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THEOLOGICAL-PASTORAL DISCERNMENT ON SERGIO LANZA
AND POPE FRANCIS
Pastoralna prosudba kod Sergia Lanze i pape Franje

UDK : 272-4
272-6"20"

Original scientific paper
Izvorni znanstveni rad

Primljeno 12/2024

Summary

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The catchwords of Pope Francis (2013-2025) are complex and significant: 'epochal changes' and 'change of epochs', and they need to be studied and judged in depth from a theological-pastoral perspective. Because rapid, almost unforeseeable, social changes require the Church to seek appropriate ways to proclaim God's truth to new generations. Since pastoral discernment of the social and ecclesial situation is essential in modernizing the way of transmitting the faith, the author of the article, from a theological-pastoral perspective, deals with ecclesial judgment. In the first part, he discusses the evangelical discernment in the thought of the pastoralist Sergio Lanza (1945-2012), who founded and elaborated the method of pastoral discernment. After that, the author analyses the meaning of discernment in some of the magisterial writings of Pope Francis, and, finally, in the writings related to the Synod on Synodality (2021-2024).

Key words: theological-pastoral discernment, Sergio Lanza, Pope Francis, synodality.

INTRODUCTION

In a de-Christianized Europe, in an era of radical changes, great scientific and technological successes, the contemporary generation faces a kind of contradiction, because, on the one hand, it is, as never before, referred to an unprecedented source of news, and, on the other hand, it is becoming incapable of evaluating the signs and spirit of the times. Although this fact is becoming increasingly clear, it is not entirely new, for its spirit permeated the first Christian community. After all, Jesus warned

the hypocrites, saying to them: “You know how to interpret the face of the earth and the sky; how is it you do not know how to interpret these times?” (Lk 12:56).

The Bishop of Limburg, President of the German Bishops’ Conference, *Georg Bätzing* (1961), in his pastoral letter at the beginning of Lent 2025, on the occasion of the 1700th anniversary of the *Nicene Creed*, points out with concern that today only a third of the members of the Catholic Church in Germany believe that there is God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ. The decline of faith is a consequence of the increasing development of secularization.¹ A serious controversy over faith is shaking the Church. Are we unfaithful and distant from God?

This is a central theological-pastoral challenge,² which provokes all believers, especially bishops and priests, to ask themselves, in times of church restraint, in their local Churches and parish communities, in cooperation with pastoral and economic councils: How to improve pastoral care in times of religious indifference, unprecedented emigration of Croats and immigration of foreigners? How to get closer to people and bear witness to faith in Jesus Christ? Under the influence of social changes and doctrinal ambiguities in the church, many believers, due to their half-heartedness, do not *feel* faith as a life support, and some are searching for it, because they do not know how to believe in anything.

There is an increasing shortage of priests, making it inevitable to entrust several parishes to one pastor, which is an additional burden on the development of pastoral excellence. The question arises as to how, in accordance with the ‘change of epochs’, to devise effective pastoral methods, especially involving lay believers, and how to develop them in the spirit of pastoral creativity? How to evangelize today and what challenges do parishes, as communities of Jesus’ disciples, face? Here I am not dealing explicitly with the subject of *creativity*, although it is about the prophetic capacity to discover new horizons and promote appropriate pastoral methods.

If pastoral care, due to a lack of *creativity*, focuses only on preserving past customs or on entrepreneurial solutions, it can

¹ Cf. Pastoral Letter for the 2025 Easter Penitential Season by Dr. Georg Bätzing, Bishop of Limburg: *God’s Son – Human for Us*, 16. 3. 2025., 8.

² Cf. Luciano Meddi, Il giudizio pastorale, *Catechesi. Nuova serie* 2 (2021.), 5., 173.-184.

easily fall into ecclesial laziness, hindering the spread of the proclamation of the Word of God, which “can pass judgement on secret emotions and thoughts” (Heb 4:12). *Creativity*, according to Pope Francis, is the search for new ways of proclaiming the Gospel.³ But how do we judge whether new ways are appropriate? The work of the Church employs inventive *creativity* at all levels and in all areas, because “whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression”⁴. Pastoral *creativity* encourages change. And how do we change something and remain ‘faithful’?

Discernment is precisely the concept that connects creativity with faithfulness, because it inspires from within the one who lives in God’s presence. For the establishment of a renewed pastoral ministry, a theological-pastoral discernment of the entire life of the church and an understanding of social changes and developments are necessary. St. Paul, noticing the inappropriateness of life, emphasized the importance of discernment, warning Christians: „Do not model your behaviour on the contemporary world, but let the renewing of your minds transform you, so that you may discern for yourselves what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and mature.“ (Rom 12:2).

In recent times, the term *discernment* has been mentioned more and more frequently in theological and church writings. It is spoken of as moral, spiritual, pastoral discernment, discernment of the signs and spirit of the times, as well as other ways of discernment. Since it is not always clear what *Christian discernment* is, in this article I am going to deepen the meaning of pastoral discernment, relying in particular on the understanding of Sergio Lanza’s *pastoral discernment*.⁵

³ Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish community in the service of the Evangelising Mission of the Church* (29. 6. 2020.), 1.

⁴ Francis, Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24. 11. 2013.), 11., cf. 33 (EG). Cf. Francis, Apostolic exhortation *Christus Vivit* (25. 3. 2019.), 170 (CV).

⁵ Cf. Sergio Lanza, *Introduzione alla teologia pastorale. 1. Teologia dell’azione ecclesiale*, Queriniana, Brescia, 1989., 208.-218. S. Lanza, *Convertire Giona. Pastorale come progetto*, OCD, Roma Morena, 2005., 101.-156. Alojzije Čondić, *Ustani, zove te*, CuS, Split, 2013., 86.-101. Nikola Vranješ, *Projekt i metoda*, KS, Zagreb, 2021., 27.-93. Lanza’s understanding of pastoral discernment consists of three inseparable determinants: *kairology*, *criteriology* and *operational body*, and three successive stages: *analysis and discernment*, *decision and planning*, *realization and verification*.

1. THEOLOGICAL-PASTORAL MEANING OF DISCERNMENT

What Christian spirituality has always recommended at the level of personal choices should, as an essential task, also be applied to various common choices, as the internal building of the Christian community and as its reflection on social life.⁶ In fulfilling this mission, and in the system of judgment, the Croatian bishops emphasize that “the task of the Church is to adopt a position of *evangelical discernment* considering the influence of the secular process, which can help to understand that the focus of church activity should be placed on education in the faith that will lead to a deeper personal and communal commitment to Christ.”⁷

Discernment is a process of cognition, which is achieved through vigilant observation, careful study, choosing, separating, determining the standpoint and orientation in life, which is often accompanied by boundaries, ignorance, and disorder. It is not just about common sense, but, above all, about theological knowledge, because “with the help of the Holy Spirit, it is the task of the entire People of God, especially pastors and theologians, to hear, distinguish and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them in the light of the divine word, so that revealed truth can always be more deeply penetrated, better understood and set forth to greater advantage.”⁸ Accordingly, discernment is the form and method of church work, as Sergio Lanza insisted.

