

SURPRISED BY HOPE

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Further Meditations on Synodality

Timothy Cardinal Radcliffe



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Introduction: Yes! Amen!

“**D**id the Synod on Synodality achieve anything?” That is surely the question that has been asked most often since the end of the second assembly in October 2024. Many people had high hopes that the synod would make decisions that would transform the Church, such as the ordination of women to the diaconate, but it did not do so. Instead it began a process—a word that is typical of Pope Francis—which will be more radically transformative than we can imagine, founded on encounter with the Lord and with his brothers and sisters.

The four meditations with which this book begins were given at the retreat that preceded the synod assembly. They focus on the encounter of the disciples with the Risen Lord in John’s gospel: in the garden and the upper room (John 20), and on the beach (John 21). These meditations were intended to prepare us for our

encounter with the Lord during the synod, in silence and in prayer, and with each other in conversation and mutual attention—two encounters with the same mystery of love: “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God” (1 John 4:7).

We gathered in synod so that together we could walk “the Way,” the earliest name of the Church (Acts 9:2). Of course, changes are needed in the structures of the Church, but these will only be life-giving if they spring from our renewed communion with each other in the Lord. Otherwise they will merely be furthering an agenda and the political victory of one ecclesiastical party. Asking what the synod has achieved is not the most helpful question, since the synod is a process of opening ourselves to the guidance of the Spirit, the divine wind which blows where it wills (John 3:8). We have embarked on a journey to the Kingdom that will not end until God’s peace reigns and “they will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isa 11:9). We make this pilgrimage as a sign of hope for a world which is crucified by hatred and seems farther away than ever from Christ’s peace.

We came to Rome in October 2024 because we were summoned by the Holy Father. Christianity is a response to God who calls us all to come. This invitation we transmit to each other and to the world:

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come."
And let everyone who hears say, "Come."
And let everyone who is thirsty come.
Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.
(Rev 22:17)

The heart of our Christian life is the word *Amen*. It occurs only 30 times in the Old Testament but 123 times in the New Testament. It is the characteristic word of Jesus. He is the only person, as far as I know, to begin a sentence with the word, and even pronouncing it twice: "Amen, amen, I say to you" (John 1:51, and twenty-four other times).¹ It is the word that sums up the call of Jesus to live and which Saint Jerome advised should never be translated.² It is our Yes, one way of translating "Amen."

Jesus is God's "Yes" to us and our "Yes" to God: "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not 'Yes and No'; but in him it is always 'Yes.' For in him every one of God's promises is a 'Yes.' For this reason it is through him that we say the 'Amen,' to the glory of God" (2 Cor 1:19). In the Book of Revelation, it is even the name of Jesus, "the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God's creation" (3:14).

1. New American Bible, Revised Edition.

2. See Saint Jerome, Epistle 26 to Marcella.

So we gathered in synod to say to the Lord our Yes, responding to the Lord's Yes to us. We may disagree on what that assent should mean in the life of the Church, on what is a faithful development of the tradition and what is a betrayal, but it cannot be denied that we are all called to be ready, with our loins girded, our feet shod, and our staffs in our hands, to set forth for wherever the Lord is leading us.

When Benedict Green, a monk of the Anglican community of Mirfield, England, drew near to his end after years of suffering from Parkinson's disease, he wrote to tell his friends that he was no longer able to welcome them since he could not speak anymore. He concluded with the words of Dag Hammarskjöld (1905–1961), the second secretary general of the United Nations: "For all that has been, Thank you. For all that will be, Yes."

Ever since the Church gathered in Jerusalem in AD 70 to consider on what conditions the Gentiles should be baptized, synods have met so that we could say together our Yes to the Lord. Often this has taken the form of assenting to new ways of articulating our faith. Encounter with the Lord, with other cultures, and with each other rejuvenates the Church, and renews our Yes. Saint John's gospel, with his theology of the Logos, is fresh from the encounter of Hebrew and Greek wisdom. The universities of the thirteenth century forged a new language born of the encounter of Christianity with the Arabic world, and the rediscovered works of Aristotle.

