

5 CARDINALS' INITIATIVE

The dubia will bear fruit in due time

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How should we evaluate the formula of the dubia, which the five signature cardinals chose to employ, given that seven years have passed since the previous dubia were made public after the publication of the post-synodal exhortation *Amoris Lætitia*? We can imagine that, the media will consider it a direct attack against Pope Francis, an initiative aimed at dividing the Church, or even a way to question the Synod on its eve. Among

those who are rather critical of this pontificate, there will be those who will consider this initiative redundant, especially in light of the 2016 dubia which received no response.

In order to understand if the method chosen by the five signatory cardinals is the correct one, it is necessary to reflect on the nature of the faithful's adherence to the magisterium, and on the way in which they are called to relate to the full and Supreme Authority, which belongs to two subjects: the «Roman Pontiff, by virtue of his Office, that is, Vicar of Christ and Pastor of the whole Church», and to the college of bishops «together with its head the Roman Pontiff, and never without this head» (*Lumen Gentium*, 22).

There is one approach we could consider "maximalist": anything contained in official documents by the Supreme Pontiff and the Dicasteries would require absolute assent; without regard to the type of document, to what degree of assent is required, to the topic covered, to the reiteration of a certain teaching in the magisterium. The more maximalists among the maximalists would also demand the same indisputable assent for any statement made by the Pontiff even in an informal context, such as, for example, an interview. The maximalist position normally assumes a voluntarist attitude, which can be expressed as follows: you don't need to understand; it is sufficient (and necessary) for you to obey. In this way the Magisterium is transformed into an instrument of absolutist government. The believer is required by will to discard the demands of reason.

On the other hand, there is a "minimalist" attitude, for which only the infallible and definitive Magisterium would require the assent of one's intelligence. As for the rest, it would be sufficient to have a respectful attitude, but judging for oneself the truth and orthodoxy of such statements. Minimalism almost inevitably leads to self-referentiality, that is, to attributing to oneself the authority to ultimately resolve questions of a doctrinal and moral nature. Ultimately, one's own judgment becomes the determining criterion of the truth or falsity of a statement.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 892, recalls that the Magisterium of the Church, even when it does not teach in an infallible or definitive way, must be welcomed with a "religious spiritual respect", as "this attention" "leads to a better understanding of Revelation in matters of faith and customs". It is not the intention of this article to go into the explanation of what this "religious homage" due to the merely authentic Magisterium is. The interesting point is that the meaning of the existence of the latter is to guide the intelligence of the faithful to adhere to the truths of faith, to the truths closely connected to them, and to offer a "better understanding of Revelation".

The maximalist position no longer comprehends this intellectual aspect, while the minimalist falls into a liberal examination of the Magisterium. It is clear that if the faithful perceives that when some statements of the Pontiff or bishops are not then rebuked and corrected which clash with those truths they have given their trusting assent, and they are unable to see continuity with the constant teaching of the Church, they must ask the supreme authority for clarification. This authority has the duty to answer their question. The Petrine ministry exists to confirm its brothers and sisters in the faith; and no one else has the last word on such matters.

The problem is no less acute when, rather than problematic and unclear statements present in official documents - for example *Amoris Lætitia* -, the faith is threatened by unfortunate, informal but still public comments, or even by acts that reveal a heterodox conception.

The dubia presented to the Pope in two formulations by the five signatory cardinals are a perfectly legitimate act, which corresponds adequately to the act of assent, which is not a mere act of obedience nor an adherence to what the individual personally believes to be right. The meaning of these questions is to urge Peter's successor to do what he must and for which he exists: confirm his brothers and sisters, so that they can provide a rationabile obsequium.

A few pastors are now demonstrating that they know how to give due consideration to the Petrine ministry and to respect the nature of the magisterium, which must shed light on what is not clear and not sow doubt on what is certain. This attitude also demonstrates the great esteem and respect that these pastors have for the faithful, not demanding blind obedience from them, which leaves the intellect without content on which to base itself, nor abandoning them at the mercy of their own personal judgment, but considering them worthy of being involved in a more necessary work of clarification.

This endeavour must be for effective clarification, not a simple recommendation or exhortation to trust, which, without an alethic content, demonstrates once again an absolutist conception of authority and voluntarist assent. In this sense, the reformulation of the dubia was a necessary act. The people of God cannot be left in uncertainty on such capital points as those that were raised. Let's be clear: the Church has already expressed itself clearly, but it was and is necessary for the Pope, this Pope, to proclaim these truths, today again, which in different ways is not only threatened, but denied by the pastors themselves, including by some statements pronounced by the Pontiff himself.

It is not a question of putting the Pope in difficulty, but of turning to that office which belongs to him alone. In a time of confusion, during which some monks wanted Saint Jerome to subscribe to a Trinitarian formula that was not clear to him, the Doctor of the Church, writing to Pope Damasus, had no doubts: «I have decided to consult the Chair of Peter, where that faith which the mouth of an Apostle exalted can be found (...) I follow no other primacy than that of Christ; for this reason I put myself in communion with your Beatitude, that is, with the Chair of Peter. I know that the Church is built on this rock" (Letter XV, 1-2, passim).

Therefore, is applying the dubia really a wasted effort? Is it an initiative with no hope of success? Is it doomed to failure like the path of the "reform of the reform" or like that of the hermeneutics of reform in continuity? The point is that all these "roads" correspond to the truth, to the nature of things; they are not ecclesiastical political strategies, which must be measured in terms of immediate success. They are tiring, uphill, strongly opposed roads that do not garner the consensus of the masses. But, that matters little. They have deep roots and, as the psalmist warns us, they will bear "fruit in His season and His leaves will never fall; all His works will succeed » (Ps. 1, 3). Not before, not after: in His time.