

Livio MELINA. *Kurs bioetyki. Ewangelia życia*. Transl. Katarzyna Wójcik. Wydawnictwo Św. Stanisława BM, Kraków 2016, pp. 254.

DOI: <http://dx.do.org/10.18290/rt.2017.64.3-13>

Life, as a gift of God passed on to man, remains a fundamental value which is at the center of the Gospel, making it *the Gospel of life*. The Church accepts the Gospel as her own and preaches the truth by any possible means. She interprets in detail many specific problems regarding the creation, the course and the end of human life.

The book Kurs bioetyki by Father Livio Melina, who was the director of the John Paul II Pontifical Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences in Rome between 2006 and 2016, is a systematized lecture *on bioethics based on John Paul II's encyclical Evangelium vitae*. *The study was published as part of bioETYKA series*. As an avid propagator of the thought of the Polish Pope, Father Livio gave a series of lectures oscillating around the issues raised in John Paul II's encyclical. The lectures were published in Polish and preface to the work was written by Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz.

First chapter of the book outlines the context for the appearance of the papal document, which may create the impression that it is a classic discussion of the contents of the encyclical. However, as reading continues, it becomes clear that the author not only arranges material in a systematic way (not always following the content chronology of *Evangelium vitae*), but also brings a certain original contribution, widens essential issues and provides more details of the complex problems. Naturally, the papal document is limited by form to a synthesis that is creatively described and interpreted in this publication, constituting a valuable contribution to the understanding of the thought of John Paul II.

Maybe the word “course” (handbook) used in the title is not adequate here. The book does not refer to many more detailed bioethical problems (e.g. doctor–patient relationship, cloning, genetic engineering, genetic modification of food, use of tissues and organs for transplantation, ethics of natural environment). Due to the context of its creation, the book addresses the topics raised in the encyclical and their derivatives (abortion, euthanasia, artificial procreation, persistent therapy, disease and death, secular law and bioethical issues). For obvious reasons, it does not refer to the teaching of Popes Benedict XVI and Francis. However, in preaching the *Gospel of life*, both Popes are continuators of the great thought of John Paul II. Hence, knowing and understanding it is essential—and this is ensured by the work of Fr. Melina.

It is interesting and original how Father Melina combines the encyclical *Evangelium vitae* with an earlier encyclical, *Veritatis splendor*, which is equally important for moral theology. Contemporary crisis in understanding moral issues generates particular consequences for depreciating the fundamental values of human life.

Analyzing the current threats to life (postmodern culture or the crisis of moral teaching), Fr. Melina draws attention to the link between the defense of human life and the social context. It seems that today the Church must stand up for the defenseless (unborn, sick), as in the late nineteenth century she stood up for the oppressed workers. The struggle to protect life is not just a matter of securing individual human rights, but it is a matter of development or degradation of entire societies.

In various places of the book one can see valuable references to the Biblical message. Although quotes from the Bible are frequent, as if to confirm the presented reflection, they always reflect the essence of the problem in a way that emphasizes Christian character of the argument.

In the second part, the author gives a positive lecture on Catholic teaching regarding the respect for life. He touches upon the issue of anthropology (including theology of image, relation of the human being). The author presents the ethos of fatherhood and motherhood, including the so-called theology of the body by Karol Wojtyła (for example, he broadens the perception of the uniting functions of the sexual act in marriage). He also examines some aspects of caring for life at its end. In this part of the book, the considerations devoted to the status of the human embryo are very interesting and comprehensive. Not only do they show the development of human embryo and fetus (the author negates the concept of the so-called pre-embryo), but also reflect on the personification of the embryo from the moment of conception and individuality, as a basis for conferring status of a person on the embryo.

In the main part of the book, Fr. Melina, as stated above, refers to the issues raised in *Evangelium vitae*. Therefore, he discusses in detail the problems of abortion and euthanasia or the relation of lay legislation to moral norms. In addition, contents that are worth highlighting include the so-called therapeutic abortion (which should be rejected as a concept) and the reference of euthanasia to the Eucharist, of course as a juxtaposition (Melina writes: *Euthanasia is a total antithesis of the Eucharist*). The author also separates euthanasia from the resignation from persistent therapy.