Church discernment is not limited to theological reflection, but, by its very nature, refers to the direction of life and church work. Society is changing unstoppably from day to day, and the usual pastoral care is being criticized for its ineffectiveness. Not because it is wrong, but because it does not correspond to reality. Pastoral discernment encourages the investigation of the signs and spirit of the times and the re-examination of existing pastoral care. Cultural metamorphosis deeply threatens the usual way of Christian initiation and education in the faith, and, with missionary pastoral care, encourages the local Church and the

⁶ Cf. Paolo Asolan, *Il tacchino induttivista*, Il pozzo di giacobbe, Trapani, 2009., 37.-39.

⁷ HBK, „Da vaša radost bude potpuna“ (Lv15,11). Kateheza i rast u vjeri u današnjim okolnostima (12. 4. 2018.), KS, Zagreb, 2018., 5.

⁸ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* (7. 12. 1965.), 44 (GS).

parish community to take care of the way in which the faith is proclaimed and transmitted, and to discover, through pastoral judgment, more appropriate ways of evangelization and to create new structures. Thus, renewing themselves, they come to know what the will of God is (cf. Rom 12:2), in a world of great changes. Through genuine pastoral discernment, pastoral restraint, activism, empiricism and the dispersion of proposals are avoided.⁹

Discernment is understood in action and manifested in understanding, and we must not understand it as the application of general instructions to specific examples. It is only a theological-pastoral content, because it is directed towards decision-making. However, its subject is not fundamental religious or ethical questions, but life choices, 'inspired by faith'¹⁰, whose commitment includes turning to the Gospel. Having a foothold in reality means being responsible and finding one's way in life choices. Therefore, discernment is originally connected to the act of faith, that is, it is a Christological observation of reality, under the action of the Holy Spirit: "It is all to bind them together in love and to encourage their resolution until they are rich in the assurance of their complete understanding and have knowledge of the mystery of God in which all the *jewels* of wisdom and knowledge are *hidden*." (Col 2:2-3). This means being able to recognize in the 'carpenter' the promised Saviour (cf. Mk 6:3), in the crucified man the Son of God (cf. Mk 14:27-29) and the Wisdom of God (cf. 1 Cor 2:7).¹¹

Without a Christological foundation, any other way of discernment would inevitably imitate prudential discernment. It might be accepted, but it would not be Christian and would be exposed to a struggle between superficiality and dialectical skill. Discernment goes beyond ambiguous and inconsistent interpretations, which would be equated with human prudence or common sense. Without denying human capacity, St. Paul clearly describes the Christian specificity of discernment as a gift of the

⁹ Cf. S. Lanza, Progetto, discernimento, verifica pastorale, in: Autori vari: *Creatività dello Spirito e programmazione pastorale*, Edizioni Dehoniane, Roma, 1998., 106.-113. P. Asolan, Il discernimento teologico-pastorale, in: Antonio Donato - Jules Mameault (ed.), *Il discernimento*, Accademia Alfonsiana, Roma, 2018., 151.-162. Angelo Auletta, *La guida della comunità cristiana nella prospettiva della corresponsabilità ecclesiale: la figura del discernimento*, Cittadella Editrice, Assisi, 2022., 195.-301.

¹⁰ Cf. GS, 4., 11.

¹¹ Cf. P. Asolan, Il discernimento teologico-pastorale, 151.-162.

Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 12:1-11) and therefore he included the “the power of distinguishing spirits” (1 Cor 12:10), i.e. the ability to recognize genuine gifts from being blinded by the brilliance of special manifestations, among the gifts of the Spirit.¹²

Discernment is a spiritual path, personal and communal, which helps us to know, choose and carry out the will of God. In the life and work of the Christian community, the wisdom of the cross is manifested (cf. 1 Cor 1:23), and “not, it is true, aphorism of this age” (1 Cor 2:6). Therefore, it is not an act of mere human prudence and common sense, but an act of faith. Recognizing God’s ways requires not only a commitment to research, but also a willingness to accept the enlightenment of the Spirit, which encourages the mind to understand things that it cannot understand by its natural disposition. By listening to the Holy Spirit, judgement nourishes the real poverty of the spirit, does not presuppose knowledge of difficulties and solutions in advance, but reads the signs of the times, in order to recognize in them the power of the Spirit. Discernment, in its particularity, which must not be reduced only to socio-metric or similar technologies, nevertheless does not lack ‘executive rules’, which must be known and followed, so that completely one-sided inclinations and impressions are not attributed to the Spirit.¹³

1.1. *Requirements and discerning standpoints*

The essential requirement of the theological-pastoral method, developed by Sergio Lanza, is manifested in the fact of finding the correct theological-pastoral way of transmitting the Gospel message, in a socio-cultural environment, which is constantly changing. Pope Francis rightly calls it a “change of epoch”¹⁴, since no one ‘possesses’ discernment, because it is a gift of the Spirit, and its verification implies persistent research and fidelity to the will of God. For, in the *Spirit*, one must accept “what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (Rev 2:7), and it points to the cultivation of communion. Therefore, discernment is not an independent act, but is at the service of communion, because

¹² Cf. S. Lanza, *Introduzione alla teologia pastorale*, 208.-218.

¹³ Cf. S. Lanza, *Opus Lateranum. Saggi di teologia pastorale*, (P. Asolan - Tiago Freitas, ed.), LUP, Città del Vaticano, 2012., 302.-310.

¹⁴ Francesco, *Discorso al V Convegno nazionale della Chiesa italiana*, Firenze, 10. 11. 2015.

pastoral care is by its very nature an image of the life and work of Christian community.

