Review Essay

Theological Ethics of Life: A New Volume by the Pontifical Academy for Life

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Etica teologica della vita: Scrittura, tradizione, sfide pratiche (Theological Ethics of Life: Scripture, Tradition, Practical Challenges) is a hefty tome, 520 pages of primary text, discussion, and response. It brings together the papers presented at an interdisciplinary study seminar organized by the Pontifical Academy for Life in October 2021, in which leading theologians and philosophers provided a series of substantive, targeted responses to a primary text (or testo base) that aimed to recast a “theological ethics of life” in light of Pope Francis’s more recent doctrinal impulse, especially his encyclicals and apostolic exhortations.

This testo base—which opens with the words “the joy of life” or gaudium vitae—was the fruit of the collaborative work of eight authors who engaged in a long process of progressive formulation and redaction, discerning how the insights of the Catholic bioethical tradition (e.g., Humanae Vitae, Evangelium Vitae) receive further articulation in light of Pope Francis’s developing theological corpus from Evangelii Gaudium, Amoris Laetitia, and Laudato Si’ to Veritatis Gaudium, and more. Catholic scholars were invited to offer their support or, conversely, critical assessment, of the testo base, keeping alive a dialogue within the church on the delicate field of bioethics beyond any artificial division between conservatives and liberals, traditionalists and revisionists. In Etica teologica della vita, the testo base is

3 As the introductory note to Etica teologica della vita clarifies, the eight scholars who drafted the testo base were: Carlo Casalone, Maurizio Chiodi, Roberto Dell’Oro, Pier Davide Guenzi, Anne-Marie Pelletier, Pierangelo Sequeri, Marie-Jo Thiel, and Alain Thomasset.
offered in Italian, followed by responses in Italian, Spanish, French, and English from figures hailing from Europe, the US, Africa, Latin America, and the Philippines. As such, the volume stands out for its strong international character and scope, highlighting the global nature of the church as reflected in the works of the seminar.

There is much to recommend about the volume—for what it represents, i.e., a meditative and respectful conversation among scholars of diverse theological inspiration in the tradition of *questiones disputatae*—but also for what it signals with respect to the premises that sustain such an extraordinary exchange. The latter—embodied in the concrete practices of study, reflection, argument, and face-to-face interactions that unfolded between real persons in real time over the years necessary for in-depth theological discourse—may not always come across as clearly in the finished product, which might be perceived as a static artifact. Unpacking the critical premises that undergird the volume, therefore, may provide a helpful framework for readers, who are invited to enter into the dynamism of the text and continue the deliberations it offers.

In this article, we highlight three such premises, provide an overview of the volume itself, and offer some final considerations about its potential impact upon the current theological discussion on an ethics of life inspired by Christian anthropology.

**Hermeneutical Premises of *Etica teologica della vita***

The first premise concerns the relation between theology and magisterium. Overcoming the stereotypical rendition of the two as alternative, the volume pleads for a shared *diakonia* to the “intelligence of faith,” which both magisterium and theology, in their respective space and function, serve in obedience to the objectivity of the Christian revelation. Thus, the unrelenting work of theological reflection, as an attempt to unpack the meaning of the “joy of life,” aims, ultimately, at conveying the beauty and significance of the Gospel’s ethical message for both believers and non-believers.

In turn, the magisterium articulates the multifaceted richness of the Christian revelation by pointing, with its doctrinal articulation, to the heart of the kerygma, the “ever fresh and attractive good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” Such a premise results in an understanding of the inseparable nexus of theology and pastoral care, beyond an intellectualist ethics detached from faith, on the one hand, and a magisterial message disincarnated from history, on the other.

To retrieve a different appreciation for the dialogue between theology and magisterium entails recognizing the dynamic character of the ecclesial tradition and the importance of *doctrinal developments* in matters of morals. This is the second premise.