We, too, gathered in the synod to find new ways of saying “Yes” to the Lord who commissions us to say to our contemporaries: “Let everyone who is thirsty come.” We beg for new fresh words so that we can, in turn, reach out especially to the millions of young people who are searching for the meaning of their lives: “Come and take the water of life as a gift. There is a place for you at the table.” As Pope Francis likes to say, “All, All, All are welcome.”

When the assembly ended, we were just at the beginning of finding fresh words of assent and invitation to carry us beyond the sterile battles between so-called traditionalists and progressives. We sought for ways to assent to the Lord’s summons in words that are enriched by the encounter of North and South, East and West.

We are just at the beginning of finding fresh words for today’s thirsty people. For example, a question that puzzled both assemblies of the synod was how, as women and men, ordained and lay, we are both equal and different. This is a question which young people are posing in almost every part of the world today. On most continents, the relationships between young men and women are uneasy. In the final chapter of the book, I describe how only slowly, largely after the end of the assembly, I became aware that the synod was moving from the language of “complementary,” which implies fixed roles, to the dynamic and evolving language of “reciprocity.” We are just at the beginning of renewing how we speak to each other in ways that are loving, attentive, and true, and to speak of our God in love and truth.

This is more important today than at any time since I was born, at the end of the Second World War. Today the global order in which I grew up, and which has shaped our world for eighty years, is in danger of crumbling. A symptom of this is a collapse of solidarity. Many wealthy countries, especially in the West, are radically reducing their aid to developing countries. This will result in the deaths of millions of people. It is more than the cessation of a flow of support to those in need. It is the loss of a vision of what it means to be human, and our shared dignity as the children of God, made in the divine image and “what Adam Smith, the great philosopher-economist of the Enlightenment, memorably described as a ‘fellow feeling for the suffering of others.’”³

At this moment of the breakdown of our solidarity with those who suffer and die, the synod invites us to say a resounding, “Yes, you are our brothers and sisters, flesh of our flesh. Let everyone who is thirsty, come.” We also respond as they call us to come and receive their gifts too.

Timothy Cardinal Radcliffe OP
Ash Wednesday 2025

3. Kevin Watkins, “The Assault on Solidarity,” *The Tablet*, March 8, 2025.

Searching in the Dark

John 20:1-18

During the retreat last year,¹ we meditated on how to listen to each other. How may we face our differences in hope, opening our hearts and minds to each other? Some barriers did fall, and I hope we began to see those with whom we disagree not as opponents but as fellow disciples, fellow seekers.

This year we have a new focus: “*How to Be a Missionary Synodal Church*.”² But the foundation of all that we shall do is the same: patient, imaginative, intelligent,

1. See Timothy Radcliffe OP, *Listening Together: Meditations on Synodality* (Liturgical Press, 2024)—Ed.

2. See XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, “*How to Be a Missionary Synodal Church: Instrumentum Laboris* for the Second Session (October 2024),” July 9, 2024, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2024/07/09/240709d.html>. Hereafter cited as IL.

open-hearted listening. I even thought of repeating the same talks that I offered at the last retreat, but you might notice! Herbert McCabe OP once told me of a time that he realized at the last moment that he was due to give a lecture to a distinguished theological society. He grabbed a lecture from his files, leapt on his motorbike, and arrived just in time. When he opened his notes, he saw that he had given the same lecture to the same society a year before. "What did you do?" I asked. He replied, "I left out the jokes. They are the only things anyone remembers." Your memories may be better.

Profound listening is still the foundation of everything we shall do this year. It is, the *Instrumentum Laboris* says, "the first act of the Church" (IL 6). The writer Amos Oz said of his grandfather: "He listened. He did not just politely pretend to listen, while impatiently waiting for her to finish what she was saying and shut up. He did not break into his partner's sentence and finish it for her. He did not cut in to sum up what she was saying so as to move on to another subject. He did not let his interlocutress talk into thin air while he prepared in his head the reply that he would make when she finally finished. He did not pretend to be interested or entertained, he really was."³ Listening to God and to our brothers and sisters is the discipline of holiness.

3. *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, trans. Nicholas de Lang (Vintage, 2005), 110.

