

Toward the Pan-Amazon Synod

Challenges and contributions from Latin America and the Caribbean

Unofficial translation from the original Spanish by Hieronymus Weasaltrowsers

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It deals, therefore, with a sign of the mission shared by both organization to the service of life and of the excluded of this territory, as a service to the Church so that the cries of the poor and of the Earth may illuminate the Synod in October 2019.

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NB: Page numbers have been inserted manually by the translator so as to correspond to the original and do not reflect the pages in this version of the document.

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Translator's Preface

The document that I here present is, in a word, a roadmap for the destruction of the Church. It came to my attention an article published at LifeSiteNews on 3 September ([here](#)) and covered in a video by Anthony Stine of Return to Tradition ([here](#)) the following day. It is a plan to use the Amazon Synod to change the Catholic Church beyond recognition, to the point at which the resulting institution could not properly be called the Catholic Church at all.

Unlike the *Instrumentum Laboris*, whose release on 17 June rightly provoked warnings of heresy and apostasy from multiple bishops and cardinals, it is not evident that this document, the product of a joint effort between *Amerindia* and the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM, an acronym for Spanish *Red Eclesial Panamazónica*) to hold “listening sessions” in Bogotá in April of this year in preparation for the Synod, is Vatican-approved. There are, however several indirect lines of evidence suggesting a connection, and perhaps even coordination, between the authors of the two documents.

First, evidence concerning the circumstances: The two documents were published quite close together. The *Instrumentum* was released by the Vatican on 17 June of this year. This document, while lacking a precise date, was also published in June, meaning that no more than about two weeks could have intervened between the two. Furthermore, both documents appear to have been drafted in Spanish. Until now, this document from Bogotá has existed only in Spanish, and, though available in both Spanish and Italian, it is clear from the labels used on the Vatican's web site that the Spanish is original and the Italian is a translation.

Aside from the circumstances, the similarities in content are striking, and to such a degree that coordination, not coincidence, seems to be the most likely explanation. A few examples will suffice for the moment: First, other documents drafted by REPAM, one of the two organizations behind the present document, are cited a small handful of times in the Preparatory Document from 8 June of last year and numerous times in the *Instrumentum Laboris*. In addition to citing their writings, the *Instrumentum* also commends and recommends the continuation of REPAM's work in section 129(f)(2). It is also curious that the present document and the *Instrumentum Laboris* both make use of the Greek word *καιρός* (*kairós*) ‘time, opportunity’ to describe the present moment with respect to the situation of the Church in the Amazon. Lastly, one need only read the documents side-by-side to see the similarities in their worldviews and proposals, similarities which, especially in view of the foregoing, strongly suggest that the authors of the present document and of the *Instrumentum Laboris* are not operating independently of one another.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* has been rightly labeled “heresy” and “apostasy” by the likes of Cardinals Brandmüller, Müller, and Burke, as well as Bishop Schneider and Archbishop

Viganò. Even so, given the strong possibility of coordination between the authors of the two documents, it is reasonable to suppose that the *Instrumentum* was moderated from what the engineers of the synod actually want so as not to provoke a backlash by trying to take too much ground at once. The present document, however, shows no such signs of “moderation;” it is far more brazen in its apostasy. The direst points will be treated momentarily.

First, however, it is opportune to note one further similarity between the present document and the *Instrumentum Laboris*: no official English translation of either one exists. This is the only English version of the document from the Bogotá meetings, and the only English translation of the *Instrumentum Laboris* is an unofficial version hosted by *Rorate Cæli* ([here](#)). One might reasonably wonder, especially in light of Pope Francis’ recent unflattering remarks about Americans, whether this is a deliberate attempt to keep the English-speaking Catholic world in the dark about the plans for the synod for as long as possible. If so, it cannot be said to be entirely ineffective; in the case of the present document, despite its displaying a June publication date, LifeSite did not pick up on the story until early September, nearly three months after the fact.

