

## Amazon Synod: Summary of final document

- Oct 28th, 2019



Five chapters, plus an introduction and a brief conclusion: the Final Document of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region was released on the evening of 26 October, by the express will of the Pope. The document deals with a wide variety of topics, including mission, inculturation, integral ecology, defence of the indigenous peoples, an Amazonian rite, the role of women, and new ministries, especially in areas where access to the Eucharist is lacking.

**Conversion:** this is the common thread running through the final document of the Pan-Amazon Synod. Conversion is expressed with different accents: integral, pastoral, cultural, ecological, and synodal. The text is the result of the "open, free, and respectful" exchange undertaken in the three weeks of the work of the Synod, to tell the story of the challenges and the potentialities of Amazonia, the "biological heart" of the world, spread over nine countries and inhabited by over 33 million people, including about 2.5 million indigenous persons. Yet this region, by area the most vulnerable in the world on account of climate change caused by human beings, is on "a rampant race to death". And thus the Document reiterates that a new direction is necessary in order to save it, to avoid a catastrophic impact on the entire planet.

### Chapter I - Integral conversion

From the beginning, the document exhorts us to a "true integral conversion", with a simple and sober life, in the manner of St Francis of Assisi, to be committed to relating harmoniously with the "common home", the creative work of God. Such conversion will lead the Church to be a Church "on the move", in order to enter the hearts of all the Amazonian peoples. Amazonia's voice is a message of life expressed through a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural reality, represented by the varied faces that dwell therein. "Good living", and "doing good" is the lifestyle of the Amazonian people. This means living in harmony with oneself, with others, and with the supreme being, in a single intercommunication between the whole cosmos, in order to forge a project of full life for all.

### The suffering of Amazonia: the cry of the land and the cry of the poor

Nevertheless, the text does not ignore the many sorrows and the great violence that today wound and deform Amazonia, threatening its life: the privatization of natural goods;

predatory models of production; deforestation which has affected 17% of the whole region; pollution from the extractive industries; climate change; drug trafficking; alcoholism; trafficking; the criminalization of leaders and defenders of the territory; illegal armed groups. On a broader basis there is the bitter story of migration in the Amazon on various levels: the traditional mobility of indigenous groups in their territories; forced displacement of indigenous populations; international migration and refugees. All these groups need cross-border pastoral care, including the right to free movement. The problem of migration, we read, ought to be confronted in a coordinated way by the Churches on the borders. A work of permanent pastoral care must, in addition, be considered for migrant who become victims of trafficking. The synodal Document invites us to be attentive also to the forced displacement of indigenous families in urban centres, emphasising that this phenomenon demands a "joint pastoral response" in the peripheries. Hence, the exhortation to create missionary teams which, in coordination with the parishes, would be able to deal with this aspect, offering inculturated liturgies and favouring the integration of these communities in the cities.

## **Chapter II - Pastoral conversion**

Recalling the missionary nature of the Church is essential. Mission is not something optional, the text says, because the Church is mission, and missionary action is the paradigm of all the work of the Church. In Amazonia, the Church must be modelled on the Good Samaritan, that is, she must go out to meet everyone. She must be "Magdalene", loved and reconciled in order to announce joyfully the Risen Christ, and "Marian", that is, she must generate children in the faith, but also inculturated among the peoples that she serves. It is important, then, to pass from a "visiting" pastoral ministry to a pastoral ministry that is permanently present. For this reason, the synodal Document suggests that the religious Congregations throughout the world establish at least one missionary outpost in one of the Amazonian countries.

### **The sacrifice of the missionary martyrs**

The Synod does not forget the many missionaries who have spent their lives in order to transmit the Gospel in Amazonia; the most glorious pages of that history have been written by the martyrs. At the same time, the Document recalls that the proclamation of Christ in the region was often accomplished in collusion with the powers that oppressed the people. For this reason, today the Church has the "historic opportunity to distance herself" from "the new colonializing powers, by listening to the Amazonian peoples and transparently exercising her prophetic activity".

