

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the life of the Church has been affected not only by the turbulent changes on the world scene caused by the coronavirus pandemic and the Russian aggression in Ukraine but also by an internal transformation, whose aim is to deepen the understanding of what it means to be the Church today. Especially in this time of uncertainty, the Church should be careful to avoid being ‘caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures’¹; instead, she should be the motherly, homely place for everyone. The open door is an eloquent symbol of such emphasis. Gradual implementation of this attitude is a part of the vision of Pope Francis, for whom the Church is not ‘a fortress but a tent able to enlarge her space (cf. Is 54:2) and give access to all’.²

Openness, in this line, should be a fundamental Christian attitude both to the world around and to one another within the church, which means also within its organisational structures and across the various states of life. Only then is for the Church possible to go forward, as Pope Francis underlines: ‘[E]ither she is on a journey always widening her space so that everyone can enter, or she is not a Church.’³ That is why it is necessary to ask: In what ways is this openness being realised in the Church today, what challenges lie ahead, and what new paths are

¹ Pope Francis, ‘Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*’, 49, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#V.%E2%80%82A_mother_with_an_open_heart.

² Pope Francis, ‘General Audience 23 October 2019,’ accessed September 26, 2022, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20191023_udienza-generale.html.

³ Ibid.

opening up? This is the theme with which the present issue of AUC Theologica called 'The Open Door of the Church' comes.

The first two papers focus on the recent experience of the Church with synodality – a process that aims to bring the idea of an open Church into reality. In the first contribution called 'Synodality: The Church that Still Listens and Learns', Josef Mikulášek suggests the way how the Church could learn from the field of social sciences, namely from the construct of a community of practice, as the Church is, among others, also a social reality. In contrast to the one-directional flow of knowledge, the author highlights the necessity of adopting the *bottom-up* approach, which is attentive to the variety of experiences given by different contexts and local conditions. He then also shows how this notion is related to the idea of the ongoing Revelation.

The following article by Pavol Hrabovecký focuses on the theme of synodality in relation to J. H. Newman's understanding of the concept of *sensus fidelium* in the essay 'On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine'. In light of this text, the author lists some challenges of the current synodal process and warns against overemphasising only one part of the church. He underlines the need to avoid any extremes and that both lay people and pastors should be heard and walk together as a family.

Moving from systematic theology to the field of liturgical studies, the next article by Radek Tichý is devoted to Pope Francis' Motu proprio 'Spiritus Domini', according to which the liturgical ministries of lectors and acolytes have been open also to women. As the title 'Liturgical Ministries of Men and Women: Lectorate and Acolytate Then and Now' suggests, the author presents a historical development of these ministries and shows that this regulation of canon law is a return to tradition and part of organic development rather than a complete innovation.

The following article approaches the idea of openness in the context of the attitude of the Church towards sinners. In her paper called '*Fleat pro te mater ecclesia*: Images of the Church in Ambrose's Treatise *De Paenitentia*', Karolína Štauberová goes back to the times of Novatian heresy, according to which those who committed a serious crime were denied the possibility of penance and absolution. In contrast to the Novatians, she presents Ambrose's notion of the open Church towards sinners as rendered in his treatise *De Paenitentia*. In light of this historical experience, the author warns against any similar tendencies of Christians to perceive themselves as exclusive and close door to others.

Instead, she presents Ambrose's image of the Church as the inn, where everybody can be welcomed and cured, as an inspiration for today.

The final article 'The Stranger in the Bible: The Needy and the Brother' by Jiří Dosoudil deals with the theme of openness as concerns immigrants and refugees in the context of the contemporary Russian aggression in Ukraine. Exploring the attitude towards immigrants and foreigners in both the Old and the New Testament, the author shows that the Bible teaches us to approach strangers as brothers and to be prepared to help any person in need. By accepting strangers, Christians act according to the ideal of the gospel.

Although in the presented papers the theme of the open Church could have been touched only selectively, we hope that this issue of AUC Theologica can contribute to the academic debate on this important topic.

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doi: 10.14712/23363398.2022.14