The bearer of discernment is the church community, which is called, by its mission, to open itself to the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. In relation to the pastoral mission, it is necessary to deepen the common and personal Christian discernment component, which stems from the *Incarnation*¹⁵, a fundamental theological-pastoral principle. In this context, the importance of pastoral discernment was particularly emphasized by Saint Pope John Paul II, who said: „For a believer the interpretation of the historical situation finds its principle for understanding and its criterion for making practical choices in a new and unique reality, that is, in a *Gospel discernment*. This interpretation is a work which is done in the light and strength provided by the true and living Gospel, which is Jesus Christ, and in virtue of the gift of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁶

For a common discernment to be credible, it must have certain internal factors, such as: obedience to the Holy Spirit and a humble search for the will of God, reflection on the Word of God, interpretation of the signs of the times, in the spirit of the Gospel, evaluation of gifts, in fraternal dialogue, spiritual-missionary and socio-cultural creativity, cooperation with the church authorities and a synodal way of pastoral care. Understood in this way, a common discernment can be a school of Christian life, developing mutual love, cooperation, co-responsibility and inclusion in society.¹⁷ Because, “this ‘discernment’, often mentioned by the Apostle Paul, is not only a matter of evaluating reality and events in the light of faith, but also involves a real decision and obligation to employ it, not only in Church life but also in human society.”¹⁸

The Holy Spirit does not act in general, but through human gifts and abilities, which must be recognized and exercised. Therefore, to understand God’s will, ‘seeing clearly between’ points to the importance of the already proven criteria from the millennial Christian tradition. Discernment must support the course of salvation history, take into account faith, the Church’s teaching and the sincerity of human prudence, and give priority

¹⁵ Cf. S. Lanza, *Introduzione alla teologia pastorale*, 227.-235.

¹⁶ John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (25. 3. 1992.), 10 (PDV).

¹⁷ Cf. S. Lanza, *Opus Lateranum*, 311.-313.

¹⁸ John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (30. 12. 1988.), 51.

to the common good, which must never be questioned. In order not to stumble in terms of worldview, the discernment must be directed theologically from the beginning, because only in this way, through the pastoral search for God, the Church “can face the difficulties and challenges of this new period of history”¹⁹. Otherwise, there is a danger of interpreting world events and judging personal, socio-cultural and church events only by scientific, humanistic or technocratic achievements. The Church is open to anthropological challenges, which arise from scientific discoveries, and judges them evangelically.

Discernment is inherently theological, because it is open to the promptings of the Spirit and therefore, above all, it encourages the conversion of mind, spirit and soul (cf. Rom 12:2). Inner renewal includes a complete Christian life and the imitation of Jesus Christ, which is impossible without spiritual maturity and prayerful devotion. All this implies patient and humble preparation, and not presumptuous surrender to waywardness, dialectical ability or technical-professional excellence. Discernment is a moral rather than intellectual act, which implies inner freedom and clarity, in performance and in motives. To judge means to know how to separate good from evil, to separate truth from lies, to discern justice from injustice, to distinguish between the essential and the inessential, to take the right stance and side and to make responsible decisions. Sometimes it is unusual, because it needs to be practiced in non-judgment, that is, accepting those weak in faith, without judging opinions (cf. Rom 14:1). It is an act of respect, which does not conclude with the victory of one side over the other, but rather reveals the gospel message of unworthy servants (cf. Lk 17:10). Theological-pastoral competence not only enters into the demands of discernment, but is also necessary due to the complexity of the social and ecclesial situation. It encourages the ‘pastoral love’ from which it arises, but without competence it is like mercy without justice or faith without reason.²⁰

The promptings of the Holy Spirit must not be an excuse for pastoral laziness, because some may think that the Holy Spirit directly influences them and that they do not need to discern or systematically design pastoral care. This is the trap of the pasto-

¹⁹ PDV, 10.

²⁰ Cf. P. Asolan, *Il discernimento teologico-pastorale*, 156.-158.

ral Enlightenment conceit, according to which all personal states of mind are directly divine. Therefore, a Christological discernment of reality is necessary according to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. „Do not stifle the Spirit or despise the gift of prophecy with contempt; test everything and hold on to what is good and shun every form of evil “ (1 Thess 5:19-22). It is clear that, in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, in pastoral work, evangelical discernment and pastoral planning should be exercised. For not every emotional state responds to the influence of the Spirit, and in charismatic areas, true prophecy should be distinguished from prophetic naivety, which excludes rational discernment. Saint Paul teaches: “The prophetic spirit is to be under the prophets’ control “ (1 Cor 14:32), so by denying discernment, any behaviour can be deified, and also that which is not imbued with the divine.

1.2. Process, criteria and method of discernment

The central criteria of pastoral discernment are not artisanal nor are they unthinkingly applied; although lists of precise and exactly determined laws from Scripture are not applicable, there are nevertheless indications for clear guidelines. The judgement of the situation relies on tradition, and, as we have mentioned, refers to the history of salvation, Holy Scripture, faith, and the Church’s teaching.²¹ It is important to emphasize anthropological-cultural perspectives and ecclesiology, because they relate to human reality, in which faith meets social and human sciences, including legal, or canonical, determinants. So that discernment does not stop at the free-minded and social level, the Holy Scripture illuminates it so that the correct and God’s plan of salvation can be recognized. The criteria of church education and the common good, healthy spirituality and pastoral service, cooperation and co-responsibility, synodality and mission are necessary. However, these are not imposed or ready-made pastoral instructions for immediate application, but rather criteria that guide discernment, that test reality, that strive for implementation, and that have an effective meaning. It is not limited to general but to applicable goals, which require explicit factors, such as the persons who will achieve them, the indicators of what is to be achieved, the expected effects, the conditions under which

²¹ Cf. GS, 4., 11., 37.

they are achieved: the time period and means, and the criteria for checking applicability.²²

Reality shows that there is a prevailing lack of pastoral guidelines, programs and plans, a lack of will to face reality, to anticipate events and to create a longer-term approach, because we have limited ourselves and anchored ourselves in the usual pastoral ‘trenches’, from which we often, due to indecision or complacency, do not even try to get out. Therefore, we should not be surprised that, in the face of secularism and wokeism, proclamation is being deadened, pastoral ‘space and time’ is being dissolved, such as, for example, the relationship between parish and Sunday, or the sacraments, catechesis and charity are being inadmissibly separated. Therefore, it is necessary to discern what are the true evangelical values or at least openness to the Gospel, because „the word of God appears here as a criterion for discernment.”²³

The enormous complexity and lack of pastoral fervour hinder the recognition of pastoral challenges and undertakings, which brings anxiety, loss of vocation and secularization of the lay faithful. Pastoral work often fails because final goals are confused with those that are immediately achievable. The rule of pastoral gradualness is neglected, because, on a personal and communal level, time is needed for growth and maturation. Pastoral work does not tolerate skipping and shortcuts, but values God’s education, requires patience and openness to the promptings of the Spirit, and, in this context, our undertakings become a sign of pastoral wisdom. Discernment is life-giving, it opens up the possibility of creativity, i.e. it values the influence of faith and hope in the life of the community, and thus prevents bureaucratic restraint, which is focused on religious obligingness, and bypasses people and life. The administration of the local Church with its structures (offices, councils, committees, etc.)²⁴ has a special responsibility in discernment, because it is called to recognize, direct and plan pastoral care, determine pastoral pri-

²² Cf. S. Lanza, Progetto, discernimento, verifica pastorale, in: Vari autori, *Creatività dello spirito e programmazione pastorale*, Dehoniana, Roma, 1998., 71.-105. P. Asolan, Il discernimento teologico-pastorale, 158.-162.

