

An exemplary case of an authentic synodal exercise

By PIERANGELO SEQUERI

If the Church is the place for listening, discussion and discernment concerning the theological intelligence of faith, then the workshop organized by the Pontifical Academy for Life on *Theological Ethics of Life. Scripture, Tradition, Practical Challenges* (Lev, 528 pages, 30.00 euro), a text that collects the Proceedings of a study seminar attended by an international group of theologians as well as various experts in the humanities, is the right institutional formula for this exercise, at least for two reasons. On the one hand, because the fact that a Pontifical Academy has proposed itself as an institutional entity interested in hosting a wide-ranging theological and moral debate is a symbol of noticeable intellectual honesty that does honor to the Church itself. Unfinished business and new issues need to be addressed, not swept under the rug. On the other hand, because such a move displays and promotes one of the most valuable dimensions of ecclesial synodality: namely, the mutual listening and dialogue between authoritative magisterium and professional theology. The interest of this usual relation - and how I wish it became usual and normal again - is strictly communal, indeed, and in some way self-referential. It is about the love of Jesus' disciples for the Church, and the love of the Church for the men and women of their time. In short, these are no trivial topics: which should never be the exclusive preserve of self-appointed lobbies and praetorians of power. I wish to emphasize this aspect regarding model and style, which characterizes the friendly initiative of the Pontifical Academy for Life and the kind availability of the participating theologians. The idea that one can serenely and seriously propose argumentations typical of the dialectical process in search of the best interpretation that can - or even must - guide the thinking and praxis of faith, appears to be so weak and so abused at certain times in these frantic years, that you feel out of place and out of time, if you try to put it into practice. This idea of the Pontifical Academy for Life is almost touching, because it is the idea that all this can be done right in the Church, and that it can be done by dealing with this time when the Lord has entrusted precisely to us the responsibility to understand and to make people understand the ways in which the Gospel sheds light on human condition. Each of us, then, according to the ministry and charism received, will do their part. The authoritative magisterium, according to the charism received from the Lord, confirms the consistency of faith: but it never does so - this is Christianity - in the vacuum of thought and the surrealism of practices. Thinking theology, in turn, performs a clarifying task that makes the consistency of faith truly intelligible: for this very reason, it is not even conceived as an alternative path to the exercise of authoritative magisterium. We are not talking about a cooperation that should be fixed once and for all, in a Council, say, and then filed away pending some emergency. This is the novelty that this initiative introduced as an event and conceived as a model: the sheer normality of this kind of frequentation, of availability, of service; while respecting the role that excludes any claim to "surreptitious" replacement or pressure "from the outside". The issues at the center of this dialectic exercise and service of discernment are many, delicate, important and complex. Experts will duly comment and illustrate them. I would just like to draw attention to their wide-ranging presentation, which is certainly good news for believers (but also for everyone else). In the basic text, which provides the overall themes and the framework for the discussion, the issues of so-called "bioethics" (and "biopolitics") belong to the non-reductive and exciting horizon of the poetry of life - its birth and its energy, its wounds and its end, its indestructible root in the generation of the Son of God and its surprising destination to God's new world - that restores them to their underlying meaning: namely, the passions of love for life and not the obsession with technical performance. This is the right framework for the ethical outreach of Christianity. The teaching of Pope Francis urges in every way the revival of this horizon as the key to the Gospel vision of life and destiny. In this spirit, the habit of continuing this kind of debate would be a pure joy of life (and faith).

("Avvenire" – July 9, 2022 – Originale text: Italian. Translated by Leonardo Stefanucci)