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4 Pope Francis, *Veritatis Gaudium* (2018), Foreword, no. 4a.
The issue here is one of fidelity to the origins and continuity of doctrinal statements consistent with a lived attunement to the challenges of the times, rather than abstract repetition of formulas. The Christian message is born of an “event of life” that neither immediately depends on a particular system of thought nor can be fixed within the measure of a timeless normative articulation. The Gospel of life is not a “statement” about life, nor a rigid normative system defined once and for all, but an experience of the overwhelming mystery of its origin in God.

As the testo base suggests, “The life of faith explains itself, thinks itself, it makes itself intelligent” (no. 5, emphasis in original). This means that the attempt to articulate doctrinally the significance of such an original experience cannot simply “reassemble life by means of an abstract conceptualization, but restores to it its own understanding in words of wisdom that come from the roots of its mystery” (no. 5).

In this light, it becomes clear that the dynamic character of church doctrine on matters of life ethics does not answer to spurious requests for accommodation, nor is it a kind of linguistic adjustment aimed at making the Gospel of life more suitable to contemporary ears. The Christian tradition moves between the two poles that nourish its self-understanding: the Christ event, finding its mediation in Scriptures and tradition, and the reality of contemporary society, to whose complexity and cultural expectations it tries to respond. Benedict XVI described this tradition in the beautiful image of “the living river that links us to the origins, the living river in which the origins are ever present.”

Because it is living, such tradition is also constantly in motion, beyond any pretense to realized completeness. Thus, as Pope Francis suggests,

The theologian who is satisfied with his complete and conclusive thought is mediocre. The good theologian has an open, that is, an incomplete thought, always open to the maius of God and of the truth, always in development, according to the law that Saint Vincent of Lérins described in these words: annis consolidetur, dilatetur tempore, sublimetur aetate.

Dialogue, and this third premise is, therefore, an exigence internal to theological thinking, an intellectual necessity rather than a concession to “good will” or an optional disposition by amiable thinkers in search

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5 The English quotations from the testo base offered here were made directly from the Italian text. All parenthetical in-text citations in this article are to the testo base as included in Etica teologica della vita.
6 Pope Francis, Veritatis Gaudium, Foreword, 4d.
7 Pope Francis, Veritatis Gaudium, Foreword, 3.
of self-congratulatory recognition. *Etica teologica della vita* gives testament to the fruitfulness and need for intra-ecclesial dialogue, especially around issues that, though hotly debated, do not always pay heed to foundational dimensions necessary to ground their more mindful articulation. Among the issues addressed in the *testo base*, subsequently becoming an object of discussion during the seminar, are artificial contraception, *in vitro* fertilization, and end of life care, among others.

**Etica teologica della vita: A Précis**

*Etica teologica della vita*, seeking to capture the dynamics of a theological conversation unfolding under the aegis of the Pontifical Academy for Life, is organized following the timeline of the seminar, presenting sections of the *testo base* and the targeted commentaries under the headings of Prima Giornata, Seconda Giornata, and so forth. The *testo base* proceeds in roughly three parts. After the introductory chapter, Chapters II-V take up traditional loci in Catholic bioethics; Chapters VI-X take up a series of “Great Anthropological, Ethical, and Theological Questions”; and the final two chapters consider emerging questions and eschatology. For the sake of simplicity, we outline in this section the content of the *testo base*. Given the multiplicity of discussants and respondents, it would be too cumbersome to detail here the individual analyses of the *testo base* and the ensuing dialogue amongst seminar participants. By the “materiality” of the dialogue between the authors of the *testo base* and their interlocutors, we provide a snapshot of the nature of the dialogue in which they engaged, whose hermeneutical premises and potential impact we articulate in this piece.