²³ Benedict XVI, Apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* (30. 9. 2010.), 87 (VD).

²⁴ Cf. Pontifical by Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, *Directory for Catechesis* (5. 6. 2020.), 416.

orities and goals, and develop an effective strategy, avoiding fragmentation and division.

The deepening of the method of discernment may include other factors, but the general approach should always be understood flexibly and wisely incorporated into the life of the community. The rules for the community's discernment are not the cause of success, but the availability of the environment for the free and merciful action of the Spirit as the effective cause of discernment, and the process of discernment includes prayer.

A joint discernment, for example by a pastoral council, contains several components: first of all, it is important to clearly pose the question, jointly evaluate its justification and pastoral suitability, and determine the complexity of the content from several angles, so as not to fall under reproach: „You have seen many things but not observed them; your ears are open but you do not hear.” (Isa 42:20). In order for theological interpretation not to become merely cognitive, and pastoral care merely an undertaking, the holistic view must be spiritually interwoven. From the beginning, a common prayerful mood is necessary, seeking God's will (cf. Acts 2:42; 4:24; 10:9). Then, it is necessary to reflect personally together, because silence and personal concentration are enriched in the presence and exchange of communion, which expresses the anthropological value and truth of the Spirit. This is followed by a conversation about the subject, which is not initially a debate, but attentive listening, in communion and prayer, and the deepening of thought and meaningful discussions come later. This may take time, but it is important to avoid conflicts at the beginning. Finally, after analysis and discernment, a decision follows, which does not occur according to the measure of the majority, but follows the paths of ecclesialism and finds a specific way of gradual realization, according to the appearance of different church realities of discernment (pastoral council, priestly council, religious chapter, etc.) and the nature of the question, knowing that in analysis not everything can be judged completely, but deeper enlightenment is necessary, especially when the decision would lead to difficulties for the unity of the community.²⁵

²⁵ Cf. S. Lanza, Progetto, discernimento, verifica pastorale, 106.-113. Franco G. Brambilla - Antonio Ruccia, *Discernimento comunitario. Per una prassi sinodale*, Messaggero, Padova, 2024., 13.-22.

2. EVANGELICAL DISCERNMENT IN SOME WRITINGS OF POPE FRANCIS

In order for the Church to proclaim eternal truth as successfully as possible, it has “to judge in the light of the divine word”²⁶, i.e. through *evangelical discernment* “recognize and understand the world in which we live.”²⁷ Pope Francis adopted the Council’s views on the signs of the times.²⁸ He had been inspired by Ignatian spiritual discernment since the beginning of his papacy.²⁹ In his writings and messages, he refers to and uses *evangelical discernment*, with the intention of recognizing, interpreting and changing the way the Church works.³⁰ In addition to addressing the Church, Pope Francis encourages social leaders to discern. In his address to the heads of states and governments of the European Union, he invites us to discern the present, in order to continue the journey that we have begun, building on what is essential, discerning the path of hope and the path of a new humanism.³¹

Although I am focusing here on *pastoral* discernment, it should be noted that the term *discernment*, in the Pope’s writings, has multiple meanings, and not with a clear distinction, because it speaks of: pastoral, practical and evangelical discernment, and sometimes moral, spiritual, communal and personal.³²

In his first apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, in which he refers to the fundamental renewal of pastoral care in the spirit of “pastoral and missionary conversion”³³, the Pope mainly uses the word *discernment* as completely understandable, common

²⁶ GS, 44.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁸ Cf. EG, 14., 51., 108.

²⁹ Cf. Sveti Ignacije Lojolski, *Duhovne vježbe*, Ignatiana-Pneuma, Zagreb, 2021. Francesco Maceri, Il discernimento ignaziano, u: A. Donato – J. Mimeault (ed.), *Il discernimento*, 51.-63. Franjo, *Naučiti jezik srca. O umijeću razlučivanja i donošenja odluka*, Verbum, Split, 2023., 27.-32. Benedict XVI: „Every saint is like a ray of light streaming forth from the word of God: we can think of Saint Ignatius of Loyola in his search for truth and in his discernment of spirits“, VD, 48.

³⁰ Cf. Francesco, Oggi la Chiesa ha bisogno di crescere nel discernimento, *La Civiltà Cattolica* 167 (2016.), 3., 345.-349.

³¹ Cf. Francis, *Address to The Heads of State And Government of The European Union in Italy for The Celebration of The 60th Anniversary of The Treaty of Rome*, Sala Regia, 24. 3. 2017., p. 4., 6.

³² Cf. EG, 33., 50., 154. Francis, Apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (19. 3. 2016.), 37., 304 (AL).

³³ EG, 25., cf. 33.-35.

and without special interpretation.³⁴ In going beyond the pastoral care of conservation, i.e. 'it has always been done this way', and in his efforts to create a synodal Church that discerns, he noticed that it is a complicated concept that requires additional explanation, so he held several catecheses on this at regular meetings on Wednesdays, from August 2022 to January 2023.³⁵ However, here I focus on his evaluation of discernment in some church writings, but I will refer to some thoughts that he deepened in 'catecheses'³⁶ on a spiritual-life level.

Although the implementation of *discernment* is somewhat forgotten, due to the Pope's frequent use, it has become his essential word, or rather one of the fundamental pillars of his papal ministry. Since the catchphrase, 'judging the signs of the times', sometimes vaguely combines the theological-spiritual and social interpretation of events, Pope Francis believes that "we would not be well served by a purely sociological analysis", so, what he offers „is something much more in the line of an *evangelical discernment*“³⁷, for which Christ is the stronghold and the Holy Spirit is a free and creative reflection of God's will.

Apart from the importance of 'personal discernment', the Pope promotes 'common discernment', which, despite its complexity and effort, must be exercised in the Church by abandoning its comfort and going to the peripheries of the world and life. He teaches that the Holy Spirit prompts every Christian to evangelize and endows the Christian community with a sense of faith, which helps them to discern what, on a personal and communal level, truly comes from God.³⁸ Having established pastoral conversion in a 'missionary key', he encourages creative questioning of the evangelizing goals, structures, methods and approaches of one's own communities and stresses that it is essential not to go alone, but together, "in a wise and realistic pastoral discernment"³⁹. He therefore calls: "I encourage each

³⁴ Cf. Angelo Auletta, *La guida della comunità cristiana*, 122.-127., 191.-194.

³⁵ Cf. Franjo, *Naučiti jezik srca. O umijeću razlučivanja i donošenja odluka*, Verbum, Split, 2023.

³⁶ Cf. Nuno da Silva Gonçalves, 'Ascoltare il proprio cuore': Il discernimento nelle catechesi di papa Francesco, *La Civiltà Cattolica* 174 (2023.), 3., 233.-241.