### **Ecumenical and interreligious dialogue**

In this context, both ecumenical and interreligious dialogue are very important. It is "the indispensable path of evangelization in Amazonia", the text says. On the one hand, it must take its starting point from the Word of God to initiate real paths of communion. On the other

hand, with regard to interreligious dialogue, the Document encourages a greater knowledge of indigenous religions and cults, so that Christians and non-Christians, can act together in defence of their common home. For this reason, moments of encounter, study, and dialogue among the Amazonian churches and the followers of indigenous religions are proposed.

### **The urgent need for indigenous pastoral ministry and for youth ministry**

The document further recalls the need for an indigenous pastoral ministry, that would have a specific place in the Church: it is necessary, in fact, to create and maintain "a preferential option for the indigenous populations", and to give a greater missionary impulse among native vocations, so that the Amazon might be evangelised by Amazonians.

Further, space must be given to Amazonian youth, with their lights and their shadows: divided between tradition and innovation; immersed in an intense crisis of values; victims of sad realities such as poverty, violence, unemployment, new forms of slavery, and difficulty in accessing education. The text notes that they often end up in prison, or committing suicide. Yet young Amazonians have the same dreams and hopes as other young people in the world - and the Church, called to be a prophetic presence, must accompany them on their journey, to prevent their identity and self-esteem from being damaged or destroyed. In particular, the Document suggests "a renewed and courageous youth ministry", with an ever active pastoral ministry, centred on Jesus. Young people, in fact, are a theological "locus" and prophets of hope, they want to be protagonists, and the Amazonian Church wants to recognise their space. Hence, the invitation to promote new forms of evangelization, including the use of social media, and to help young indigenous people to achieve a healthy interculturality.

### **Pastoral care in the cities and for families**

The final text of the Synod then deals with the theme of urban pastoral ministry, with particular attention on the family. In the urban peripheries they suffer from poverty, unemployment, lack of housing, as well as numerous health problems. It becomes necessary, then, to defend the rights of all so that everyone has equal access to the benefits the city has to offer on the basis of the principles of sustainability, democracy, and social justice. It is necessary to fight, the text reads, so that in the "shanty towns" basic fundamental rights might be guaranteed. The institution of a "ministry of welcome" should also be central, for a fraternal solidarity with migrants, refugees, and the homeless who live in the urban context. In this area, valid assistance can come from the ecclesial base communities, which are "a gift of God to the local Churches of the Amazon." At the same time, public policies aimed at improving the quality of life in rural zones are also called for, in order to avoid the unchecked movement of people to the cities.

### **Chapter III - Cultural conversion**

Inculturation and interculturality are important, the Document continues, in order to achieve a

cultural conversion that leads Christians to go out to meet the other, and to learn from them. The Amazonian people, in fact, with their "ancient scent" - which provides a contrast between the desperation that one breathes on the continent, with their values of reciprocity, solidarity, and sense of community - offer teachings of life and an integrated vision of reality capable of understanding that all of creation is connected; and guaranteeing, therefore, a sustainable management. The Church is committed to being allied with the indigenous populations, the synodal text repeats, especially in denouncing the attacks on their lives, the predatory commercial projects, ethnocide and ecocide, and the criminalization of social movements.

### **Defending the land and defending life**

"The defence of the land", the text reads, "has no other purpose than the defence of life", and is based on the evangelical principle of the defence of human dignity. It is therefore necessary to respect the rights of self-determination, the delimitation of their territories, and of prior consultation of indigenous peoples regarding the use of their land. A specific point is dedicated to the indigenous populations in voluntary isolation, of which there are approximately 130 in the Amazon today. Often victims of ethnic cleansing, the Church must undertake two types of action, one pastoral and another that of applying of pressure so that national governments might protect the rights and the inviolability of the territories of these people.