Chapter I, entitled “The Joy of Life—Inheritance and Project,” sets both the tone of the *testo base*, and signals key methodological moves that shape its vision. This vision is grounded in the preceding tradition of magisterial reflection on bioethical questions but locates that tradition in a more robust theological framework. In language that echoes *Laudato Si’,* the document opens boldly—affirming not only that life is a gift, but that this gift is rooted in and discerned through joy, relationship, contemplation, and attentiveness, and manifest in the ordinary, concrete lives of real people. Its opening paragraphs are worth quoting in full:

>The joy of life (*Gaudium vitae*) is manifested in human history in many ways and has its origin in the gift of life itself. It is a sentiment that is born of the gratuitousness of personal relationships, but also of

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8 In the seminar, invited *discussants* responded critically to the *testo base*; authors of the *testo base* served as *respondents* to those critical presentations.
a “contemplative distance” and of a deep attentiveness vis-à-vis created things and the universe. It is the grateful joy of the one who receives an act of welcome, a cup of water, a smile, or a hand in moments of difficulty. It is the joy of the child who is happy to see again the face of its father who is playing hide-and-seek with it. It is the pleasure of the grandmother when she sees her little grandchild running towards her and taking its first steps. It is the joy of the poet who is struck with wonder at the manifestation of things, even the simplest things that are apparently insignificant. It is the tremor of one in love when he recognizes the approaching steps of his beloved. It is the profound joy of one who in prayer feels within oneself the words of Jesus: “I have called you friends…” (Jn 15:15). It is the marvelous joy of the one who has recovered from Covid-19 and lies on the grass under the tepid March sun and lets himself be welcomed by the maternal embrace of the earth. The joy of life implies freedom from the claim to control and manipulate everything. It is generated by an attitude of “let it be” that reveals openness to welcome the revelation of good in the promise that is inscribed upon existence itself. This joy, accordingly, is not far from the life of human persons, nor is it an impossible mirage for them. (no. 1)

Yet the joy of life is not simply captured in these myriad minute incarnations; it is primordial and cosmic as well—an ontology of gift, joy, and life rather than of scarcity, death, darkness, pointing recursively toward Christology:

In its concrete history, humanity recognizes with surprise that the joy of living is a quivering that is spread throughout the entire universe. Joy goes ahead of us, because it belongs to life itself; in its essence: it is manifested in the sensitive and sensuous character of its glorious presence, which is the opposite of a cold seriousness or an inert neutrality. The joy of life is the very glory of the being that asserts itself over against pure nothing and detaches itself from the inertness of pure Being [Sein], with the incessant vibration and dance of the living being. Joy belongs to life in its essence, because life enjoys from the very first moment its victory over the blinkered identity of the being that remains standing where it is, as it is, in itself. This means that the cultures and the religions, the philosophies and the theologies, art and poetry, and many other works of the human being are, in their various ways, a testimony to the joy that is born of the promise of life, the promise that has found its full realization in Jesus. The Church bears witness to this with amazement and gratitude. The present document wishes to put words to the “symphonic truth” that makes its way through the world and through history in an authentic hymn to joy. (no. 2)

Other key affirmations resound throughout the chapter—that the joy of life: springs from God’s own joy in complementing the good-
ness and abundance of creation (no. 3); is for every single person, persisting through the pain of the world as “an authentic act of spiritual resistance to the blackmail of evil” (no. 4); challenges the false divorce between theology (theory) and pastoral work (practice) (no. 5); and affirms that “the truth is not an abstract idea, but is Jesus himself, the Word of God in whom is the Life that is the Light of the human race” (no. 6).

Drawing on Pope Francis’s corpus broadly—including, for example, *Veritatis Gaudium*—the opening chapter also reflects on the task of theology. It affirms that “the church is ever open to new situations and ideas” and that “the good theologian has an open, that is, an incomplete thought, always open to the *maius* of God and of the truth, always in development” (no. 6). It reprises Pope Francis’s four criteria for revivifying ecclesiastical studies—and hence, the whole of theology—going forward. The first criterion is that theology is first and foremost a contemplative practice, a discipline that proceeding “in a manner that is spiritual, intellectual, and existential, is able to go ‘to the heart of the kerygma’” (no. 7). Second, it is dialogical. Citing Benedict XVI, we are reminded that from the encounter that is at the origin of theology “truth is *logos* that creates *dia-logos*” (no. 8). Third, theology must be both inter- and trans-disciplinary; revelation “does not annul other knowledge; on the contrary, it requires it” (no. 9). And finally, it requires a rich collaboration (no. 10) among theological institutions, cultural fields, scientific disciplines, those who are poor, the laity and clergy who participate in parish life, and more. The *testo base* articulates a broadly synodal vision for the practice of theology.

