and with profound difficulties in subsistence. For this group of theologians, this is the *sarx* in which the *Logos* acts and reveals itself in a privileged way and, for this very reason, it is necessary to establish a path of proximity, without the pretension of “bringing theological knowledge”. On the contrary, because here the *Logos* manifests itself in a more corporeal and exalted way, one must listen and learn. Precisely because, starting from this non-academic contexte, it will be possible to develop a truly incarnate academic theology.<sup>24</sup>

Through this methodology, what is intended is to increase a “theology of resonance” where the word of God (*Logos*) is articulated with the word of the poorest people (*logos*).<sup>25</sup> By listening and sharing life with the poorest people, we erase “the word of God reveals the meaning of the word of very poor people, and the latter does the same for the word of God.”<sup>26</sup> In fact, the vision and defense of the dignity of the person means that, in this work of resonance, the poorest people are taken beyond their weaknesses and vulnerabilities; rather, they are taken into account by the strength with which they stand firm and continue on their way despite adversities, thus constituting themselves as ‘experts’ on the meaning of human existence.<sup>27</sup> Only on the basis of this certainty is this methodology realized, in which the goal is “a return to serious listening to the words collected, and a proposal aimed at weaving theological reflection more closely with the words through which the poorest people share their experiences, their discoveries, their intuitions, the fruit of their meditation on the Word of God.”<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Le Méhauté, *Révéle aux tout-petits*, 18-37.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Le Méhauté, *Révéle aux tout-petits*, 22-37.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. E. Grieu, «Méthodes bibliographiques et théologie pratique», *Didaskalia*, n° 39 (2009): 137-138.

<sup>26</sup> Odinet, *Vivants grâce à Dieu*, 31.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. F. Odinet, *Les Premiers Ressuscités – Les Pauvres, Maîtres en Résurrection* (Paris: Éditions Facultés Jésuites de Paris, 2021), 12-13.

<sup>28</sup> Le Méhauté, *Révéle aux tout-petits*, 361.

It should be noted, however, that this work of resonance is not something automatic, and that placing the word of God and the word of the poor mutually echoing does not derive solely from an approximation of the word of one to the word of another. On the contrary, “the ‘resonance’ implies the mediation of theological research [...]. This means that the chosen grid of analysis reveals only certain resonances; other questions and other hypotheses would undoubtedly have produced other echoes.”<sup>29</sup> In other words, the ‘echoing’, proper to a ‘theology of resonance’, implies opening doors so that it is possible to make another kind of understanding of Revelation itself.<sup>30</sup> In this case, theology opens up to “expect the unexpected” and to the understanding of perspectives never before thought of, but that find a framework in theological tradition and knowledge.

The theology of resonance, at the methodological level, becomes a school - a school where the poorest are the masters and where the research work is done with life itself as reference. The footnotes, rather than invoking authors, texts, and/or theological works, invoke people, events, and concrete realities that each person has as a basis for his or her understanding of God, the Mystery of Christ, and/or the meaning of life. This is a *theology at the school of the poor*<sup>31</sup> - a school where theologians and non-theologians together make a path of discovery and welcoming of the revelation that manifests itself in the lives of people living in greater precariousness.

One of the starting points for the theology of resonance (and, consequently, for the *theology at the school of the poor*) may be linked to the monastic tradition of *lectio divina*, where prayer resonates the promise and takes on a greater dimension starting from the reality of very poor people, since they live animated by faith and hope that the promise of God - which is revealed in His Word (the *Logos* incarnate) - will be realized before their eyes, in society and in the Church.<sup>32</sup> A perspective that reconfigures the way of reading and thinking about the theology of revelation, since in this way of theology of resonance “the words of the poorest allow us to identify um

<sup>29</sup> Odinet, *Vivants grâce à Dieu*, 31.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Grieu, «Méthodes bibliographiques et théologie pratique», 141.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. É. Grieu, L. Blanchon, J.-C. Caillaux (dirs.), *À l'école du plus pauvre. Le projet théologique de Joseph Wresinski* (Paris: Lumen Vitae, 2019). Cf. J. Tonglet, «À l'école du plus pauvre. Le projet théologique de Joseph Wresinski», *Revue Quart Monde*, n° 253 (2020): 47-51.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Groupe Place et Parole des Pauvres, *Église: quand les pauvres prennent la parole* (Paris: Ed. Franciscaines, 2014), 57-58; 68-69; 75-78.

echoes between the ‘first impressions’ of Sacred Scripture and the ‘first impressions’ of human existence”<sup>33</sup>.