This year we shall be reflecting on “the one mission of proclaiming the Risen Lord and his Gospel” (IL, Introduction) to a world that “sit[s] in darkness and in the shadow of death” (Luke 1:79). To guide our meditations, we shall take four resurrection scenes from Saint John’s Gospel. I call these four scenes “Searching in the Dark,” “The Locked Room,” “The Stranger on the Beach,” and “Breakfast with the Lord.” Each sheds some light on how to be a missionary synodal Church in our crucified world.

Our first scene begins in the night: “Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb” (John 20:1). This is where we, too, are today. Our world is even more darkened by violence than when we gathered here a year ago. She comes looking for the body of her beloved Teacher. We, too, are gathered in this synod to search for the Lord. In the West, God seems to have largely disappeared. We face not so much atheism but a pervasive indifference. Skepticism poisons the hearts even of many believers. But all Christians everywhere are searchers for the Lord, like Mary Magdalene before dawn.

We, too, in this synod may feel like we are in the dark. Since the last assembly, so many people, including participants in this synod, have expressed their doubts as to whether anything is going to be achieved. Like Mary Magdalene, some say, “Why have they taken away our hope? We expected so much from the synod, but perhaps there will be just more empty words.”

But although it is dark, the Lord is already present in the garden with Mary Magdalene and with us. Before his death Jesus said, “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24). The seed had been sown in the rich soil of the garden by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, sown in a new tomb that no one had used. It is about to flower. The dawn is near. Like Mary Magdalene, we shall receive more than we search for if we, too, are open to encounter the Lord.

In the garden, we see three seekers: Mary Magdalene, the Beloved Disciple, and Simon Peter. Each one searches for the Lord in their own way; each has their own way of loving and each their own emptiness. Each of these seekers has their own role in the dawning of hope. There is no rivalry. Their mutual dependence embodies the heart of synodality. All of us can identify with at least one of them. Which one are you?

Tomáš Halík has argued that the future of the Church depends on her ability to reach out to the seekers of our society. These are often the “nones.” I do not mean contemplative religious sisters but the people who claim that they have no religious affiliation. They, too, are often searching for the meaning of their lives. Halík writes that Christians must thus be willing to be “seekers with those who seek and questioners with those who question.”⁴

4. *Patience with God: The Story of Zacchaeus Continuing in Us*, trans. Gerard Turner (Doubleday, 2009), 9.

All the accounts of the resurrection are filled with questions. Twice Mary Magdalene is asked why she is weeping. She asks where they have put the body. They all ask why the tomb is empty. In Mark's account, the women ask, "Who will roll away the stone for us?" (16:3). Luke's accounts of the resurrection, too, are filled with questions: "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" (24:5). Jesus asks the disciples fleeing to Emmaus, "What are you discussing with each other?" (24:17). Then all of the disciples: "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?" (24:38). The resurrection bursts into our lives not as bald statement of fact but in searching questions.

Profound questions do not seek only information. They invite us to be alive in a new way and to speak in a new language. The poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote, "Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. *Live* the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer."⁵

The resurrection is not Jesus coming alive again after a brief interruption but a *new* way of being alive in which death has been conquered. And so it bursts into our lives in the gospels, first as urgent questions that will not let us

5. *Letters to a Young Poet*, rev. ed., trans. N. D. Herter Norton (Norton, 1954), 27.

go on living in the same way. Likewise, we come to this synod with many questions—for example, about the role of women in the Church. These are important questions. But they cannot be seen as just questions about whether something will be allowed or refused. That would be to remain the same sort of Church. The questions that we face should be more like those in the gospels, which invite us to live the risen life together more profoundly, a new Easter.

And so we must dare to bring to this synod the deepest questions in our hearts, disconcerting questions that invite us to new life. Like those three seekers in the garden, we must attend to each other's questions if we are to find a renewed way of being Church. If we have no questions, or superficial questions, our faith is dead. A certain archbishop, not present with us today, said to a group of Dominican novices, "Make sure that all of you read the *Summa* of Aquinas. It contains fifty-six thousand answers to all those who criticize the Catholic Church!"⁶ Aquinas would have been horrified. As a child, legend has it, his first question was "What is God?" and his holiness was to refuse any answer for, he said, we are joined to God as to the unknown.