Setting the rhythm for the entire document, Chapter I is followed by analyses of two discussants: Piero Coda, Ordinary Professor of Trinitarian Ontology at the University of Sophia in Loppiano; and Emilce Cuda, Faculty member at the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina and the Secretary of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America.

Taking to heart the counsel of the Second Vatican Council, the systematic work of the document, which begins in Chapter II, begins with a substantive reflection on “Sacred Scripture and Life.” After a series of caveats on the loss of engagement with scripture for baptized persons (no. 14) and potential misuses of scripture (nos. 15–17), the document traces the scriptural witness not only to “life” (as in *Evangelium Vitae*) but to the joy of life and its goodness from Genesis through the witness of the Hebrew Scriptures to the incarnation, beatitudes, Christ’s ministry, and his glorified body (transfigured and raised). The overriding message here—captured in many of the subheadings—is *blessing*. Andrzej S. Wodka, president of the Holy See Agency for the evaluation and promotion of the quality of university and ecclesiastical faculty (Avepro) and former dean of the Alphonsian Academy, Rome, serves as the discussant for Chapter II.
Following the pattern established with *Rerum Novarum*, Chapter III—“Interpreting the Present Time”—outlines the particular “signs of the times” that challenge those faithfully seeking to navigate the church’s witness to the blessing and joy of life in our contemporary context. These include, in keeping with the tradition, distorted anthropologies and sociologies, the “individualism and the privatization of the subject, whose narcissism and self-centeredness increase all the time…. the deep fraying of family and societal relationships in a logic of self-sufficiency that sees only one’s own interests” (nos. 46–47).

We hear as well of the two-edged sword of new technologies, offering extraordinary new knowledge and benefits (nos. 56–59) as well as equally profound challenges. In keeping with Pope Francis’s insight that “everything is interconnected,” this chapter highlights the close connection between the “‘emerging and converging’ processes” of twenty-first century technologies, that promise to transform not only the natural world but also ourselves (nos. 63–66). This survey of the contemporary landscape also foregrounds another hallmark of Pope Francis’s papacy, one largely absent in Catholic bioethics—the role played in all these issues by economics. As the testo base notes, we are faced with a dramatic paradox: precisely at the moment when humankind possesses the technical-scientific capabilities to achieve a widespread prosperity that could promote an effective universal distribution of goods in according with God’s desires, what we observe is an exacerbation of conflicts, fomented by increasing inequalities…. The technological structure of the industrial revolution and of the digital expansion has resulted in a unilateral and dominant technological-scientific paradigm that has deleted the questions about the meaning of life and about the bonds that create solidarity among human beings. This trajectory intersects with the predominance of the laws of the market, interpreted in the sense of greed and rapacity, and leading to indifference vis-à-vis those who are weakest; here, the wisdom of the peoples and of the poor is forgotten, and there is an erosion of the time devoted to what is more fundamental, such as the search for the good. (no. 46)

The discussant for Chapter III is William Desmond, the David Cook Chair in Philosophy, Villanova University; the Thomas A. F. Kelly Visiting Chair in Philosophy, Maynooth University; and Professor of Philosophy Emeritus, Institute of Philosophy, KU Leuven, Belgium.