### **Indigenous theology and popular piety**

From the perspective, then, of inculturation - that is, of the incarnation of the Gospel in the indigenous cultures - space is given for an indigenous theology and for popular piety, the expressions of which must be appreciated, accompanied, promoted, and sometimes "purified", since they are privileged moments of evangelisation that ought to lead to an encounter with Christ. The proclamation of the Gospel is not a process of destruction, but of growth and consolidation of those "seeds of the Word" in the cultures. From here, there is an emphatic rejection of "colonial-style evangelisation" and "proselytism", in favour of an inculturated proclamation that promotes a Church with an Amazonian face, with full respect for and parity with the history, the culture, and the lifestyle of the local populations. In this regard, the synodal Document proposes that centres of research in the Church should study and collect the traditions, languages, beliefs and aspirations of the indigenous peoples, encouraging an education based on their own identity and culture.

### **Creating a network of Pan-Amazonian ecclesial communication**

In the field of healthcare, too, the Document continues, this educational project should promote the ancient knowledge of traditional medicine in every culture. At the same time, the Church is committed to offering health care in places where national health care programs do

not reach. There is also a strong call for an education in solidarity, based on an awareness of a common origin and a future shared by all, as well as a culture of communication that promotes dialogue, encounter, and care of the "common home". Specifically, the synodal text suggests the creation of a network of Pan-Amazonian ecclesial communication; of an academic network of bilingual education and of new forms of education, and even distance learning.

#### **Chapter IV - Ecological conversion**

In the face of "an unprecedented socio-environmental crisis", the Synod calls for an Amazonian Church capable of promoting an integral ecology and an ecological conversion, according to which "everything is connected".

#### **Integral ecology, the only possible path**

The hope is that by recognizing "the wounds caused by human beings" to the territory, models of development based on justice and solidarity might be sought. This translates into an attitude that links the pastoral care of nature to justice for the poorest and most disadvantaged people of the world. Integral ecology should not be understood as a one more path that the Church can choose for the future, but as the only path possible in order to save the region from predatory extractivism, from the spilling of innocent blood, and from the criminalization of defenders of the Amazon. The Church, insofar as it is "part of an international solidarity", should foster the central role of the Amazon biome for the equilibrium of the planet, and encourage the international community to furnish new economic resources for its protection, strengthening the tools of the framework convention on climate.

#### **Defence of human rights and the demands of faith**

More than a political duty and a social obligation, defending and promoting human rights is demanded by our Faith. Faced with this Christian duty, the Document denounces the violation of human rights, as well as extractive destruction; takes up and supports, also in alliance with other churches, the campaigns to disinvest in extractive companies that cause social and ecological damage to the Amazon; proposes a radical energy transition and the search for alternatives; and also proposes the development of programs of formation for the care of the "common home". Nations are asked to stop thinking of the region as an inexhaustible resource, and a hope is expressed for a socially inclusive "new paradigm of sustainable development" that combines scientific and traditional medicine. It recommends that commercial concerns not be placed above concern for the environment and for human rights.

#### **A Church allied to the Amazonian communities**

The appeal is to responsibility: we are all called to safeguard God's work. The protagonists of the care for, and the protection and defence of the peoples are the Amazonian communities themselves. The Church is their ally, walking with them, without imposing a particular way of acting; recognizing the wisdom of the peoples concerning biodiversity, and against any form of biopiracy. The request is made that pastoral agents and ordained ministers be formed in this socio-environmental sensitivity, following the example of the martyrs of the Amazon. The idea is to create ministries for the care of the common home.

### **Defence of life**

In the Document, the commitment of the Church to the defence of life "from conception to its natural end", and to the promotion of intercultural and ecumenical dialogue, in order to counteract structures of death, sin, violence, and injustice. Ecological conversion and the defence of life in the Amazon are, for the Church, a call to "unlearn, learn, and relearn in order to overcome any tendency toward colonizing models that have caused harm in the past".

### **Ecological sin and the right to potable water**

The definition of "ecological sin" as "an action or an omission against God, against one's neighbour, the community, the environment", the future generations and the virtue of justice is proposed. In order to repay the ecological debt that countries have to the Amazon, the Document suggests creating a global fund for the Amazonian communities, so as to protect them from the predatory desires of national and multinational companies.