The book also discusses the fundamental commandment *You shall not kill* in its various manifestations, above all, in irrevocability of this moral norm. The author also draws attention to the problem of necessary defense, the consequence of which may be the death of an aggressor, and raises the subject of death penalty. Similarly, the author discusses the value of the mother's and the unborn child's life in a situation of threat to life as a result of a serious illness.

The author draws attention to the relationship that exists between the abortive mentality and the use of contraception. He also discusses the issue of conducting experiments on embryos or prenatal diagnosis.

At the end of the book, Fr. Melina shows the didactic value of the encyclical *Evangelium vitae*. First of all, it faces the subjectivity of moral teaching already rejected in *Veritatis splendor*. Today, there are also strong trends in the Church which attribute the autonomy of deciding on specific norms to the conscience of an individual person. On this occasion, the theologian touches upon the Catholic understanding of natural law. At the same time, Fr. Melina highlights the doctrinal importance of several fundamental statements made by the encyclical in question (numbers 57, 62, 65). He also shows the differences and relationships that occur in this context between the dogma and the ordinary teaching of the Magisterium of the Church. In an interesting way Melina emphasizes the validity and the normative nature of John Paul II's statements, which, although they are not dogmas, constitute reliable and true propositions. They also refer to the infallibility of the Pope, understood as a link with the teaching of all bishops. These considerations are of detailed nature, constituting an exceptional value of the reviewed study.

While discussing the relationship of lay law to moral law, Fr. Melina tackles the very practical problem of cooperation with evil against life. He mentions here par-

ticipation in abortion, making contraception available or carrying out euthanasia, in which the feeling of caring for the patient and relieving the pain is mixed with the patient's annihilation as a method of getting rid of suffering. Discussing many manifestations of the so-called *culture of death*, father Melina refers also to the mission of the *culture of life* which, in a prophetic way, can protect the world from showing unfaithfulness to God, the giver of life, through the renewal of family and moral reflection.

It seems that if reason and faith are to be *two wings on which believers rise*, bioethics is an attempt to create a bridge between empirical sciences and ethics, especially its theological variant. The development of medicine brings new dilemmas and questions. Reflection of a priest who has been studying John Paul II's thought for years reduces the distance between science and ethics. Reflection resulting from the Revelation and deeply embedded in detailed medical, biological and psychological knowledge, confirms that also the Church today is capable of responding to new humanity questions in a clear way rooted in the Truth.

Tomasz Wasilewski SSP
PhD student at the Institute of Moral Theology
of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin
e-mail: twasilewski@paulus.pl

Translated by Dominika Bugno-Narecka



The preparation of the English version of *Roczniki Teologiczne* (Annals of Theology) no. 3 and its publication in electronic databases was financed under contract no. 753/P-DUN/2017 from the resources of the Minister of Science and Higher Education for the popularization of science.

OSSERVATORIO CARDINALE VAN THUAN SULLA DOTTRINA SOCIALE DELLA CHIESA. *Settimo Rapporto sulla Dottrina sociale della Chiesa nel Mondo „Guerre di religione, guerre alla religione.”* Ed. Giampaolo Crepaldi, Stefano Fontana. Siena: Edizioni Cantagalli, 2016, pp. 218.

DOI: <http://dx.do.org/10.18290/rt.2017.64.3-14en>

Observatory Cardinal Van Thuân on the Social Doctrine of the Church was established in 2003 by Archbishop Giampaolo Crepaldi, the then secretary of the Pontifical Commission “Iustitia et Pax” and now Archbishop of Trieste. It is named after the head of Pontifical Commission “Iustitia et Pax” who died in 2001 and who spent 13 years in prison of the communist regime in Vietnam (9 years of which in solitary con-