³⁷ EG, 50., cf. 77. Cf. Gianluca Casanova, *Corresponsabilità*, Tau Editrice, Todi, 2024., 124.-129.

³⁸ Cf. EG, 20., 33., 119.-120. Franjo, *Naučiti jezik srca*, 59.-63.

³⁹ EG, 33. Cf. F. G. Brambilla - A. Ruccia, *Discernimento comunitario*, 58.-64.

particular Church to undertake a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform.”⁴⁰

In order not to run in vain, faced with the challenge of greed and indifference, as pastoralist *Jan Loffeld*⁴¹ warns, church work, if it does not recognize or if it ignores the prophetic direction, can succumb to pastoral individualism. For theology and pastoral care, faith and life, must not be separated. Therefore, an evangelical discernment is necessary, which looks at the context, as Pope Francis points out, depicting Saint Paul, who “approached the apostles in Jerusalem to discern whether he was “running or had run in vain” (*Gal2:2*); the key criterion of authenticity which they presented was that he should not forget the poor(cf. *Gal2:10*).“⁴²

Within the principles and criteria of discernment, attention should be paid to each and every person, to the mutual attraction between the Gospel and man’s personal and social life.⁴³ Likewise, the entire Christian community is involved in the call to growth in faith, so it is essential to discover that, in catechesis, the first proclamation and mystagogic renewal play a fundamental role, „the one which would assume very different forms based on each educational community’s discernment“.⁴⁴

Pastoral care sometimes suffers from religious eccentricities, fashion, worldliness and customs that are not directly related to the essence of the Gospel; they may be beautiful, but they do not serve the transmission of the Gospel, so they need to be fearlessly examined through constant discernment, according to Pope Francis, and the help and condition for good discernment is confronting the Word of God and the Church’s teaching, listening and listening to the people.⁴⁵ Mission does not take a defensive stance, and faith, due to controversy, can turn into fideism or spiritualism, and pastoral care into religious helpfulness, if we forget “to grow in its own understanding of the Gospel and in discerning the paths of the Spirit“⁴⁶. Therefore, the preacher’s “preparation for preaching thus becomes an exercise in evangeli-

⁴⁰ EG, 30., cf. 16.

⁴¹ Cf. Jan Loffeld, *Wenn nichts fehlt, wo Gott fehlt*, Herder, Freiburg, 2024.

⁴² EG, 195.

⁴³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 181.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 43., 154., 171. Franjo, *Naučiti jezik srca*, 111.-118.

⁴⁶ EG, 45.

cal discernment⁴⁷, which allows us to recognize God's message, which resonates in historical circumstances.

In circumstances of excessive individualism, freedom of choice can degenerate into an inability to give oneself (cf. Phil 4:2), and in such a social environment many marry and raise families, of which Pope Francis speaks in the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, calling for "the pastoral discernment of those situations that fall short of what the Lord demands of us"⁴⁸. Although pastoral discernment is related to moral content, it is not the same as 'moral discernment'⁴⁹, because it is "related to judgments about the participation of believers in the life of the Church."⁵⁰

In order for the faithful to be "capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations"⁵¹, the Pope, outlining pastoral conversion, emphasizes that the Church is called to educate the consciences of the faithful and to work synodally, which allows discernment to grow in depth and fidelity to God.⁵² Except the judgement of the integral pastoral care of the family, Pope Francis, in the eighth chapter of the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, elaborates on pastoral discernment in relation to 'so-called irregular situations'. He clearly emphasizes that "the Church's pastors are not only responsible for promoting Christian marriage, but also the pastoral discernment of the situations of a great many who no longer live this reality", moreover he claims that "in pastoral discernment, there is a need to identify elements that can foster evangelization and human and spiritual growth."⁵³

He especially asks parish priests to discern the participation of marriages and families in the life of the community, in prayer meetings or in other ways. For the divorced, who have remarried and may find themselves in very different circumstances, there should be room for appropriate personal and pastoral discernment. Priests should instruct these persons, educating them to

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁴⁸ AL, 6.

⁴⁹ Cf. A. Donato, Il discernimento come metodo in teologia morale, in: A. Donato - J. Mimeault (ed.), *Il discernimento*, 95.-109.

⁵⁰ Dalibor Renić, Predgovor hrvatskom izdanju, in: Franjo, *Naučiti jezik srca*, 9.

⁵¹ AL, 37.

⁵² Cf. *Ibid.*, 37. CV, 281.

⁵³ AL, 293., cf. 303.

discern, and follow and discern the stages of their growth so that they may become aware of their situation before God.⁵⁴ The purpose of pastoral discernment, in such difficult situations, is to care for the properly educated conscience of persons and to strive in these circumstances. Pope reminds us that “discernment is dynamic; it must remain ever open to new stages of growth and to new decisions which can enable the ideal to be more fully realized.”⁵⁵ In avoiding deviation in pastoral care and on the path to holiness, that is, in recognizing and fulfilling the Christian calling and mission “the important thing is that each believer discerns his or her own path, that they bring out the very best of themselves”⁵⁶. Discernment is a form of seeking, and we seek what we lack, what, in a way, we know, what we look for. It is about *desire*, as a direction and one of the factors of discernment, because in its essence it is a longing for fullness, which is never completely fulfilled, and is a sign of God’s presence within us.⁵⁷ Therefore, the paths of holiness can be discerned only in the light of the Spirit, teaches Pope Francis. Otherwise, all decisions will be an ornament that conceals the Gospel. Consequently, world-views that cripple social pastoral care will prevail, so in discernment, both in growth on the path of holiness and in the role of church schools in pastoral care and culture, the first essential factor is precious *prayer*, because it strengthens the gift of love, the authenticity of which is discerned in conversion in the light of mercy.⁵⁸

Regarding spiritual corruption, wondering how to know whether something comes from the Holy Spirit or from the devil, Pope Francis explicitly states that “the only way is discernment”, which, in the apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et Exultate*, he speaks more or less generally about. Explaining the meaning of discernment (cf. Mt 13:44-48),⁵⁹ it is, besides presupposing mental capacity and common sense, “a gift which we must implore”⁶⁰.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 297.-298., 300.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 303.

⁵⁶ Francis, Apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et Exultate* (19. 3. 2018.), 11., cf. 23., 62 (GE).

⁵⁷ Cf. Franjo, *Naučiti jezik srca*, 51.-55.

⁵⁸ Cf. GE, 100.-105., 150. Francis, Apostolic exhortation *Veritatis Gaudium* (16. 4. 2017.), 1., 3. Franjo, *Naučiti jezik srca*, 43.-47.

⁵⁹ Cf. Franjo, *Naučiti jezik srca*, 19.-23.

⁶⁰ GE, 166.