The Synod recalls the "urgent need to develop energy policies that drastically reduce the emission of carbon dioxide and other gases related to climate change"; promotes clean energies; and focuses attention on access to potable water, a basic human right and a condition for the exercise of other human rights.

Protecting the earth means encouraging reuse and recycling; reducing the use of fossil fuels and plastic; modifying eating habits such as the excessive consumption of meat and fish; adopting a sober lifestyle; planting trees.

In this context, there is a proposal for an Amazonian Socio-Pastoral Office that would work in synergy with CELAM, CLAR, Caritas, REPAM, Episcopal Conferences, local Churches, Catholic universities, and non-ecclesial entities. The creation of an Amazon office in the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development is also proposed.

### **Chapter V - New ways of synodal conversion**

Overcoming clericalism and arbitrary impositions; reinforcing a culture of dialogue, of listening, and of spiritual discernment; responding to pastoral challenges: these are the characteristics on which a synodal conversion must be based; a conversion to which the

Church is called in order to advance in harmony, under the impulse of the life-giving Spirit and with evangelical boldness.

### **Synodality, ministry, the active role of the laity, and consecrated life**

The challenge is to interpret the signs of the times in the light of the Holy Spirit, and to identify the path to follow in the service of God's plan. The forms of the exercise of synodality are varied and ought to be decentralized, attentive to local processes, without weakening the bonds with the sister Churches and with the universal Church. Synodality, in continuity with the Second Vatican Council, translates into co-responsibility and the ministry of all; with particular attention to the participation of the laity, both men and women, considered as "privileged actors". Lay participation, both in consultation and in decision making in the life and mission of the Church, the Document explains, must be strengthened and expanded, beginning promoting and conferring ministries "for men and women in an equitable way".

The document suggests that Bishops "can entrust, for a specific period of time, in the absence of priests, the exercise of pastoral care of the communities to a person not invested with the priestly character, who is a member of the community". The responsibility for the community, it specifies, would remain with the pastor.

The Synod then proposes consecrated life "with an Amazonian face", beginning with strengthening native vocations. Within the proposal is an emphasis on an itinerancy of consecrated persons for the most impoverished and excluded. The Document also asks that formation be centred on inculturality, inculturation, and dialogue between spiritualities and Amazonian cosmovisions.

### **An opportune moment for women**

Ample space in the Document is dedicated to the presence of women. As the wisdom of the ancestral peoples suggests, mother earth has a feminine face; and in the indigenous world, women are "a living and responsible presence in human promotion". The Synod asks that the voice of women be heard, that they be consulted, that they participate in a more decisive way in decision-making, that they might contribute to ecclesial synodality, and to take up more forcefully leadership within the Church, in pastoral councils, or "even in areas of government". Protagonists and guardians of creation and of the common home, women are often "victims of physical, moral, and religious violence, including feminicide". The text reaffirms the Church's commitment to defending their rights, especially with regard to migrant women. At the same time it recognizes the ministries entrusted by Jesus to women, and calls for a "revision of the *Motu proprio Ministeria quaedam* of Saint Paul VI, so that adequately formed and prepared women might also receive the ministries of acolyte and lector, among the others they are already able to carry out".

Specifically, in those contexts in which Catholic communities are guided by women, it asks for the creation of a ministry recognizing women who are leaders of the community. The Synod notes many consultations on the Amazon sought the "permanent diaconate for women", a theme very much present during the work of the Synod at the Vatican. The Document expresses the desire of Synod participants to share their experiences and the reflections that emerged so far with the "Study Commission on the Diaconate of Women", established in 2016 by Pope Francis, and "await the results".