The proposals of the document are plainly ordered toward the destruction of the Church and the Faith. Aside from the predictable attacks on clerical celibacy and the liturgy, it takes direct aim at several dogmas. The reservation of priestly ordination to men alone is attacked both directly, through suggesting that the possibility of women’s priestly ordination, denied for reasons of patriarchy rather than Divine institution (sec. 3.6.2.3), be a subject of ongoing study (sec. 3.5.7), and indirectly, through the arguments that it puts forth for ordaining women to the diaconate (sec. 3.6), which, because no meaningful distinction is drawn between priestly and diaconal ordination in this document, are quite transparently intended to be applicable to the priesthood, as well. It further attacks the priesthood itself, insinuating that it is not of Divine institution, nor was it present in the New Testament Church, but it attained its sacral character later, as the Church emerged from houses into public life. Lastly, similar to, but more brazenly than, the *Instrumentum Laboris*, it undermines the dogma of *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus*, which it disparages by name, calling it a “pretension” and insinuating that it is a Medieval innovation while approvingly quoting figures such as Hans Küng and Leonardo Boff, the latter of whom states that it is an injustice to claim that only one religion is true; at the same time, it affirms various forms of paganism, including cultic rituals (e.g., Yurupary) that sometimes involve the use of hallucinogenic drugs. All throughout, the reasoning presented in this document is rife with a spirit of vital immanentism.

It should not be overlooked that, in order to justify these indefensible statements, the authors appeal to three main groups of sources: (1) the writings and speeches of Pope Francis, cited 90 times total, 49 of which are to *Laudato Si’*; (2) the documents of Vatican II, cited in excess of 30 times total, the most cited of which is *Lumen Gentium*, with 13 citations; and (3) documents from meetings of the Latin American Bishops in Puebla, Mexico; Medellín, Colombia; and Aparecida, Brazil, a total of 23 times. (The heretical document on “Human Fraternity” is also cited once.) In contrast, the Scriptures are cited only 19 times.

The “new path” that this document lays out for the Church is nothing short of Her annihilation. The religion described herein is *not Catholic*, and we are bound by the First Commandment not to follow it, no matter how many of our peers and, yes, even shepherds may

do so. In view of this, a line on page 107 raises great cause for concern: “[We ask] that no one break communion, even if he is not fully in agreement with the others.” Is this a suggestion that the Synod may precipitate a schism? In view of Pope Francis’ recent remarks on the matter (“I am not afraid of schisms,” etc.), it is not an unreasonable supposition. Archbishop Viganò, too, shares this view. In a conversation with Robert Moynihan dated 11 September (read [here](#)), he says, “Pope Francis is saying that because he knows the Amazon Synod may provoke a schism. He is ready to say others are making the schism, but (by his actions in continuing to support the Amazon Synod) he is provoking it himself.”

We may be just weeks away from such a catastrophic event. Are we ready to face it? Are we ready to face false accusations of heresy and schism and even false excommunications for standing firm in the faith, as did St. Athanasius and Archbishop Lefebvre and as has more recently happened to Fr. Vaughn Treco? If the architects of the Synod have their way, can we really reassure ourselves that this will not intensify in the future?

I do not say that this will happen, only that it is a distinct possibility, but one for which we must be prepared, hence my decision to undertake the task of this translation in the first place. Because of the speed with which it was prepared I cannot promise that it is free from all error (if you find one, please help improve the translation by reporting it to weasaltrousers@gmail.com), but I am sufficiently confident that it is free from errors that would significantly distort the sense of the original. If any part has been done well, *non mihi Domine, non mihi, sed Nomini Tuo da gloriam*. If any errors remain, *mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*.

Sancte Athanasie, ora pro nobis!

Hieronymus Weasaltrousers
15 September 2019
Feast of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Notes on the Translation

A few brief notes on certain editorial decisions regarding the translation may be in order:

First, I have occasionally found it expedient to insert explanations into the body of the text itself. These are enclosed in square brackets and begin with my pseudo-initials, “HW.”

