

Open Sea

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We were in the final stages of preparing this issue of *Ekklesia* when Pope Francis unexpectedly passed away on Easter Monday. And we were laying out the magazine when we received the gift of the election of Pope Leo XIV. The theme of this issue, *Men and Women: Together!*, chosen in agreement with the editors of the magazine's other language editions, thus falls in a moment of transition.

Pope Francis had made this theme one of the guiding lines of his pontificate, seeking to lead the ecclesial community toward new balances. "The Church acknowledges the indispensable contribution of women to society, with their sensitivity, intuition, and certain distinctive capabilities which are more often found in women than in men," which he reaffirmed at the beginning of his Petrine ministry in *Evangelii Gaudium*. And he concluded: "Consequently, greater room must be created for a more incisive female presence in the Church. Because 'the feminine genius is needed in all expressions in the life of society,' the presence of women must also be guaranteed in the various settings where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 103).

Although many women—and not only women—had hoped and continue to hope for further developments, we have witnessed significant concrete steps in this direction. This continued to the very end of his pontificate with the appointment of two women to the highest positions in Vatican offices: Sr. Simona Brambilla as Prefect of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and Sr. Raffaella Petrini as President of the Governorate of Vatican City State. The entire global synodal process, moreover, aims for the full participation of both women and men in the journey and mission of the Church—a process which does not follow the logic of "everything right away," but rather seeks a vital and gradual evolution.

Until recently, Leo XIV was the Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops, which, since July 2022, has included not only cardinals and bishops among its members—who deliberate on episcopal appointments—but also three women, among them María Lía Zervino, who is interviewed in this issue. When he was elected pope, we first saw him primarily among the cardinals, but even in his first speech from the central Loggia of St. Peter's Basilica, it was clear how much he, as a bishop, felt himself part of the faithful people surrounding him, and how much he desired, as Pope, to walk together "as men and women faithful to Jesus Christ, without fear, to proclaim the Gospel, to be missionaries." His first outing from the Vatican was to the Shrine of Our Lady of Good Counsel in Genazzano.

When all this was happening, we had already made the editorial choices for the focus of this issue. We did not want to concentrate on the equally important and much-debated issue of women's access to ministries, nor solely on the role of women in the Church. Rather, we wished to broaden the perspective. Our aim was to explore the essential reciprocity between man and woman—a field where much still remains to be done, both in the Church and in society (see the historical framing in the article by Maria Clara Lucchetti Bingemer).

The Final Document of the recent Synod states:

“By virtue of Baptism, men and women enjoy equal dignity in the People of God. Yet women continue to encounter obstacles in obtaining fuller recognition of their charisms, their vocation, and their place in the various spheres of Church life, to the detriment of the service to the common mission” (n. 60).

It is therefore necessary to “de-masculinize the Church,” as Pope Francis courageously acknowledged, just as it is necessary to overcome the male-dominated frameworks still present in many cultural and social structures—without, however, flattening gender difference. As one consecrated laywoman perceptively wrote to us:

“Today's deceptive temptation directed at women—which echoes that ancient one from the Book of Genesis—is this: ‘You will become like man.’”

That women have a specific way of interpreting human existence is also shown in the account of Dorothea Greiner, a female Lutheran bishop, who introduces us to the practices of other Christian Churches.

We were also aware of the danger of stereotypes, which Marta Rodriguez warns against in her contribution: there is no such thing as “the woman” with fixed characteristics, just as there is no such thing as “the man” with others. Every woman and every man—and every father and every mother (see the article by Maria Scotto)—embody these characteristics in a unique and evolving way, within cultural and social contexts that differ greatly from one another.

What is increasingly needed is a relational vision, in which each person discovers and offers their identity in relationship with the other, thereby transforming themselves and the other in turn. But here a key factor comes into play: it seems difficult to achieve such unity-in-distinction without a “third” element to mediate between the two, enabling them to encounter and at the same time distinguish themselves from one another. In the Christian experience, this “third” is ultimately Jesus (see the passage by Chiara Lubich).

We are aware that in tackling a subject of such breadth, we have ventured into the open sea—a complex and even stormy situation in which it is hard to put forward theses or draw conclusions that do not require further study and exploration. Yet we hope that this issue of *Ekklesia* may at least offer some inspiration—not just for reflection, but above all for the journey toward a more dynamic and complete realization of that dual and ultimately “Trinitarian” image of God which man and woman, ever anew, are called to be.