Chapter IV demonstrates the debt of this document to *Evangelium Vitae* in turning next to an extended reflection on the fifth commandment: “‘Thou Shalt Not Kill’: Historical-Theological Hermeneutic and Hermeneutic of the Magisterium.” As the testo base notes, it “concentrate[s] in particular on the interpretation of the fifth commandment concerning the prohibition of the direct killing of an innocent
person” (no. 74). It traces the interpretation of this commandment beginning in thirteenth century Scholasticism and the *Summa Theologiae* II-II, Q. 64 (nos. 75–76), continuing through the development of moral theology (nos. 77–85) and the history of interventions from the ecclesiastical magisterium through the post-conciliar period (nos. 86–108). The discussant for Chapter IV is Ángel Rodríguez Luño, Professor Emeritus of Fundamental Moral Theology, Pontifical University of Santa Croce, Rome. Pierdavide Guenzi, Ordinary Professor of the Moral Theology of Marriage and Family, John Paul II Pontifical Theological Institute for Marriage and Family, responds to Professor Luño’s remarks.

Where Chapter IV traced the primacy of the fifth commandment for Catholic bioethics from the thirteenth century forward, Chapter V—“Theological Ethics: Conscience, Norm, and Discernment”—does the same for other key components of the pre-conciliar moral tradition. Here, reflections on moral responsibility, conscience, the moral law, and norms are framed by a theoretical reflection on theological anthropology (nos. 110–18). Discussions of this chapter are provided by Sigrid Müller, Professor of Moral Theology, University of Vienna, and William Murphy, Jr., Professor of Moral Theology, Pontifical College Josephinum, Columbus, Ohio. Alain Thomasset, Professor of Fundamental Moral Theology, Centre Sèvres - Facultés Jésuites de Paris, offers a response to Müller and Murphy.

After considering fundamental topics in moral theology—scripture, the signs of the times, the fifth commandment, conscience, norms—the document then shifts to a longer section on “The Great Anthropological, Ethical, and Theological Questions.” These questions are taken up in Chapters VI–X. As the opening to Chapter VI, “Our Common Home and Global Perspectives,” asks:

> Are there fundamental experiences in human life that we could recognize as common and shared by everyone, within and beyond cultural and religious differences? And what are they? This is the great question posed by nature. The affirmative answer to this question is at the origin of the following reflection, in which our theme will be the anthropological, ethical, and theological structure of the experience of life, in order that it can be lived in the joy of the Beatitudes (Matt 5).

(no. 134)

This chapter—focused largely on questions of ecology—reads almost like an excerpt from *Laudato Si’*, distilling its concerns in similar language. Discussants for Chapter VI are Gaël Giraud, Professor, the McCourt School of Public Policy and the Directeur of the Environmental Justice Program, Georgetown University; Director of Research, CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique), Paris, and Marie-Jo Thiel, Professor of Ethics and Moral Theology and the
Chapter VII pivots from the ecosystem on a global scale to a specific focus on the beginning of life, “Being Born, Loving, Generating.” While this chapter takes up traditional questions—reproductive technologies, contraception, marriage, sexuality—it seeks to shift from a juridical framework to “the anthropological question about the body, the incarnation, and the ‘filial’ character of the ‘incarnate self’” (no. 151). This reframing pushes into, through, and beyond phenomenology to the touchstone of joy:

How can one make sense of such a love, and what explains a joyful vision of life and makes possible gratitude for its gratuitous gift? Certainly, joy must be understood and described, because pain and misery are aspects of reality that are just as true as joy. How can one regain a sense of the ontological primacy of the latter, without ingenuously passing over the obvious character of the former? (no. 147, emphasis in original)

Carlos Castillo Mattasoglio, Archbishop of Lima, Peru, offers the discussion; Maurizio Chiodi, Ordinary Professor of Bioethics, John Paul II Pontifical Theological Institute for the Science of Marriage and the Family, Rome, responds to the Archbishop.

Chapter VIII shifts from the beginning of life to the end of life in taking up the great anthropological, ethical, and theological questions surrounding “Suffering and Life ‘Put to the Test.’” From scripture to phenomenology to Salvifici Doloris, this chapter offers a beautiful reflection for reimagining the joy and blessing of life amidst the suffering, pain, and illness negotiated within the realities of modern end-of-life health care. Here the discussion is led by Richard-Nazzareno Farrugia from the Università di Malta in conversation with Roberto Dell’Oro, the Austin and Ann O’Malley Chair in Bioethics and the Director, Bioethics Institute; Professor, Department of Theological Studies, Loyola Marymount University.