For time’s sake, I have tried, inasmuch as possible, to preserve the syntax of the original as long as the resulting translation was intelligible and acceptable English.

The original Spanish text uses three different words, *indígeno*, *autóctono*, and *originario*, all of which I render “indigenous,” since they are used more or less interchangeably.

The word “novelty” in this translation, a word upon which Catholics rightly look with suspicion, reflects an underlying *novedad*, which could also be translated with the more neutral-sounding “newness.” In the context of the document as a whole, however, “novelty” seems the more appropriate translation.

Regarding gender in language, the original is, predictably, imbued with a spirit of feminism. Thus, translating it faithfully requires a number of awkward turns of phrase, and often the insertion of “men and women” before a personal noun in order to capture the intended meaning. Where the generic masculine is used, this is a consequence of my own style, seeking to concisely translate the underlying terms that provide no gender specification whatsoever without resorting to such awkward turns of phrase such as “he or she,” “his or her,” singular “they,” and others. Doubtless, the authors of the original document would vehemently protest this stylistic choice.

In one instance, I have found it necessary to coin the term “Creatress” (perhaps the Latin *Creatrix* would have done just as well) in order to accurately translate the original text’s blasphemous reference to God as *Creador-Creadora*, which is the word for “Creator” used twice, first the masculine form and then the feminine. I elected to translate it thus because, although “Creator” is not an inaccurate translation for either term, to use it alone would obscure this impious designation that should not be allowed to escape unnoticed. I therefore elect to translate it “Creator-Creatress,” with its much more explicit invocation of male and female.

There is one respect in which I must disagree with LifeSite’s translation of a portion covered in their article. Section 3.6.2.2. uses the word *cultual*, which is an obscure Spanish term meaning “cultic, related to worship.” The LifeSite article renders it “cultural,” apparently supposing that this was a typographical error for intended *cultural*. I have chosen not to follow their lead in this regard because (a) using *cultual* instead of *cultural*, although it requires me to follow an obscure word, allows me not to presume that the same typographical error has occurred a handful of times, and (b) the meaning of *cultual* makes more sense in context than that of *cultural*.

I have generally left non-Spanish terms untranslated, based on the supposition that if the authors of a Spanish-language text used non-Spanish terms, the choice was deliberate. In particular, I have always left any Latin untouched. I have made some exceptions to this rule, however, for certain terms of Portuguese or indigenous origin that, while perhaps well known to an Amazonian audience, are likely to be too obscure for most of the English-speaking world.

Lastly, while I have done my best to make the document intelligible, there are sections that, as seems to be characteristic of modernist texts, are an inscrutable word salad in any language.

Caveat lector.

PROLOGUE

The importance of the Pan-Amazon Synod that will take place in Rome in October 2019 is difficult to exaggerate. It addresses an assembly officially called “special” because it will treat questions referring to a particular geographic area, specifically Amazonia. But its “special” quality goes far beyond this formal consideration. For the first time, it is made manifest with such clarity that the challenges, conflicts, and emerging opportunities in a territory—a word with connotations more profound than those of “geographic area”—are the dramatic expression of the moment that intersects with the survival of the planet Earth and the coexistence of all humanity. And, in consequence, it raises again the question of the type of presence that the ecclesial community is called to have in a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected, violent, and unequal, that, however, houses in its bosom signs of the life-giving presence of the Kingdom of God.

In this Synod, the Church, through pastors who listen closely to the heartbeat of their territories and communities, has an exceptional opportunity to open itself up to what the Spirit of Jesus invites it to live in order to be “good news” in today’s world, provided that it does not overlook that the approved decisions will be valuable on a universal scale, precisely in the measure in which the special characteristics of the Amazon region are taken seriously.

