



## INTRODUCTION

It is with great pleasure and joy that I introduce this volume presenting the Proceedings of the Workshop promoted by the Pontifical Academy for Life (PAV), to which an international group of theologians and experts from other humanities was invited. The intent behind it is to render a service to the PAV and to the Church by discussing topics that are very much felt in the ecclesial community, concerning even controversial aspects of the theological ethics of life. This is a process similar to medieval disputations or *quaestiones disputatae*: once a thesis was presented, the debate was conducted by theologians. That was an indispensable service to the deepening of the faith so that it could be understood and transmitted.

Theological reflection and pastoral practice are closely intertwined. The task of theologians and believing scholars in other disciplines is not limited to a sterile formal exercise, but has an inseparable link with the Church's pastoral experience and practice. As Pope Francis said in the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*: “*One of the main contributions of the Second Vatican Council was precisely seeking a way to overcome this divorce between theology and pastoral care, between faith and life. I dare say that the Council has revolutionized to some extent the status of theology – the believer’s way of doing and thinking*”. Therefore, there is no separation between theology and pastoral care, between theory and praxis. One complements the other. For this reason, the meeting was part of the process initiated by Pope Francis for a “*true synod of the universal Church*”. Thus, this workshop collected the invitation to *parrhesia*, which characterizes every synod: *parrhesia* also stimulates and empowers theologians, academicians and scholars.

The “small” workshop we held was intended to meet the wishes expressed by Pope Francis when he stated, also in *Veritatis Gaudium*, that “*the worldwide network of ecclesiastical universities and faculties is called to offer the decisive contribution of leaven, salt and light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the living Tradition of the Church, which is ever open to new situations and ideas*” (VG 3).

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My deep desire has been to foster a climate of research, dialogue and discussion among the participants. I refer once again to *Veritatis Gaudium* when, in some beautiful passages, it speaks about a “*wide-ranging dialogue*” (VG 4b) as the guiding criterion for a renewal of ecclesiastical studies. Quoting Benedict XVI, Pope Francis said that “*truth, in fact, is logos which creates dia-logos, and hence communication and communion*” (VG 4b). In this light, he urged theologians to establish a dialogue not only “*with Christians of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities*” (VG 4b), but also “*with those of other religious or humanistic convictions, maintaining contact with scholars of other disciplines, whether these are believers or not*” (VG, 4b). In this spirit of dialogue, our workshop aimed to give a contribution to a twofold intellectual dialogue.

Firstly, we wanted to promote dialogue between various forms of knowledge, that is, what *Veritatis Gaudium* calls “*inter-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary approaches carried out with wisdom and creativity in the light of Revelation*” (VG, 4c). The reports and discussions were intended to foster dialogue among philosophers, theologians, and humanities scholars, without losing sight of “*the vital intellectual principle of the unity in difference of knowledge and respect for its multiple, correlated and convergent expressions.*” (VG, 4c).

Secondly, our meeting pursued dialogue between different theological perspectives and models, so that the richness of theology, as *intellectus fidei*, shines forth in all its beauty. Today there is a deeply felt need to promote, safeguard and put into practice the service of theology, which is absolutely necessary for the Church and for the lives of all believers. However, this invitation to dialogue among “*theoretical models*” is not a mere exercise in theological eclecticism, juxtaposing diverse perspectives. On the contrary, while it is true that there are many ways of speaking the truth of Revelation - and the history of theology bears eloquent witness to this -, it is also true that the “*basic text*” (BT) on which we have been working moves within a precise framework of thought.

Theologically, in fact, the BT introduces a paradigm shift that is both descriptive and conceptual, as it follows a pattern that is both argumentative and narrative, theoretical and sapiential, phenomenological and interpretative. This allows it to be both receptive and critical of the different fields of human knowledge, offering a welcoming register not only for philosophy and its methods, but also for the humanities and the natural sciences. By opting for a specific methodological choice, we do not pretend to canonize one system or theoretical model, as if it were the only one and the ultimate one (cf. VS 29), but rather we commit ourselves to honor the task arising from the event of God's Revelation in human history. Therefore, while being aware of the “*relativity*” of any theoretical model before the truth of God's Revelation in the individual story of Jesus, the text carries out a radical change, moving, as it were, from the sphere to the polyhedron. Accepting Pope Francis' invitation contained in *Veritatis Gaudium*, we have attempted to make “*a radical paradigm shift*” (VG 3).