6. Paul Murray OP, "Dominicans and the Key of Knowledge: A Talk to Dominican Friars Studying in Rome," Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, February 19, 2023, https://angelicum.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Paul-Murray-Dominicans-and-the-Key-of-Knowledge-13.Apr_.2023-vf.pdf.

Listening in Silence Together

We begin today in the synod to think about the processes through which Church changes, the pathways we need. The following strange text offers some insight into how this happens:

Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food

and throw it to the dogs.” She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly. (Matt 15:21-28)

At first sight it looks as if Jesus is being rude, calling her a dog. And that he only makes an exception for the Canaanite woman’s daughter because of her personal faith. “I have come only to the lost sheep of Israel and, all right, *you*.”

But this incident belongs to the evolution of Jesus’ mission. It comes between the feeding of the five thousand, which symbolizes the mission to the Jews, and the feeding of the four thousand, which points to the mission to the Gentiles. Jesus had told the woman there was only enough bread for the children of the household, but a few verses later there will be more than enough bread for everyone, seven baskets full of leftovers.

The center of this encounter is silence. She makes her request and, the gospel says, “He did not answer her at all.” The disciples say, “Send her away.” They have an immediate solution to her question. Get rid of her. Silence her. But it is Jesus who is silent.

Jesus’ silences are never empty. He is silent when they bring to him the woman caught in adultery. He is

silent during the trial before his death. His silence faced with the woman is not a rebuff. He is listening to his Father and to her. It is the silence in which something new is germinating. As the Irish poet Yeats wrote, “Like a long-legged fly upon the stream / His mind moves upon silence.”¹

Remember Madre Maria Ignazia’s beautiful meditation on “To you, silence is praise” (the beginning of Psalm 64). “At the root of every prayer, of every ‘work for God,’ vibrates the silent Breath of God. It is a matter of perceiving it.”²

In the Old Testament, silence is a sign of wisdom, the refusal to be caught up in unthinking responses. Rowan Williams talks of “the silence that emerges because of a steady refusal of the uncritical agenda of the ego.”³ This is the pregnant silence when one refuses to impose one’s own will, one’s language, but waits for words that will give space to the other person. Just as Jesus writes silently in

1. William Butler Yeats, “Long-Legged Fly,” <https://allpoetry.com/Long-Legged-Fly>.

2. Mother Maria Ignazia Angelini, “Synod Retreat Meditation: ‘To You, Silence Is Praise’—Full Text,” October 1, 2024, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2024-10/synod-retreat-meditation-mother-angelini-to-you-silence-praise.html>.

3. *The Edge of Words: God and the Habits of Language* (Bloomsbury Continuum, 2014), 234.

the sand before he speaks to those who wish to stone the woman caught in adultery.

Our synodal assemblies have been filled with silence, as we listen to the Lord and each other. Many people demand a quick decision on, for example, the ordination of women to the diaconate or the opening of the priesthood to married men. But the silence on such issues is not that of denial but of listening for the right way forward. In a society of instant communication, demanding immediate responses, we need the space quietly to play with new ways of thinking, to be tentative, to imagine. The archbishop of Salzburg reported that when he asked young people what they wanted of the Church, they replied that “church should be a place where you can talk, where what you say doesn’t immediately make the rounds like it usually does on the internet.”⁴

People demand a yes or no. Can the Canaanite woman’s daughter be healed? Yes or no. Can women become deacons? Yes or no. But that would be to remain in the same binary logic, the same discourse. In the gospels, the way forward is usually through the breakthrough into a new language, a new imagination in which ancient categories are transcended.

4. Archbishop Franz Lackner, from the report on the European pre-synodal workshop in Linz, 2024.

In this story, the breakthrough takes the form of a strange dialogue: “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” This looks offensive. How could Jesus refer to this woman and her daughter as dogs? But it is not. Matthew has taken this incident from Mark, in which the woman is Syrophenician. At the site of the ancient Syrophenician city of Ashkelon, in Israel, a cemetery for seven hundred dogs was discovered. They were small dogs that had died of natural causes from the fifth to third centuries BC.⁵ It seems the dogs of the ancient Syrophenician people who buried them there were their best friends, treasured members of their household. Just like the dogs of the English are today!

