

# Entering a New Continent

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When Christopher Columbus arrived in the Caribbean, he actually thought he had arrived in Asia by sailing westwards. It was probably not easy for him to admit that he was wrong. Between the Indies he dreamed of and the Europe he came from, lay an immense continent to be later named America. No doubt, he had to adapt to an unfamiliar world, one which was very different to what he had been expecting when he began his journey from Palos, in Andalusia.

Something similar is happening in the Church. Those who were born around the 1950s find themselves facing a world that is totally different from the one they grew up in as children. Over the decades they have probably been perplexed by the changes that have taken place at every level and which have brought about different ways of doing things with different standards of behaviour and the rapid disappearance of social, ideological, religious and even faith scenarios. We have truly landed on an unknown "continent" that requires a change in mentality, practices and structures. These changes demand that we must not fail to recognize God's plan and which are destined to change our way of living, expressing, understanding, incarnating and proclaiming the faith.

It is not easy to summarize the new parameters into which faith must now fit but let us try to name a few. *Pluralism*, experienced as never before, now involves every sphere of life: food, clothing, cultures, understanding of oneself and the world. *Secularism*, in which religion, reduced to the private sphere, must coexist with other beliefs and no longer has a decisive social role. *Interdependence* in a world in which everything is connected with everything, where borders - previously almost impermeable, so much so that very different peoples could coexist almost without interacting with each other - are increasingly open and intercultural dialogue has become indispensable for coexistence.

Everything - even science - invites us to have a relational way of thinking which takes into account not just facts, but interactions. Whether we want it or not, we are interdependent, and our home has become our common home. Even though there are those who shut themselves up in their own perspective or in their own nation, it is now evident that we cannot continue to live in a self-referential way, as if the others did not exist. Those who persist in doing so will have no future. Ecology teaches us that ecosystems, in order to subsist, need an environment of sustainability, balance and harmony. All this makes us realize that we have been acting in the world as if we were rulers and masters.

What do we want to say with this introduction? We need to really understand what it is that Pope Francis is driving at. There are those who make hasty and ill-founded judgments: he is a pope who likes to be *à la mode*, who promulgates ecological and solidarity-based encyclicals, sets up shelters for the homeless in the colonnade of St. Peter's, but does not deal with "spiritual things" and is often overly critical of the clericalism and worldliness of certain sectors of the clergy. It seems to us that Francis seeks to respond - and to help the

Church respond - to what the Gospel requires in the new "continent" in which we now find ourselves. From *Evangelii gaudium* to *Fratelli tutti*, with *Laudato si'* and the *Document on Human Brotherhood* which he signed in Abu Dhabi with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, from *Amoris laetitia* to *Querida Amazonia* and the current *Global Compact on Education* that has involved Jews and Muslims from the outset, the pope pursues the same goal: To guide the mission and activity of the Church in this new world facing us, so that we do not remain clinging to outdated patterns and risk devoting all our efforts to preserving a way of living and spreading the faith that is no longer relevant or meaningful.

Certainly, promoting authentic dialogue means having to tune our minds and hearts differently. If this causes problems and worries, then one need only consider how Jesus acted. There were plenty of priests, Levites, Pharisees and other exemplary citizens around him, but it was the public sinners and prostitutes who were the ones who actually followed him, and his attention was particularly focused on the poor.

Therefore, in this issue of *Ekklesia*, the theme of "Together, in the Common Home" deals with a variety of issues. There are articles that illustrate some of the anthropological and social changes, some which refer to *Fratelli tutti*, the *Global Educational Pact* and *Laudato si'*, as well as to the 25th anniversary of the apostolic exhortation *Vita consecrata*. There are insights and best practices, along with experiences of dialogue on some of the fronts facing the Church and the world today.