The territory of the Amazon is shared by nine countries, with almost eight million square kilometers, that form a biome, which is to say, a living system of organic interactions that are essential for the climatic equilibrium of the planet. It is a territory today fought over as a strategic space by power groups and outside interests that prey on its forests, reserves of potable water, and impressive biodiversity, with an exploitation of an extracting character and a “throwaway culture.”

Also unique is the *human and cultural wealth* of its 35 million inhabitants scattered in forests, riverbanks, fields, and large cities. Of them, almost three million belong to native peoples that speak 340 diverse languages. They constitute an invaluable contribution to the current world, thanks to their harmonious manner of relating with nature, with other human beings, and with God. They are human communities that today, however, feel attacked in their bond with the Earth, in their cultural and spiritual values, and they issue to us a strong call to fight the dynamic of exploitation and accumulation that has the planet on the brink of its limit and humanity subject to an increasing inequality.

The *historic moment* through which the Amazon is coming is a special one. As Pope Francis points out, “the native Amazonian peoples have probably never been so threatened in their territories as they are now.” Today many are assassinated, expelled from their lands, persecuted, and impeded from gathering and organizing. Because of that, there have also been numerous

martyrs of the Amazon, and today witnesses of hope continue fighting for justice, respect for the rights of their peoples, and defense of the “common home.”

The setting in which the *ecclesial community* in the Amazon lives is also extraordinary. A true *kairós*. Throughout the more than 500 years in which the Catholic Church has been present in Amazonian lands, we have found lights and shadows. On one hand, there is the radical testimony on the part of many brothers and sisters of following Jesus, taken even to martyrdom, to give witness to the Gospel and defend the rights of the most repressed. On the other hand, the ecclesial community as a whole has not managed to free itself of the influence of the colonizer project in whose bosom the first evangelization occurred. Therefore, today we feel the necessity of a sincere conversion of attitudes and structures that permit us to go out to encounter those who are most hurt or are stigmatized for their ethnic, cultural, or religious characteristics.

The Amazonian Christian community feels calls to be a Church that is postcolonial, plural, and solidary with those excluded from society. It involves undertaking, with discernment and bravery, the reform of some of its structures, moving past the fear that closes it off to the novelty of the Spirit. Pope Francis himself has suggested it repeatedly. Furthermore, in his speech in Puerto Maldonado, he did not hesitate to ask for the support of the indigenous settlers themselves:

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“Help your bishops, help your men and women missionaries, so that they may become one with you, and dialoguing in that way among all, you can express a Church with an Amazonian face and a Church with an indigenous face.”

A Church with an Amazonian and indigenous face will be possible if the marked centralism that conditions as much life as the structures of the believing community is overcome. It tries to accomplish a practice of the faith that is more participative and communitarian and, therefore, capable of a more profound discernment of the presence of the Kingdom of God in history. May A synodal dynamic at every level guarantee the hearing of laywomen and men, religious women and men, priests, and deacons, and let those who are culturally “others” feel that the Christian community speaks to them in their own language.

Today there exists a greater consciousness of the necessity of supporting the emergence of diverse ministries that respond to the situation of the different Amazonian ecclesial communities. Ministries with a much more participative profile that permits the accompaniment and strengthening of personal charisms, community processes, and agreement with the appropriate social context.

Many communities demand that the Church be present in the distant places, there where no one wants to go, though indigenous missionaries and priests, capable of understanding the cultures and religions of the Amazonian peoples. In this same line, the Pope encourages us unto the formation of a clergy of the place who know the local conditions from the inside and make it possible that very many communities can participate regularly in the celebration of the Eucharist.

On the other hand, they demand the overcoming of a patriarchal perspective and the frank, explicit, and formal recognition of

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the participation of women in the bosom of the ecclesial community. This recognition must not be motivated by the shortage of clergy, but by the intrinsic, original value that the feminine participation in the construction of the Christian community has at every level. The *Preparatory Document* accepts the complaint they have made and even raises the necessity of identifying the type of official ministry that can be conferred on women, bearing in mind the central role that they play in the Amazonian Church.