At the same time, this is a way of thinking and taking on a renewed theological perspective of the Mystery of Christ, all the more that “the sufferings of the poor find in the cross of Christ a place of interpretation and even consolidation.”<sup>34</sup> In this sense, the theology of resonance implies starting from the understanding of the poor of the Paschal Mystery, namely from the way they, in the first person, read the Gospel and live/feel the Paschal Mystery. These are people who have not accommodated or resigned themselves to the condition of prisoners/slaves of the suffering in which they find themselves. On the contrary, they are people whose faith in the promise that flows from the Word of God (*Logos*) sets them free and they enter into a process of inner renewal, often associated with the experience of forgiveness and reconciliation with themselves (with their personal history), with God, and with others.<sup>35</sup> From here, the theology of resonance becomes the expression of a theological practice capable of transfiguring the meaning and the way of thinking of practical theology in our days, when what is needed is a more human and humanizing understanding of the resurrection of Christ, of the eschatological Promise, and of the present-day experience of the Paschal Mystery.

#### *Starting points, methodologies and case studies*

The fundamental questions guiding the theological reflection on the resurrection, with the word of the very poor as the key to its reading, have to do with knowing whether the resurrection of Christ appears to be an intelligible source of what the very poor experience, and whether it allows us to understand the force that animates the very poor to classify and qualify their experience of God and of Revelation. At the same time, we must ask ourselves if the word of the poorest (*logos*) can also constitute itself as an intelligible source for understanding the resurrection. Thus, in a systematic way, what is presented as the principle and hypothesis of the study is to understand to what extent the resurrection corresponds to the experiences of the poorest in

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<sup>33</sup> Odinet, *Vivants grâce à Dieu*, 116.

<sup>34</sup> Odinet, *Les Premiers Ressuscités*, 14.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Odinet, *Les Premiers Ressuscités*, 13-14.



their daily life, that is, how the *Logos* becomes *sarx* in our days.<sup>36</sup> Searching, in this way, “show how listening to the poorest can shed theological light on a question essential to the Christian faith.”<sup>37</sup>

The study groups being analyzed by Facultés Loyola Paris theologians are built on the basis of the *ATD - Quart Monde* movement where the poor and poverty are understood beyond the adverse circumstances in which the poor find themselves.<sup>38</sup> Here, the theological development and analysis is done from the word of the poor and from the word of those who daily accompany these people, learning from them the dimension of faith/resurrection.<sup>39</sup>

These three groups being studied by Facultés Loyola Paris are therefore linked to the spirituality of Fr. Joseph Wresinski and his founding institutions. They are: La Pierre d'Angle; Toulousain Place (Grupo Place et parole des pauvres); Famille Bartimée. With these groups, consisting of 10-20 people, a reflective and meditative reading of the Bible is done (each group of people does this work of meeting and sharing once a month, for one or two years). The basis of the reflection is Christ's question “And you, who do you say that I am?” (Lk 9:20) and the Gospel of St. John. Following this reading/sharing, there is a social time with something to eat/drink. Apart from these monthly gatherings, some weekend gatherings are also provided (outside the usual spaces) for retreats and/or to deepen the spirituality of Fr. Joseph Wresinski.<sup>40</sup> Note that the group *Place et parole des pauvres* in Toulouse has a different dynamic than the other two groups. In this particular case, the objective is not only to read and share from the biblical texts, but also to produce a text where the poor express themselves directly. Thus, the poor are summoned by the diocesan team in charge of the group whenever the aim is to produce a new text. Consequently, these groups meet more regularly and have a somewhat different internal dynamic.<sup>41</sup>

Regardless of the tenuous differences in the way it works, the truth is that here we see a very similar methodology. First, listening to the poor is at the center of theological reflection. This is the first major point of departure. Then, the dialogue and theological conclusions derive naturally from this,

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Odinet, *Les Premiers Ressuscités*, 15-16; Le Méhauté, *Révéle aux tout-petits*, 257-277.

<sup>37</sup> Odinet, *Les Premiers Ressuscités*, 19.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. R. Bray; H. de Laat; X. Godinot; A. Ugarte; R. Walker, *Les dimensions cachées de la pauvreté* (Montreal: Éditions Quart Monde, 2019).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Odinet, *Les Premiers Ressuscités*, 26-29.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Le Méhauté, *Révéle aux tout-petits*, 20-21.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Odinet, *Les Premiers Ressuscités*, 28-29.

that is, “move from spirituality to theology, from listening an imprecise and subjective content to discerning a common, coherent and objective thought.”<sup>42</sup> From this point of view, we are not facing a refusal to do academic theology. That is why there is a team of theologians (from different theological areas) who do theology *with* the poor, in a mutual growth, both for theology and for all those who reflect on the themes under study.<sup>43</sup> Starting from the *suffering flesh*, the understanding of Scripture is not an academic exegesis, but a relationship with God that is established in people marked by great vulnerability.