The gift of discernment is increasingly necessary, because everyone, especially young people and marriage, is exposed to the onslaught of virtual platforms, and “without the wisdom of discernment, we can easily become prey to every passing trend.”⁶¹

Discernment does not only apply to extraordinary circumstances, serious difficulties and making final decisions, but is a path of freedom and a means of spiritual struggle and vigilance, which helps us to follow the Lord more faithfully, to recognize God’s times and the promptings of his grace. In addition to pastoral discernment, the Pope, who was particularly influenced by *Miguel Á. Fiorito* (1916-2005) and *Diego Fares* (1955-2022), often mentions *spiritual discernment*, which does not exclude, but rather goes beyond, intellectual, social or moral knowledge, because it is always grace. It goes beyond reason and prudence, because it seeks to enter into God’s mysterious plan for each person and leads to the source of eternal life (cf. Jn 17:3). Since some avoid surrendering to the freedom of the Spirit in prayer, and some fall into spiritual dryness, the Pope emphasizes that the prerequisite for synodality and *prayerful discernment* is the willingness *to listen*: to God, to others, and to reality. The attitude of listening implies obedience to the Gospel, as the ultimate criterion. Its meaning is not to exploit life for self-gratification, but to recognize the way in which the baptismal mission is fulfilled. It is not a conceited analysis of ourselves or a selfish look at ourselves, but rather a coming out of ourselves in order to draw closer to the mystery of God.⁶²

According to the exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* “the decision to marry and to have a family ought to be the fruit of a process of vocational discernment”⁶³, and according to the exhortation *Christus Vivit*, which is addressed to young people, he speaks about the judgement of Christian vocation. In this exhortation, the Pope applies the reflections from the exhortation *Gaudete et Exultate* to the discovery and recognition of one’s personal vocation in the world.⁶⁴ He certainly thinks that “in discerning your vocation, do not dismiss the possibility of devoting your-

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁶² Cf. *Ibid.*, 166.-174. CV, 295. EG, 171. Franjo, *Naučiti jezik srca*, 65.-79. Miguel Á. Fiorito i Diego Fares, *Per una teologia del discernimento*, in: Francesco, *Sul discernimento* (Antonio Spadaro, ed.), EDB, Bologna, 2024., 119.-206.

⁶³ AL, 72.

⁶⁴ Cf. CV, 283.-286.

self to God in the priesthood, the religious life or in other forms of consecration.⁶⁵

In working with youth, it is essential to recognize and discover that Jesus wants to be a friend to every young person, and precisely “this discernment is the basis of all else.”⁶⁶ Every form of pastoral work, every form of development and spirituality, the Pope believes, should be seen in the light of the Christian vocation, that is, in missionary service to others. The vocation does not consist only in the tasks that need to be done, because “in discerning your vocation, it is important to determine if you see in yourself the abilities needed to perform that specific service to society.”⁶⁷ Therefore, it is not just about jobs that contribute to earning money or entertainment, but about recognizing the meaning of life and God’s plan in human life. This ‘being for others’, among young people, requires knowing oneself, and is particularly connected to starting a new family and work, so both attitudes must be the subject of a certain discernment.⁶⁸

There are people, priests or lay faithful, who accompany young people on their journey of discernment, and they must first of all listen to them. Listening involves three different and complementary types of sensitivity: the first is directed to the individual, and an example of this type of listening is found in the encounter between Jesus and the disciples on the road to Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:13-35). The second sensitivity consists in discerning where grace is present and where temptation is present, recognizing the influence of the Holy Spirit and the snares of evil, distinguishing truth from fallacy. The third sensitivity consists in listening to the impulses that move the other person and helping to discern where the other wants to go.⁶⁹

3. ON PASTORAL DISCERNMENT AT THE ‘SYNOD ON SYNODALITY FROM 2021 TO 2024’

After analysing and judging the social and church situation in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis focused on evangelising-missionary transformation and a syn-

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 276.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁶⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 256.-258. Franjo, *Naučiti jezik srca*, 43.-47.

⁶⁹ Cf. CV, 291.-299.

odal understanding of the Church, promoting a conciliar understanding of the people of God, who have a *sense of faith* “to discern the new ways that the Lord is revealing to the Church.”⁷⁰ In accordance with his instructions, the International Theological Commission published the document: *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*,⁷¹ explaining the meaning of synodal renewal. Apart from speaking about the *importance of apostolic, communal, evangelical and synodal discernment*⁷², in the service of proclamation and the church’s mission, it also emphasizes that discernment has always been “at the heart of synodal processes and events.”⁷³

At the beginning of October 2021, the *Preparatory Document* was published, in which it was proposed that “in a synodal style, decisions are made through discernment, based on a consensus that flows from the common obedience to the Spirit.”⁷⁴ The purpose and goal of the preparation was to reflect and consult with the people of God, at the level of the local Churches. At the same time, the *General Secretariat of the Synod* affirms the importance of the Holy Spirit in the relationship of community and discernment: “In a synodal style we make decisions through discernment of what the Holy Spirit is saying through our whole community.”⁷⁵

The *Synod on Synodality* was held in two parts: The first part was held from October 4 to 29, 2023, and immediately before it, the first document, *Instrumentum Laboris*, was issued, which presents Pope Francis’ understanding of the synodal Church, and helped in the assembly session, as a contribution to the discernment of what is considered fruitful for the growth of the synodal Church. The *Instrumentum Laboris*, as well as the *Final Docu-*

⁷⁰ Address of his Holiness pope Francis, *Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17. 10. 2024. Cf. *Instrumentum laboris* for the Second Session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 9. 7. 2024., 58 (IL2).

⁷¹ Cf. International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 2. 3. 2018.

⁷² Cf. *Ibid.*, 19., 21., 42.-43., 69., 73.-75.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 113., cf. 114.

⁷⁴ Preparatory Document for the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 7. 9. 2021., 30., IX.

⁷⁵ The General Secretariat of the Synod, *Official Handbook for Listening and Discernment in Local Churches - Vademecum*, September 2021., 5.3., 9. Cf. Juan A. Guerrero Alves - Óscar Martín López, *La conversazione nello Spirito. L'arte del discernimento e la pratica della sinodalità*, LEV, Città del Vaticano, 2024., 25.-57.

ment, which abound in speech about discernment, presented the ‘synodal method’, calling it: ‘*conversation in the Spirit*’. It is described as a common prayer for common discernment,⁷⁶ and it is ‘revealed’ “as a space for discernment in a synodal Church”⁷⁷, because “a synodal Church is also a Church of discernment”⁷⁸, so we should not be afraid, personally and together, “to engage in ongoing synodal discernment”⁷⁹.