Finally, we must note that the wealth on which this Synod relies, thanks to the experience and reflection that the *Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM)* has accumulated in its five years of existence, is also special. The originality of its contribution to the understanding of the Amazonian reality lies in that, since its founding, it has sought to assemble all the ecclesial actors who work in the territory in a tight bond with the people who inhabit it, and to do so from the perspective of an integral ecology, as *Laudato Si'* proposes. This network has inaugurated a new ecclesiality that goes beyond the present organizational logic and permits the opening of a broader joint responsibility that can motivate the Gospel promise throughout the Earth and humanity.

We hope these contributions that we present here will be a service in conjunction with the ecclesial community and, in a special way, to those who have a direct participation in the Pan-Amazon Synod. They are the result of an encounter promoted by *Amerindia* to which specialists in distinct areas were summoned to invite them to draw up short, simple, and well-founded texts that can orient us on the principal issues that will be in play at the synodal assembly.

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It seemed opportune to us to gather those texts in a single volume and, to facilitate its use, distribute them in three major areas:

1. Integral ecology.
2. Indigenous peoples.
3. New paths for the Church.

We place them in the hands of the readers in the hope that they may serve to discern the paths that the Spirit invites us to follow in the Pan-Amazon Synod and beyond.

1. INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

Introduction

Integral ecology differs notably from the conventional way of conceiving ecological things, as it concerns not just the relations with the environment, the fauna and the flora, but a holistic way of looking at the relations in our common home. The Greek term *oikos* refers to the home and is the origin of words like *ecology*, *economy*, and *ecumenism*, which are intimately interrelated when we delve into the causes of the grave environmental crisis. Of course, to speak of an integral ecology is not a “green” approach in the classic sense of environmentalisms and ecologisms, but a “multicolor” comprehension of life. It addresses “a distinct outlook, a thought, a politics, an educative program, a style of

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life, and a spirituality that form a resistance to the advance of the technocratic paradigm.”¹

Integral ecology implies a dialogue between the environmental ecology, economic ecology, social ecology, cultural ecology, and the ecology of everyday life.² Moreover, it considers the ethical principles of the common good and intergenerational justice.³ It is a style of life inspired by the spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi, “an example *par excellence* of the care of what is weak and of an integral ecology, with joy and authenticity” that incarnates “until the point at which the concern for nature, justice with the poor, accord with society, and interior peace are inseparable.”⁴

For the same reason, “today we cannot fail to recognize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach, which must integrate justice in the discussions about the environment, to hear as much the cry of the Earth as the cry of the poor.”⁵

The path from a conventional notion of ecology to an authentic experience of integral ecology implies a conversion⁶ to accept that everything in creation “is related, and all human beings are together as brothers and sisters on a marvelous pilgrimage, intertwined by the love that God has for each one of His creatures and which unites us

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¹ *Laudato Si'*, 111.

² Cf. *Laudato Si'*, 138-155.

³ Cf. *Laudato Si'*, 156-162.

⁴ *Laudato Si'*, 10.

⁵ *Laudato Si'*, 49.

⁶ Cf. *Laudato Si'*, 216-221.

also, with tender affection, to the brother sun, to the sister moon, to the brother river, and to Mother Earth.”⁷

The aforementioned understanding of life, so ingrained in the ancestral wisdom of the Amazonian peoples, invites us, from a culture of encounter, to “seek integral solutions that will consider the interactions of natural systems among themselves and with social systems. There are not two separate crises, one environmental and another social, but one single and complex socio-environmental crisis. The lines for the solution require an integral approximation in order to combat poverty, to return dignity to the excluded, and simultaneously to care for nature.”⁸

Therefore, in the context of the Pan-Amazonian Synod, the integral ecology proposed by *Laudato Si’* becomes a model, a horizon, a project to move from a “throwaway culture”⁹ into a “culture of care”,¹⁰ understanding that what happens in the biome is not unconnected to what happens on the rest of the planet, so “everything is connected” and interrelated.¹¹

From this perspective, the path of conversion that conduces to the experience of an authentic integral ecology of the Church in Pan-Amazonia will have to consider, at least, four aspects:

1. The care of the biome and its biodiversity.
2. The care of the ancestral wisdoms of the indigenous peoples.
3. The transition toward an ecological economy.
4. The processes of ecological education and spirituality in the Amazonian context.

