

'De-masculinizing' the Church?

Pope Francis

Man-woman reciprocity and the irreplaceable contribution of women to ecclesial and civil life have been among the signposts of Francis' pontificate. This text is excerpted from Pope Francis' preface to Lucia Vantini, Luca Castiglioni and Linda Pocher's volume: "Smaschilizzare la Chiesa"? Confronto critico sui 'Principi' di H.U. Von Balthasar" (Making the Church Less Masculine? A critical evaluation of the 'principles' of Hans Urs von Balthasar), Ed. Paoline, Milan 2024.

The presence and contribution of women to the life and growth of ecclesial communities through prayer, reflection, and action are realities that have always enriched the Church and, indeed, constitute its identity. Yet we have realized, especially during the preparation and celebration of the Synod, that we have not listened enough to the voice of women in the Church and that the Church still has much to learn from them. It is necessary to listen to each other in order to make the Church less masculine [Italian: "'smaschilizzare' la chiesa", literally "'de-masculinize' the Church"], because the Church is a communion of men and women who share the same faith and the same baptismal dignity.

By really listening to women, we men listen to someone who sees reality from a different perspective and so we are led to revise our plans and our priorities. Sometimes, we are bewildered. Sometimes what we hear is so new and so different from our way of thinking and seeing that it seems absurd, and we feel intimidated. But this bewilderment is healthy; it makes us grow. It takes patience, mutual respect, listening, and openness to really learn from each other and to move forward as one People of God, rich in differences but walking together.

This is precisely why I wanted to ask a woman, a theologian, to offer the Council of Cardinals a path of reflection on the presence and role of women in the Church. The starting point for this path is Hans Urs von Balthasar's reflection on the Marian and Petrine principles in the Church, a reflection that has inspired the magisterium of recent pontificates in the effort to understand and value the different ecclesial presence of men and women.

The final destination, however, is in God's hands. Let us pray to the Spirit to enlighten us and help us to understand, to find effective language and ways of thinking to engage the women and men of today, in the Church and in the world, so that an awareness of reciprocity and the practice of collaboration between men and women may grow.