The *BT* is the result of the shared efforts of a group of theologians brought together by the *PAV*, who drafted an extensive text with a comprehensive table of contents and sophisticated arguments. The *BT*, which has a systematic structure, focuses on the unitary meaning of the Christian vision of life. Individual points, passages and statements that were addressed separately during the meetings should be understood as a whole, so as to foster an orderly and non-dispersive course. In this way one can grasp the red thread that follows the developments of a theological anthropology inspired by the Christian faith and the implications of the moral dimension that is consistently justified by it. So this is not a handbook of formulas or a catalogue of cases that can be taken out of the context of the overall argument. Rather, it is a fundamental exposition of the Christian vision of life, illustrated in its existential aspects that are most relevant to the dramatic nature of the human condition and addressed from the perspective of an anthropology that is appropriate to the cultural mediation of faith in today's world.

The text was drafted on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, with a precise intent. The vitality of that encyclical and its precious legacy, in order to be honored to the full, required us not to limit ourselves to commenting on it, but rather to decipher its meaning within the framework of the Christian magisterium that brings its teaching to life for today's Church. Theological reflection is bound to perform a hermeneutical task by vocation. This task is always carried out in relation to the living Word of God, which is its ultimately binding rule, and to the new questions posed by the condition of the human subject, who is the designated interlocutor of its wisdom. In this way the Tradition of faith is born, it develops and lives: "*The living river in which the origins are ever present*", as Pope Benedict said (2).

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The teaching authority of the Church, sacred Tradition and the word of God are inextricably linked together: *“They are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls”* (*Dei Verbum* 10). In the perspective of the Catholic faith, the utmost care must be taken to safeguard the proper hierarchical relation of the conditions of possibility and exercise of the transmission of the faith: *“The living teaching office of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ [ . . . ] is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed”*. (*Dei Verbum* 2).

With humility and determination, given the value of the dialogue that took place during the workshop, we thought it worthwhile to offer its proceedings to the theological discussion within the Church and to all men and women who are in search of the truth, in the knowledge that the ecclesial community and the human community are inseparably linked, because it is faith itself that commits believers to *“give reason for the hope that is within you”* (*cf. 1Peter3:15*) and that is offered to everyone.

In introducing the volume, I wish to point out how this text is important not only for *what* it says, as is obvious, but also for *the way* it says it (the text of the Letter of Peter mentioned above adds, *“yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience”* *1Peter3:16*). Our text is not a declaration of war on the human cultures of our time; it does not aim at condemning without appeal dissenting theological opinions; it does not claim to replace the authoritative magisterium that is called to acknowledge true faith; it does not abstractly refer to the metaphysical absoluteness of a truth of God and man without history, which empties of sense the wisdom embodied in God’s revelation in Jesus; it does not conform to the pretension of reducing the moral experience to the implementation of legal acts, so it does not comply with the modern secular ideology of juridical positivism.

The structure of this book follows the format of the three-day study workshop. The topics addressed follow the spirit that informs some of the programmatic documents of Pope Francis' pontificate. For this reason, the first day kicks off by examining the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* and the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium*, dedicated to the renewal of theological and ecclesiastical studies (Ch. I). In this perspective, Scripture is central (Ch. II), in its inseparable link with *“sacred Tradition”* and the living magisterium of the Church (*Dei Verbum* 10) (Ch. IV), in the conviction that Sacred Scripture is the heart and soul of the theology of revelation and of the anthropology of faith. (3)

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The Bible, in fact, reveals a God who manifests Himself to mankind, constituting each of us interlocutor and hearer of His word and saving action from the very beginning. For this reason, hearing the Word of God in history goes hand in hand with interpreting the present time (Ch. III), learning to recognize “*the signs of the times*”, interpreted “*in the light of the Gospel*” (*Gaudium et Spes* 4). The gift of God, which lies at the origin, finds its full fulfillment in the story of Jesus: his person is the *eschaton*, the definitive event that does not spare us from the dramas of history, but allows us to go through them without losing hope and joy in life. What is dealt with at the end of the book (Ch. XII) anticipates the unfolding of the individual themes.