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On this path of ecclesial renewal, it is very important to be able to learn from the native peoples the wisdom present in the worldviews that sustain millennia-old ecological equilibria; to discern, in the midst of fusion and eclecticism, the values that make possible a good and healthy life; and to weave, from a culture of encounter, the spiritual foundations of an ecological citizenry that integrates the dynamisms of the glade, the rural areas, and the urban environments that coexist in the immensity of Amazonia.

For the same reason, the pilgrimage of the Church towards an authentic experience of integral ecology requires a contemplative outlook upon the creative action of God, who has taken many centuries to give form to the ensemble of life in Amazonia, which is, in itself, a gift, a caress, Divine revelation. Such a mystical surprise will have to be stop at diversity as a characteristic trait

⁷ *Laudato Si’*, 92.

⁸ *Laudato Si’*, 139.

⁹ Cf. *Laudato Si’*, 22, 43, 158.

¹⁰ Cf. *Laudato Si’*, 229, 231.

¹¹ Cf. *Laudato Si’*, 16, 66, 70, 73, 85, 91, 117, 119, 138, 240.

of the vital form of the territory, which refers to the Trinitarian mystery.¹² Amazonia is not a geographic circumstance, but a theological place. In that sense, it is indispensable to go deeper into the notion of “territory” that comes across all the ancestral worldviews. Without territory, there is no life. There is no life without territory. The material and spiritual issues of humanity are intimately tied to the territory.

Ecological conversion requires us to move forward in an epistemological conversion in order to perceive the reality of the structure and

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dynamic of Amazonia with lenses of complexity that conduce to the depths of spirituality.

God speaks in biodiversity. His Word incarnate requires the joining and interaction of different beings that express the grandness and magnificence of His love. “We are not the final end of the all other creatures. But all advance, together with us and through us, toward the common goal, which is God, in a transcendent plenitude where the risen Christ embraces and illuminates everything.”¹³

1.4 The care of the biome and its biodiversity

“We must break with the historic paradigm that considers the Amazon to be an inexhaustible pantry of the states without keeping its inhabitants in mind.”¹⁴ Contemplating the Amazon is like visiting the first days of creation. The exuberance of life, of the green, of the waters, of the peoples, refers us to the creative act. “Christ points toward the Amazon,”¹⁵ said Paul VI. God speaks to us from His creation. Creation speaks to us of God. It is necessary to hear what God says to us, to try to respond to what He asks of us.

The vast territory of the Amazon, with its seven million km², with 34 million inhabitants, spread through eight countries, as well as a territory of French Guyana, remains a challenge for humanity. Pope Francis

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understands that the future of the Church, of humanity, and of the Earth is bound to the future of the Amazon.

This immense territory forms a biome. *Bio* comes from Greek and means ‘life.’ *Oma* means ‘ensemble.’ For this reason, a biome is an ensemble of interconnected lives, which live in a continuous space, with similar soil, a similar topography, and a sufficiently similar climate that surrounds it, too.

¹² Cf. *Laudato Si'*, 239-240.

¹³ *Laudato Si'*, 83.

¹⁴ Francis. *Encounter with the peoples of Amazonia*. Puerto Maldonado, 19 January 2018.

¹⁵ This expression was used by Paul VI in 1972 in a letter sent to the bishops of the region.