Chapter IX extends these reflections to the anthropological, ethical, and theological questions surrounding aging in “The Various Ages of Life and the Joy of the Life that is Offered.” Importantly, this chapter locates questions of aging within a reflection on the entirety of the lifespan, covering topics such as time and the ways it is constrained and transformed in the modern era; personal identity as it shifts from childhood, through adolescence and youth, to adulthood; finally turning to consideration of old age. This section is notably marked by a constant and creative engagement with scripture. Théophile Akoha, lecturer at Cames University and Vice-President of the African Section of the Theological Pontifical Institute John Paul II of Cotonou (Benin), serves as discussant. Noël Simard, Bishop of Valleyfield,
then provides a response to the entirety of reflections on Chapters VI–IX.

The reflection on “The Great Anthropological, Ethical, and Theological Questions” closes in Chapter X, as the testo base takes up the themes of “Death, the Fulfillment of Existence, and the Care of the Dying.” Building on the previous reflections on suffering and aging, here the document takes up questions at the end of life, highlighting hospice and palliative care, the traditional considerations surrounding prudent decision-making at the end of life, as well as medically-assisted nutrition and hydration, euthanasia, and assisted-suicide. Carlo Casalone, of the Pontifical Academy for Life, responds to two discussants: Chris Gastmans, Professor of Medical Ethics and Head of the Centre for Biomedical Ethics and Law at the Faculty of Medicine, KU Leuven (Belgium), and Pablo Requena Meana, Professor of Bioethics in the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical University of Santa Croce, Rome.

Having pondered these great questions, the document turns to its final two chapters. In Chapter XI, it takes up “Ethical Challenges and Themes that are Emerging in the Present Epoch.” These cover New Digital Technologies; Cooperation between Human Being, Machine, and Robot; The Relationship between Human Beings and Animals; Screening and Perinatal Diagnoses; Vaccines: Personal Health and Protection of the Community; Individual Medicine, Public Health, Allocation of Health Resources; and The Theologian and the Public Debate. The discussant for Chapter XI is Laura Palazzani, Professor of Philosophy of Law in the Free University Maria Santissima Assunta, Rome, and Vice President of the National Italian Committee for Bioethics.

The final chapter of the document moves to a theologically-fitting end, considering in Chapter XII, “Eschatology and the Drama of Life.” Here it returns to contemplation, relationship, and attentiveness to both the particular and the cosmic, the now and the historical, the finite and the infinite, and more, as outlined in the opening paragraphs. Two discussants reflect on this eschatological horizon: Luis Antonio G. Cardinal Tagle, the Prefect for the Congregation on the Evangelization of Peoples; and Andrea Bozzolo, Rector of the Pontifical Salesian University, Rome.

Philippe Bordeyne, President of the John Paul II Pontifical Theological Institute for the Sciences of Marriage and the Family and moderator of the three-day symposium at which the document was discussed, offers a set of closing observations. In addition, the volume closes with homilies offered during the event by Cardinal Mario Grech and Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, for the Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time and the Solemnity of All Saints, respectively.
THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF *ETICA TEOLOGICA DELLA VITA*

It is not easy to predict the impact of a volume like *Etica teologica della vita* on the current theological discussion. One of the hopes of our presentation is to signal its importance and to call for an open disposition by attentive readers who seek to further its vision that moves beyond polarizations and fractures toward a robust and renewed practice of theological dialogue. In closing, let us name four future directions for engagement that we find most pressing.

To begin, there is in *Etica teologica della vita* a preoccupation with foundational questions—in fact, it explicitly calls Catholic scholars to attend more closely to the anthropological premises that ground a theological ethics of life. This call may be difficult to heed both for theologically-minded and secular thinkers alike, currently working in the field of bioethics. For the latter, bioethics tends to be driven by public policy preoccupations. It is alert to the new ethical quandaries of the day, though aiming less at defining their specific conceptual contours, resting mindfully on the challenges they raise for our understanding of the human condition. For the most part, secular bioethics foregrounds a strategy for the *ethical* solution of moral problems, that is, for a workable approach consistent with basic commitments to respect for person, beneficence, and justice. Furthermore, it assumes the latter in their validity, as principles of common morality, but fails to offer a coherent ontological framework capable of justifying them in light of a meaningful anthropological vision.