### **The permanent diaconate**

The promotion, training, and support of permanent deacons is described as urgent. The deacon, under the authority of the Bishop is at the service of the community, and today is obliged to promote integral ecology, human development, social pastoral care, and service to those who find themselves in situations of vulnerability and poverty, which makes them like Christ. It is therefore necessary to insist on ongoing formation, marked by academic study and pastoral practice, in which the candidate's wife and children are also involved. The curriculum of formation, the Synod specifies, should include themes that favour ecumenical, interreligious, and intercultural dialogue; the history of the Church in the Amazon; affectivity and sexuality; the indigenous cosmovision; and integral ecology. It recommends that formation teams be composed of ordained ministers and laity and that the formation of future permanent deacons in the indigenous communities living along the rivers be encouraged.

### **Formation of priests**

The formation of priests should be inculturated: there is a need to prepare pastors who live the Gospel; know canon law; are compassionate, following the example of Jesus; who are close to people; capable of listening, of healing and consoling, without seeking to impose themselves; manifesting the tenderness of the Father. In the area of formation for the priesthood, the Document hopes for the inclusion of disciplines such as integral ecology, eco-theology, theology of creation, indigenous theologies, ecological spirituality, the history of the Church in the Amazon, and Amazonian cultural anthropology. The Synod recommends that centres for formation, by preference, should be inserted into the Amazonian reality, and that non-Amazonian young people should be offered the opportunity of participating in such formation in the Amazon region.

### **Participation in the Eucharist and priestly ordination**

Participation in the Eucharist is central for the Christian community. And yet, the Synod notes, many ecclesial communities in the Amazon territory have enormous difficulties in accessing the Eucharist. It can take months or even years for a priest to return to a community to celebrate Mass or offer the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick. The Document reaffirms the appreciation of celibacy as a gift from God, insofar as it allows the



priest to devote himself fully to the service of the community, and it renews the prayer that there might be many vocations to a celibate life. Recognising that "this discipline is not required by the very nature of the priesthood"; and considering the vast expanse of the Amazonian territory and the scarcity of ordained ministers, the Final Document proposes "to establish criteria and dispositions on the part of the competent authority, within the framework of *Lumen gentium* 26, to ordain to the priesthood suitable men who have already legitimately constituted a stable family, are held in esteem by the community, who live their permanent diaconate fruitfully and who would receive an adequate formation for the priesthood to sustain the life of the Christian community through the preaching of the Word and the celebration of the Sacraments in the most remote areas of the Amazon region". It specifies that, in this regard, "some were in favour of a more universal approach to the subject".

### **A post-Synodal regional ecclesial structure, and an Amazonian University**

The Synod proposes a restructuring of the local Churches from a Pan-Amazonian point of view, resizing the vast geographical areas of many dioceses; grouping together particular Churches present in the same region; and creating an Amazonian Fund for the purpose of evangelization. The idea of creating a regional ecclesial post-synodal structure, organized with REPAM and CELAM, in order to take up many of the proposals that emerged from the Synod. There is a proposal in the field of education to establish an Amazonian Catholic University, based on interdisciplinary research, inculturation and intercultural dialogue, and Sacred Scripture while respecting the customs and traditions of the indigenous peoples.

### **An Amazonian rite**

In order to respond in an authentic Catholic way to the request of the Amazonian community to adapt the liturgy using their vision of the world, their traditions, their symbols and their original rites, the above-mentioned ecclesial structure is asked to set up a competent commission to study the development of an Amazonian rite that "expresses the liturgical, theological, disciplinary, and spiritual heritage of the Amazon". Such a rite would be an addition to the 23 distinct rites already present in the Catholic Church, enriching the work of evangelization; the ability to express faith in a culture of its own; and the sense of decentralization and collegiality that the Catholic Church can express. The suggestion is also made that such an ecclesial rite would complement the way in which the Amazonian people take care of the territory and relate to its waters. Finally, in order to encourage the process of the inculturation of the faith, the Synod expresses the urgent need for forming committees for the translation and drafting of biblical and liturgical texts in the local languages, "preserving the material of the sacraments and adapting them to the form, without losing sight of what is essential". Music and singing should also be encouraged at the liturgical level.

At the conclusion of the Document, the Synod Fathers invoke the protection of the Virgin of the Amazon, Mother of the Amazon, venerated under various titles throughout the region.