One of the most curious aspects of this work is that its theological systematization is something incarnate. Here, the *more theoretical* theological knowledge appears as more of a contribution to reflection. Dialogue is established and, somehow, because the *Logos* gives identity to the life of the poorest (to *sarx*) and to theological knowledge (human *logos*), surprisingly, many are the points of contact between the different actors who make this theology. However, it should be stressed that both the theological knowledge and the resonance made of the Scriptures by the poorest, everything seems to converge towards a unique experience of *Agape*. The extreme suffering of those who struggle day by day for subsistence leads, not to a revolt or refusal of revelation and the *Logos*. On the contrary, it opens up the possibility of uniting the suffering of the flesh with that of Christ crucified and, consequently, participating in the same love-*Agape* that is offered there. Somehow, the revelation about the *Agape* expands, incarnates and humanizes theology, turning it, little by little, into a manifestation of the *Agape*.<sup>44</sup>

### 3. Theology as a manifestation of *Agape*

The theological effort is not to be carried away by the pressures of academic rankings and quick publications, but it is instead to be praised. Doing theology *with* reality and amidst is a challenge that requires time, and doing it there where the *Sarx* is most wounded implies not only a high degree of commitment to this way of doing theology, but also - and above all - an experience of love that feeds and gives life to the method itself. It is a way

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Le Méhauté, *Révéle aux tout-petits*, 361.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Le Méhauté, *Révéle aux tout-petit*, 15-20.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Le Méhauté, *Révéle aux tout-petits*, 196-210.

that, from the start, understands the *Logos* as *Sarx* and *Agape*, refusing to do theology if it is not so.

The example given above about the way of working at the Facultés Loyola Paris is only one of the examples in which theology makes room for reality to say *something* about itself and *something* capable of generating theology.<sup>45</sup> But as it develops, it becomes clear that, in this way, it makes room for God to reveal himself and make himself present. Note that, “God, inasmuch as *Agape*, breaks the idolatrous obligations that pretend to procure for ‘God’ a place sufficiently worthy of him. Let us not forget that the phenomenon of God has the privilege of making *itself* seen, of manifesting *itself*, of showing *itself*, since its appearance is manifested by itself.”<sup>46</sup>

This new methodology of listening to the sarx and making it a participant in theological growth and reception of revelation is nothing revolutionary, just something surprising for our times. The truth is that, little by little, the original idea that authentic theology is done on one’s knees, with faith<sup>47</sup>, and that “faith in the biblical God is played out in love of neighbor, while God (or at least: the infinite, the unconditioned) is the ultimate guarantor of love and care for the other.”<sup>48</sup> The relationship that is established with the reality from which and with which theology is done is not based on any theological formalism, but in a dialogical sphere where love-*agape* allows correlation and mutual growth. The groups with which the Facultés Loyola Paris works do not expect from theologians financial help or a solution to their precarious situation. Rather, a deep recognition of their dignity as persons and a unique respect for their way of experiencing God (*Logos-Agape*) in their lives (*sarx*).<sup>49</sup>

It is important to note that “the experience and dynamics of agapic love should move us to build authentic inclusive and corresponding relation-

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. also The similar work *from and with* the poor that has been done for several decades with the Latin America Liberation Theologies and Basic Ecclesial Communities.

<sup>46</sup> M. Porcel Moreno, «Introducción», in M. Porcel Moreno – M. Córdoba Salmerón (eds.). *Del Logos al Agapè. En torno al giro teológico de la fenomenología*, 20. Cf. M. Porcel Moreno, «Jean-Luc Marion y la teología. La donación como alternativa al ser», *Carthaginensia*, vol. 40, n<sup>o</sup>. 77 (2024): 87-115.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. H. Urs Von Balthasar, «Theologie und Heiligkeit, an essay written in 1948», in *Verbum Caro. Schriften zur Theologie I* (Einsiedeln, 1960), 195-224.

<sup>48</sup> T. J. Marín Mena, *Alteridad y Amor. Estudio de ontología trinitaria* (Salamanca: Secretariado Trinitario, 2023), 283.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Le Méhauté, *Révéle aux tout-petits*, 18-47.

ships.”<sup>50</sup> Only in this way is *sarx* assumed in its fullness as a means of divine revelation. Indeed, in Jesus Christ, “The flesh becomes the channel of salvation that waters humanity with new life. (...) God comes to our flesh in Jesus and, in him, our flesh is led to God.”<sup>51</sup> If this is so, theology will always have to address socially lived problems, those that touch the suffering flesh and allow theology-and the revelation of the *Logos* itself-to play an active role in the world in which we live. In particular, pastoral theology (if we have to keep this name in order to understand the theological praxis in an ecclesial context), will have to truly assume that “theology will not be relevant if it is only presented as an instance of transmitting or explaining the faith. It is necessary to develop a discursive style that is not a mere commentary on texts by other authors.”<sup>52</sup>

Theological *praxis*, because it aims at concrete action in reality, will have to go beyond *speaking to* reality. In a world in constant transformation and with so many lifestyles and ways of thinking about God, one has to do more than give a theological explanation of biblical and/or doctrinal writings; one has to give *sarx* to theology and make theology *sarx*, so that it manifests the *Logos* and becomes a way of life - in *agape* for our days.