The call for deeper thinking is no less challenging for Catholic bioethicists, when the preoccupation for the normative dimension of the Catholic tradition takes precedence over a more considered articulation of its grounding theological and philosophical premises. *Etica teologica della vita* points in a different direction: without eschewing the need for discussion about moral norms, it invites scholars to focus on the vision for human beings.

Secondly, *Etica teologica della vita* shows, with a multiplicity of approaches yet in an uncanny unanimity of method, that theological reflection brings to completion the movement toward transcendence, rooted in an anthropology hospitable to the religious dimension. The openness to theology pushes bioethics toward intermediation with the final, most radical, dimension of ultimacy, but without breaking from previous engagements. The *religious* gesture thus recapitulates the deeper intentionality at work in the philosophical searching of *secular* bioethics. It does not appear on the methodological scene like a bolt out of the blue sky.

Such a realization sustains both the openness of theology to philosophical reflection, on the one hand, as well as the recognition by philosophy that a theological ethics of life may offer a journey into new dimensions of meaning. If so, the hospitality of bioethics to a theolog-
ical anthropology responds to an exigence of philosophical depth rather than ambiguous tolerance toward “irrational” raptures, incommensurable with its own “rational” premises.

In this light, it becomes possible to give a full account of a theological ethics of life, whose novity unfolds in the ethical implications of a hyperbolic historical beginning that demands constant reinterpretation and deepening. The ethical truth of the original event is not given once and for all. This is why dialogue among theological perspectives is necessary within the church, for it sustains the effort of an ever-growing process of understanding and experiential articulation. Implicit in the difficult, yet always rewarding, exchange of theological differences is the conviction that normative determinations are kept in motion by a more original process of determining. Without relation to the latter, all Christian ethical principles and rules atrophy, they become “letters” devoid of “spirit.”

Theology offers reasons to support a eudaimonistic and communitarian turn in ethics: it recognizes the primacy of the good, the relevance of virtuous moral agency, its rootedness in community, the need to articulate criteria for rightness of actions and practices in light of full narratives of human fulfilment and flourishing. At the same time, theology underlines the teleological orientation of ethics with a more original confidence in the archeology of the good. The good given in the gift of life grounds the search for a final good.

An ethics of life (bio-ethics), theologically grounded, reflects such ontological confidence (cum-fides) in all its articulations. The matrix of ethical insights flowing from the Christ event redefines the meaning of all ethical principles and norms. A new action theory follows from the metaphysical and anthropological premises of theology. This is so because the primacy of love, in this case, a love for life, informs the status of moral normativity, the relevance of ethical rules, and ultimately, the very shaping of praxis. Moreover, it defines our fundamental attitude toward the challenges involved in practices of life shaping, from medicine to scientific research, to the application of technology.

Finally, Etica teologica della vita demonstrates in rich detail how these directions—the exploration of foundational questions, of the religious dimension of bioethics, and the theological grounding of the tradition—all find new impetus and insight in the deeply post-conciliar theology of Pope Francis. It surfaces the inexorable and recursively generative connections inherent in Pope Francis’s as-yet-unfinished-oeuvre between the theological and pastoral, the theoretical and practical, the clarity of abstraction and the epistemologically imperative realities of the poor, all grounded in the heart of the church—the life of prayer, sacrament, contemplation, and discernment. As Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia notes in his introductory note to the volume, Pope Francis has recognized the importance of this initiative, as it critically
integrates his discourse into a theological ethics of life. *Etica teologica della vita* now invites the broader theological community to join that conversation, articulating together an ethic, theology, and witness infused with the joy of life and the gospel.

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