So in this gospel account, a new way of being a household is imagined, in which the woman and her daughter have a place. For the Jews, dogs were unclean animals who had no place in the household. They are outside the door, like those who licked the wounds of Lazarus. Jesus reaches out to the woman with her own idea of what a household should be like, in which dogs have their place, as in most English households!

5. See Lawrence E. Stager, “Why Were Hundreds of Dogs Buried at Ashkelon?,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 17 (1991): 27–42.

Many people are watching this synod, expecting a yes or no on various issues! But the challenge is to be more creative. We need to imagine new ways of being together, new images of the household in which we can dwell together in mutual respect. What new ministries might we imagine? We shall only do so if we learn how to be silent, listening to the Lord and each other, opening ourselves to new ways of talking. The disciples want to get rid of awkward questions. “Silence this woman and her awkward questions!” We have to welcome awkward questions, especially those to which we have no immediate answer. Many are coming from women!

Reciprocity Is the Key

The heart of synodality is mutuality. “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matt 18:20). Mutuality means transparency, accountability, and acknowledgment that the people of God have received the Holy Spirit. As Saint John said, “[Y]ou have been anointed by the Holy One, and all of you have knowledge” (1 John 2:20).

This mutuality implies equality. We share in the equal love of the Trinity. But all through the discussion of the synod, we were puzzling over a constant theme, sometimes explicitly but often implicitly, perhaps only half aware of it. What does this life-giving mutuality mean when we are equal but different—as women and men, as ordained and lay, as members of different cultures? In all cases, different but equal. All three of those cases touch the question of the ordination of women to the diaconate. Women and men, lay and ordained, and for

a Church in which most dioceses do not even accept the ordination of male permanent deacons.

I confess that I had never thought much about this before. I instinctively thought in terms of complementarity. It was Professor Anna Rowlands, an English theologian, who first challenged me on the inadequacy of this approach, for example, between men and women. We need a new way of speaking. I went around the synod hall, nagging everyone as to what this could be and was never satisfied with the answers I received.

Then one day I was stopped by Lucca. Lucca is an Italian fisherman who now rescues migrants from the sea. He thrust into my hands an article from *L'Osservatore Romano*, by an Italian theologian, Chiara Giaccardi. The title was “Reciprocity: This Is the Key Word.”¹ She was right. Slowly I became convinced that it was reciprocity. I think that it is the very heart of synodality. It is everywhere present in the final document.

Instead of being constrained by fixed, predetermined, complementary roles, as if we were jigsaw pieces being fitted together, we flourish in reciprocity. For example, I quote the final document: “We are . . . called to experience how practicing the new commandment of recipro-

1. September 28, 2024, <https://www.osservatoreromano.va/en/news/2024-10/dcm-009/reciprocity-this-is-the-key-word.html>.

cal love is the place and form of encounter with God” (*For a Synodal Church*, 44).

Reciprocity means we discover who we are through and with the other person. It is a dynamic relationship. In the family, the “domestic church,” parents discover what it means to be mothers and fathers through their children, and the children learn the meaning of childhood with and from their parents. My mother said she joked she could stop being a mother when all six of her children left home. But even on her deathbed, she showed what it means to be a mother as she reflected on what she might still do for her children. And twenty years later, her children are still learning from her what it means to be her children and, in their turn, parents.

Reciprocal relationships are evolving, open to surprise. Reciprocity comes from a Latin word meaning “to move backwards and forwards.” It implies fluid interplay. Think of the waves of the sea in constant motion, each wave forming the other in unending aqueous dialogue. I like that phrase! Unending aqueous dialogue.

Just before the synod, Pope Francis provoked outrage during a visit to Belgium by words he spoke about his vision of the relationship of men and women. The president of the Catholic University of Louvain described the position of the Church as “incomprehensible.” No scholar should ever say that something is incomprehensible, only that they do not comprehend it. Mary

McAleese, the former president of Ireland, has described Pope Francis's views on gender identity as "misogynist drive." Which is not exactly a synodal reaction.