Within this theological horizon, profoundly instructed by the Word of God, the text on which we have worked argues for an ethical approach truly capable of comprehending the primacy of Christological revelation and the radicalism of the anthropological question (Chapters VI-XI), together with the need for a clarification of the relationship between conscience, norm and discernment at the height of the human universality and the Christian specific nature (Chap. V). In this sense, it can be seen as a properly theological deepening of the ethics of life in the line of the pastoral intelligence of the Church's faith that Pope Francis wishes to convey through his gestures, words and writings.

In conclusion, I would finally like to emphasize the originality of the literary status of the basic text. We could say that it is unique in its kind as regards its propositive attitude. In fact, on the one hand it has the specific and peculiar characteristics of a theological text and on the other hand it is intended as a source of orientation and discussion. The text was written by a study group promoted by a pontifical academy, therefore, although it does not have the authority and “theological feature” of a document of the ecclesiastical magisterium, it adopts the perspective of a “service to the magisterium”.

In this light, the discussions contained in this book provide argumentative support for the ecclesiastical magisterium, without claiming to replace its authority. At the same time, this volume is intended to be a stimulus, and not a purely academic one, for the search for a pastoral convergence of theological commitment, though without wishing to limit in any way the legitimate confrontation of opinions. It is precisely in this spirit that the exchange of opinions took place during the workshop. Our intent was not to focus on the text, perhaps to modify or amend it. Rather, our goal was to address the issues that the text had raised, in a climate of mutual listening and dialogue, as the participants actually experienced.



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*Presentazione*

I would like to address my last words to Pope Francis, to thank him most warmly with a spirit of filial obedience. He was informed from the very beginning about this initiative and the publication of the proceedings, and he encouraged us to open an academic debate, under the direct responsibility of the Pontifical Academy for Life.

Vatican City, February 19, 2022

✠ VINCENZO PAGLIA  
*Presidente della Pontificia Accademia per la Vita*



## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

This volume collects the proceedings of a study seminar among theologians, philosophers and experts from different disciplines, held in Rome Oct. 30-Nov. 1, 2021, promoted by the Pontifical Academy for Life.

The outline of the workshop, whose purposes are highlighted in the *Introduction*, consisted of a basic text (denoted *BT*), to which the numbers in parentheses refer, unless otherwise indicated. The core themes discussed during the three-day workshop are taken from that text: for this reason, the paragraphs are not always listed in numerical sequential order. Some themes in fact appear in the *BT* more than once, depending on whether the approach is more fundamental or more oriented to concrete situations.

The *BT* was drafted by a group of theologians, hosted by the Pontifical Academy for Life and composed of: Carlo Casalone, Maurizio Chiodi, Roberto Dell'Oro, Pier Davide Guenzi, Anne Marie Pelletier, Pierangelo Sequeri, Marie-Jo Thiel, Alain Thomasset.

Each chapter collects the reports produced during the workshop. The first material (characterized by distinctive graphics) consists of the *BT* numbers that refer to the topic under discussion; this is followed by the speeches of one or two discussants, from different parts of the world, who reread and discuss the text from different points of view, including divergent and sometimes conflicting ones. Each chapter closes with the final speech of a member of the drafting group, who takes up themes and tensions that have emerged in the debate.

This complex structure, deliberately chosen to foster as much frank and open debate as possible, is not always recognizable in the book's table of contents. Some discussants, in fact, did not give their consent to the publication of their speeches.

Each day concludes with the final talk by the workshop moderator, who provides an overview of the work done and highlights some passages of the rich debate that took place.

Finally, the homilies that Cardinal Mario Grech, Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, and Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, gave during the Eucharistic liturgies celebrated on Sunday, Oct. 31, and on the Solemnity of All Saints, enrich the volume of the proceedings.