## Conclusion

It is unavoidable to think *Logos*, *Sarx* and *Agape* when what is intended is a pastoral and theological action capable of generating new life. The currents of theological thought multiply and there always seems to be a tension between a doctrinal and theological systematization of arguments and a proactive way of developing theological studies from the world in which theology is inserted. Yet this is a tension that seems inherent in the very relationship between these three identity concepts of Christian faith and theology itself. At all times, one seems to take precedence over the others, and thus one does not exist apart from being in connection with the others.

The choice of this order of presentation of the concepts (*Logos*, *Sarx* and *Agape*), and of the way in which each one can be theologically and pastorally thought of, was not at random. In fact, one could begin the reflection

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<sup>50</sup> S. Vivas Albán, «El Dios Trinidad: circularidad y encuentro», in *Ventanas a la Sinodalidad*, 37.

<sup>51</sup> I. Rojas Gálvez, *Cartas de Juan* (Madrid: BAC, 2022), 36.

<sup>52</sup> Van Treek, «El futuro de la teología», 141.

with *Agape*, but the risk would be to enter already from a dimension of faith and spirituality that either makes it difficult to “descend” to human reality (to touch the flesh), or leads one to speak of *Agape* as something so transcendental that human suffering would be presented only as a “footnote” in the reflection. Similarly, starting the reflection by *Sarx*, could lead to a theological tapering off, to an anthropology that neither derives from nor leads to a theology. The human *Logos* could, in this case, be presented almost as a replacement - or priority - in relation to the divine *Logos*. From then on, *Agape* would be utopian and without practical, theological or pastoral concretization.

By beginning the reflection with the *Logos* and, through the prologue of John, understanding its divine and human character starting from the person of Jesus Christ, it has allowed us to reflect on the concepts starting from the mystery of the incarnation itself: the *Logos* that allows the full experience of the *Agape* is Jesus Christ himself - Son of God and Light of humanity (cf. Jn 1:5a) - at the same time he is the incarnate *Logos* who allows himself to be touched in the flesh, and who puts himself in the situation of being rejected and not received (cf. Jn 1:5b). This vulnerability proper to those who are corporeal, starting from the person of Jesus Christ, gains a new perspective and makes it possible to make human contingency, suffering, and limit situations a path to knowledge and acceptance of the divine revelation - the revelation of God-*Agape*.

This *Logos*, *Sarx* and *Agape* path also allows for a new understanding of revelation: it is not confined to academic and ecclesial spheres, and there are voices that have to be heard if we want to expand our knowledge, faith, and way of living the *Logos*, *Sarx* and *Agape* as an essential identity for the believer's existence. This identity is forged precisely because “revelation articulates transcendence and immanence, *revelata et revelatio, fides qua et fides quae*, even if different approaches may give priority to one or other of these terms.”<sup>53</sup>

It is also important to safeguard that, if throughout this article there seems to be a battle between a theology that is theorized and a theology that is practical and pastoral, the fact is that this is a tension incarnated by the *Logos* and the *Agape*. In that sense, this is a conflict full of hope. In fact, if it is important to alert to the risks of a theology limited to the theoretical and to the fact that it no longer has much or nothing to say to today's world, it is also true that examples like those of the Facultés Loyola Paris are a

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<sup>53</sup> Le Méhauté, *Révéle aux tout-petits*, 365.

breath of fresh air. Theology is not dead, nor has it become obsolete today. It continues to struggle to manifest the *Logos* that gives it corporeality (*sarx*).

The challenge of making theology an *Agape* that speaks *from, with* and *to* reality is an incentive to rediscover new theological practices, new methods and new languages. This path will lead to new theoretical-doctrinal conquests, to new ways of understanding and welcoming revelation, and to configure lifestyles more in line with the essence of the professed faith. Theology, in this perspective, will appear as a way of life where it is not enough to speak about God, but rather implies speaking with God; where there is no longer room to speak about the human being and the suffering that marks his life, vulnerability and contingency, but rather *to speak with* and *from* human reality.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. S. Béjar Bacas, «De la “analogia entis” a la “analogia incarnationis” : nuevas mediaciones de razón para una propuesta cristológica», *Estudios Eclesiásticos*, n.º. 381-382 (2022): 719.

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