Commenting on the disastrous visit to Louvain, the journalist Jean-Pierre Denis commented, "The pope may not fully grasp how deeply our culture believes that each person defines their own origin, purpose, and standards. Contrary to what he preaches and hopes for, the individual has overtaken the concept of the person. . . . In a society where gender issues are increasingly central and where male dominance over women is being questioned everywhere, the incident in Louvain should serve as a wake-up call. Thinking about women the way Saint John Paul II did is no longer possible."²

So on the one hand, there is the language, at least implicitly, of complementarity, which seems to be too static. On the other is that of identity as constructed, chosen. The American dream is that you can be whoever or whatever you wish, a consumer choice. As the star of the recent film *The Brutalist* has said, "I am who I am. Not who you want."³ This is claimed as a right, like the right to own your body.

2. Jean-Pierre Denis, "Pope Francis and the Louvain Deadlock," *La-Croix International*, October 3, 2024, <https://international.la-croix.com/opinions/pope-francis-and-the-louvain-deadlock>.

3. Jake Coyle, "'The Brutalist,' 'Emilia Perez' Triumph at Golden Globes," Associated Press, January 6, 2025, <https://www.ap.org/news>

Neither seems correct. For Christians, identity is neither chosen nor simply fixed. It is discovered as one responds to the summons of the Lord. It emerges in our reciprocal relationships, as who we are is disclosed with and for each other. In the family, the final document asserts, “[W]e learn that we are equal in dignity and created for reciprocity” (*For a Synodal Church*, 55).

Chiara Giaccardi: “In Genesis, God creates human beings in His image, male and female. Adam, ‘made of dust,’ perceives himself as a man only upon seeing Ishà, the woman.” And she discovers who she is with him. Giaccardi again: “We are caught between two extremes; on one side, only biology counts, and everything is already written; on the other, biology counts for nothing, and everything can be written at will. Conservatives on one side, progressives on the other. A sterile struggle. . . . The key word is reciprocity, meaning mutual implication and the ability to transform one another, rather than opposing, competing, or claiming. . . . Never without the other, as Michel de Certeau would say.”⁴

God gives us the gift of creating each other. All my friends have made me who I am. We are all God’s artists! There is a new expression: “You do you.” No. We do us.

-highlights/spotlights/2025/the-brutalist-emilia-perez-triumph-at-golden-globes/.

4. Giaccardi, “Reciprocity.”

A tiny word of clarification. Reciprocity in this context could be misunderstood as opposed to gratuitous giving: I give you something and in return you give me something back. That is not what I mean. Reciprocity is the free gift of ourselves to each other, through which we both discover who we are.

One of the constant concerns of the synod was the formation of seminarians. How could they discover a wholesome Christian male identity if they are formed in an exclusively male environment without the female other? There is a crisis in the relationship between young men and women in every continent. A study looked at a number of countries on, I think, five continents, and everywhere, regardless of religion or ethnicity, young men and women are finding it harder to relate to each other.⁵ Young men are becoming more conservative and young women more liberal. It is becoming ever harder for friendships to form between the sexes and for marriages to endure. It is one factor in the decline of the birth rate in nearly all countries outside of Africa. The future of humanity depends on our finding a liberating vision of what it means to be male and female. Young

5. See, for example, "Why Young Men and Women Are Drifting Apart," *The Economist*, March 13, 2024, <https://www.economist.com/international/2024/03/13/why-the-growing-gulf-between-young-men-and-women>.

men often see this in terms of complementarity, which traps women in predetermined relationships. They are uncomfortable with women in equal positions in the office. Young women often see this in terms of identity as chosen and constructed. But identity is discovered with and for each other. Toxic masculinity is everywhere on the rise, with resulting violence to women. This is surely the fruit of a crisis of masculinity and of femininity.

Priests can only embody a Christian life if they discover what it is to be male with and from women. And what about women? How in religious communities of women is identity discovered with and for the other, including the male other? The idea of the Dominican family has been present in some form since the beginning of the Order. Dominic clearly loved the company of women. I suspect he preferred living with women to living with his brethren!

He founded a community of women in Prouille before the first community of men was established. Lay Dominicans go back to the very beginning of our tradition. Saint Catherine of Siena's group of friends, the *caterenati*, included men and women. Jordan of Saxony and Diana degli Andalò clearly loved each other, as did Catherine and Blessed Raymond of Capua. The relationship between women and men is part of our Dominican DNA. You cannot be a Dominican and flee the other sex. We are not angels, but bodily men and women.