After the first part of the Synod, through prayer, conversation and discernment, the *Synthesis Report* of the First Assembly of the Synod of Bishops was published, in which it is initially stated that it is “an instrument at the service of ongoing discernment.”⁸⁰ According to it, synodality, which without spirituality becomes superficial, includes mutual listening, conversation, community discernment and decision-making, in accordance with responsibilities.⁸¹ In knowing the will of God and in developing ecclesial discernment, the assembly of the Synod of Bishops believes that it is necessary to “deepen the criteria of ecclesial discernment from a theological perspective”⁸².

It emphasizes that, through the synodal method of ‘conversation in the Spirit’, together with other templates of ecclesial judgment, which are carried out in the sequence: *see, judge, act* or through a gradual structure: *recognize, interpret, choose*, theological thoughts, humanities and social sciences can be unified. *The Synthesis Report* and *Final Document* encourage local Churches, especially bishops, whose special task is to reason and unite, to train persons for ecclesial discernment, because it is essential that, in accordance with the situation, it is realized in the pastoral area.⁸³ One of the issues that needs to be jointly noted is the introduction of a new ministerial service, namely the

⁷⁶ Cf. *Instrumentum laboris* of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (For the First Session), 20. 6. 2023. 32.-33., 37 (IL1). XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission - Final Document*, 26. 10. 2024., 45 (*Final Document*).

⁷⁷ IL1, 34. Cf. 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *A Synodal Church in Mission. First Session – Synthesis Report*, 28. 10. 2023., 2d, 12c, 13e (*Synthesis Report*).

⁷⁸ IL1, 31.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 6., cf. 58.-59.

⁸⁰ *Synthesis Report*, Introduction.

⁸¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 1h, 2c.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 2f, cf. 2j, 15c.

⁸³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 2h, k, l; 12b, 14e, 15c. *Final Document*, 69.-70., 74.

ordination of women, and other contradictory dogmatic, pastoral and ethical issues, as well as the composition of parish and diocesan participating bodies.⁸⁴

In relation to the 'Lateran School', which advocates the method of *pastoral discernment*, and which was devised by the pastoralist *Sergio Lanza*,⁸⁵ it is noticeable that the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, in accordance with the attitudes of Pope Francis,⁸⁶ views church discernment in the following way: *see, judge, act*. This approach can be useful, but it is questionable because, due to the *belief* that there is seeing separate from discerning, it can slip into convenient morality, sociological-psychological interpretations of human and church reality.⁸⁷ In the Church, there is a diversity of understandings of discernment and established approaches, but, in order not to be destroyed in technocratic enthusiasm, the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops emphasizes that the procedure must be in accordance with the theological method, because technical and scientific competence does not have the last word, but the theological-spiritual path. Ultimately, the Assembly recognized theology and theologians contribute to the understanding of faith and discernment.⁸⁸

After the end of the second part of the Synod, which was held from 2 to 27 October 2024, the *Final Document* was published, and before that, a second *Instrumentum Laboris*⁸⁹ was published, the content of which is the subject of 'exchange and discernment', and its purpose was, by way of a joint 'conversation in the Spirit', in conversation and discernment, to discuss the question: "How can the identity of the synodal People of God in mission take concrete form in the relationships, paths and places where the everyday life of the Church takes place?"⁹⁰ The document, as it is emphasized in the introduction, sought to present the views of the missionary synodal Church, but without offering a compre-

⁸⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 9i, 15k, 16q, 18f. *Final Document*, 60.

⁸⁵ Cf. S. Lanza, La teologia pastorale secondo la 'scuola lateranense', in: Dario E. Viganò (ed.), *La teologia pastorale oggi*, LUP, Città del Vaticano, 2015., 13.-64.

⁸⁶ Cf. Walter Kasper, *Papa Franjo - revolucija nježnosti i ljubavi*, KS, Zagreb, 2015., 55.-57. G. Casanova, *Corresponsabilità*, 124.-125.

⁸⁷ Cf. A. Čondić, *Ustani, zove te*, 77.-82.

⁸⁸ Cf. IL2, 64.-65. *Final Document*, 67.

⁸⁹ IL2.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, Introduction.

hensive discussion of the doctrine of the Church, it was recommended for the service of discernment of the Synodal Assembly.⁹¹

In the Church, awareness of the diversity of 'vocations, gifts and ministries' has increased and the need for their discernment has become apparent, which is a true ecclesial act, and the Assembly, especially with regard to the renewal of the mutuality and mission of the lay faithful, emphasizes the discernment of the vocation and role of women in leadership, that is, in all areas of ecclesial life.⁹² Taking into account the needs of the community and the diversity of contexts, the *Working Document (Instrumentum Laboris)* calls for joint theoretical and practical formation in the discernment of the community, points to greater courage and creativity in the discernment of ministries, which need to be recognized and established, and discern how to place the gifts received and accepted at the service of the ecclesial mission.

Since there is a great diversity of forms of listening, conversation and discernment in the Church, clear criteria and methods for this discernment need to be established.⁹³ Therefore, the *Final Document* speaks in more detail about the ecclesial discernment for mission, which includes those who participate in it on a personal and communal level. The process of discernment, which takes place in real life and which needs to be known, is not an organizational technique, but a demanding spiritual act, which determines the life of the Church in Christ and creates communion, mission and participation and is lived in faith. Listening to the Word of God is the starting point, measure and support of every ecclesial discernment, which must not neglect the various communication links.⁹⁴

In the synodal Church, analysis and discernment are directed towards making pastoral decisions and plans, implementation and verification. For this reason, the Assembly encourages reflection on the process of decision-making, as one of the more complex and promising areas of work, and consists of elaboration or guidance in joint discernment, consultation and cooperation. This helps the subsequent decision-making, which, for example, in a diocese, belongs to the bishop, which is rooted in the church order.

⁹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 50.

⁹² Cf. *Ibid.*, 12.-13., 16., 30.

⁹³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 31.-34., 54., 57., 66. *Final Document*, 60.

⁹⁴ Cf. IL2, 58.-66. *Final Document*, 66., 77., 82.-83.

Before making decisions, consultations are necessary (in councils, cohesive groups), because the exercise of ecclesiastical authority must not be arbitrary. It is at the service of the unity of the people of God and is a common search for what the Spirit seeks. Pastoral councils are not a council that brings together people who defend their ideas, but their goal is to discern God's will; they are imbued with mercy (cf. Rom 5:5-10), and, as disciples, they must listen to the Spirit, the promised Advocate (cf. Jn 14:15-31). Therefore, the parish priest is no longer alone in making decisions in the parish. There must be a group that helps to manage the executive part of pastoral work. The aim of synodal discernment is not to force bishops or pastors to listen to the voice of the people, but to lead to a common decision in obedience to the Holy Spirit, who guides the Church "to the complete truth" (Jn 16:13). Common and more courageous decision-making overcomes clericalism, influences the course of decision-making and contributes to pastoral vitality, which essentially involves a synodal change in relation to the purpose of diocesan and parish pastoral councils. In order not to disintegrate the synodal understanding of the Church, the Assembly encourages local Churches to enliven the synodal course of decision-making.⁹⁵

The content of the discernment essentially permeates the Synod, because, according to Pope Francis, "one cannot set out on the synodal journey without discerning."⁹⁶ The aforementioned reflections were justifiably collected in the *Final Document*, which, going beyond pastoral enlightenment, asks local Churches "to continue their daily journey with a synodal methodology of consultation and discernment"⁹⁷.

The Assembly recognized that: ecclesial discernment, concern for the course of decision-making and the evaluation of the work of decisions taken, are three intertwined ways of responding to the Word, which shows the Church the paths of mission. In particular, decision-making requires discernment, which involves mutual trust between the people of God and those in

⁹⁵ Cf. IL2, 67.-72., 90.-94. *Final Document*, 74., 87.-94. In the second part of the second *Instrumentum Laboris*, especially in the part on "ecclesiastical discernment for mission" (58-66) and on "the articulation of the decision-making process" (67-72), one notices a similarity in approach with the three successive stages from Lanza's pastoral discernment, cf. note 5 and points 1,2.

⁹⁶ *Address of his Holiness pope Francis to participants in the Plenary Session of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*, Clementine Hall, 21. 1. 2022.

⁹⁷ *Final Document*, 9.

charge of the Church. The *Final Document*, especially in its third chapter, explains the meaning of discernment, which is largely taken from the second *Final Document*, and, referring to the apostolic community, to the conciliar documents *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*, claims that it can be described as ‘ecclesiastical’ because it uses all the gifts of wisdom that the Lord gives in the Church.⁹⁸

Just as the pastoralist *Sergio Lanza* described the essential points of ecclesial discernment, so too the Assembly, in the *Final Document*, speaks very similarly about factors that should not be absent from ecclesial discernment, because, on the basis of them, the making of appropriate decisions matures. It is crucial to recognize that the *Final Document*, by adopting pastoral discernment, essentially changes the current understanding of pastoral care.

In the gradual process of discerning, the subject of the discernment must be clearly defined and presented; adequate information and means for understanding must be guaranteed; time must be available for preparation with prayer and consideration of the premises; inner freedom and a desire for the common good must be present; attentive and respectful listening to those who are being consulted must be sought; and the widest possible agreement must be sought. Discernment should always take place in a real context that must be known. And for discernment to be truly *ecclesial*, assistance is necessary, such as the interpretation and understanding of biblical texts, knowledge of the Church Fathers, tradition and the Church’s teaching. At local levels, such as parishes and small church communities, it is essential to cultivate the culture of ecclesial discernment for mission and to instruct persons to carry out discernment. Participatory bodies (parish and diocesan councils) are essential in the maturation of synodal consciousness, because they participate in the necessary discernment for the proclamation of faith and the Gospel in the process of decision-making and evaluation, and at the same time they are responsible for their actions.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 79.-81.

⁹⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 81.-86., 103., 106.

CONCLUSION

In a socio-cultural environment full of uncertainty, tension and misunderstanding, division and greed (cf. Col 3:5), in a time of controversy of faith and controversy in the Church, pastoral care urgently needs to be carried out in a personal and communal, spiritual and ecclesial manner, at all levels and in all areas, in its integral evangelical understanding. Through a discernment that refers to the will of God and not primarily to the desires of the individual or the ecclesial community, pastoral care is questioned, which, by its theandric nature, unites human aspirations and the mystery of salvation, decisions are made and ecclesial work is planned. The Church, which is in the world, and “all of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy.”¹⁰⁰

The special task of pastoral theology, which acts in an interdisciplinary manner, is to discern the signs of the times or the means of salvation that God puts into life, i.e., it wants to listen to God and the people of God.¹⁰¹ This clarifies the meaning of the historical-salvific mediation of the Church, whose task is to “bring everything together under Christ” (Eph 1:10), and for this it uses communion, witness, and mission as its fundamental directions. However, in walking these paths, which Pope Francis particularly advocates, through *pastoral analysis and discernment*, which springs from the relationship with God and the Church’s tradition, its tasks are recognized and pastoral governance is conceived. This is precisely the central challenge, before which we must not hesitate, as “You foolish men!” (Luke 24:25).

It is urgent to creatively prepare new paths in a synodal spirit (cf. Hos 10:12), seeking appropriate ways of the Church’s mission, at the levels of the universal and local Church, because there are many issues that concern people. In a world in which the Church serves man, it is especially necessary to reflect and evangelically judge the issues of life and dignity of the human person, marriage and family, security and poverty, peace and survival of peoples, the influence of science and technology, migration, economic-social and political life.

¹⁰⁰ Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*. Bull of indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy (11. 10. 2015.), 10.

¹⁰¹ Cf. GS, 4., 11., 44.

So that the Church in Croatia, in the era of 'changing epochs', does not remain in the pastoral past, superficiality and complacency, it is called upon to reach out in all ways for *pastoral discernment* and, through missionary conversion of pastoral, to create new forms of tradition in relation to the Christian community. Discernment has a prophetic echo, has a sharp vision, and infuses light and liveliness, is full of memory and faith, invites us to come out of ourselves, find companions and boldly go where 'the Spirit blows' (cf. Jn 3:8), and seeks to gather all the miraculous works of God, so that we may bear witness to them together in our time and remain 'pilgrims of hope'.

PASTORALNA PROSUDBA KOD SERGIA LANZE I PAPE FRANJE

Sažetak

Zamršene su i znakovite krilatice pape Franje (2013.-2025.): 'epohalne promjene' i 'promjena epoha', pa ih, s bogoslovno-pastoralnoga polazišta, treba dubinski proučavati i prosuđivati. Jer, brze, gotovo nesagledive, društvene promjene, podrazumijevaju od Crkve tražiti prikladne načine za navještaj Božje istine novim naraštajima. Budući da je u osuvremenjivanju načina prenošenja vjere bitna pastoralna prosudba društvenoga i crkvenoga stanja, pisac u članku, s bogoslovno-pastoralnoga gledišta, obrađuje crkvenu prosudbu. U prvomu dijelu raspravlja o evanđeoskoj prosudbi, u misli pastoraliste Sergija Lanze (1945.-2012.), koji je utemeljio i razradio način pastoralne prosudbe. Nakon toga, smisao prosudbe raščlanjuje u nekim učiteljskim spisima pape Franje, te, naposljetku, u spisima povezanim sa Sinodom o sinodalnosti (2021.-2024.).

Ključne riječi: pastoralna prosudba, raspoznavanje, Sergio Lanza, papa Franjo, sinodalnost.