[HW: The claim about *oma* is incorrect. The *-o-* is from the stem vowel of *bíos* (Gk. *βίος*), and the *-ma* (Gk. *-μα*) is a nominalizing suffix. In any form other than the nominative/accusative singular, it has the form *-mat-* (Gk. *-ματ-*) before the following case suffix.]

Every square meter of the Amazonian biome has more diversity than any other place on the planet. That immense diversity of life guarantees its people nourishment, medicines, extracts, oils, and such other gifts that to this day have not been properly reckoned, if indeed one day it will be possible to calculate those benefits.

The biome even offers a fundamental gift, which is the distribution of the rains throughout the whole Brazilian territory, all the way to Uruguay, Argentina, and Paraguay. Scientists tell us that without the Amazonian biome, the Southern Cone region of the continent, which runs from São Paulo to Buenos Aires, from Asunción in Paraguay to the Andes, will be transformed into a desert. They are the “flying rivers”—water in the form of vapor that are taken by the winds to the South—that supply that whole region. It is important to remember that there exist three Amazonian rivers: that of the surface, the aerial, and the subterranean, also called “*alter do chão*.”¹⁶

Further, Amazon has great relevance in the carbon cycle, that is, in the process by which billions of trees attach carbon to their structure, preventing it from being released

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into the atmosphere in the form of gas, in a continuous metabolism that sustains itself, thus avoiding a greater warming of the Earth.

Because of this, the biome is fundamental in the regulation of the climate of the whole Earth. Those four gifts of Amazonia—the water cycle, the carbon cycle, biodiversity, and regulation of the climate—can only exist if the rainforest remains standing. Once razed, there will be no return.

Amazonia has, moreover, a great variety of peoples—its fifth great gift—with their different cultures, all of them with a profound ancestral wisdom regarding knowing how to live in the rainforest, living in the rainforest without destroying it. That socio-diversity is also fundamental for the preservation of Amazonia and of all its gifts, above all when a predatory model of development pretends to be the last word in terms of humanity’s “progress.”

There are profound contradictions in the outlooks that exist concerning the biome that can be summarized in a word: either we preserve the biome, leaving it standing, with all its gifts, or we run the risk of losing it based on an immediatist and economic, and therefore predatory, development. Even so, the urbanization of the Amazonian population does not nullify the biome; on the contrary, it even demands that the rainforest be maintained standing for the good of all.

¹⁶ In Brazil, the expression *alter do chão* has several meanings, including the name of a city that is a counterpart to another Portuguese city. In this case, *alter do chão* makes reference to the “other” river—with a tone of otherness—that runs below ground, alluding to the subterranean rivers.

The wisdom of the peoples knew to create highly profitable productive systems, without needing to raze the rainforest. Moreover, from an economy of the everyday, it created the productive system of açaí, of cupuaçu, of chestnuts, fish, etc. It is good to recall that there exist dozens of other possibilities that could be incentivized by public policies, which have a

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sustainable basis, distribute income, and benefit principally the local population, without resorting to monoculture like that of the soya bean, cattle flocks, mining, or other activities that have been shown to be predatory on the Amazonian environment, to which are added the large works of national and transnational infrastructure. Hence, it is a myth that the region is backwards and unproductive. It needs a policy of development to support it in the munificent efforts of nature and not in its destruction.

In the same way, the model of “green capitalism” is not adequate for the region, because it is ruled by the laws of the market and, more specifically, by the carbon market, with patenting of elements and essences—which, in truth, are offered freely by nature—, privatization of water, or even piracy of the wisdom of the peoples to transform it into merchandise in this new type of market.

The wisdom of the peoples is not past, nor solely present, but it also should be considered as an epistemological place for the future of humanity. Therefore, the scientific knowledge of the Amazon cannot dispense with the knowledge of the peoples, of their science, of their theologies, of their spiritualities, in brief, of all their cultures, as they have lived and preserved that environment for thousands of years. It was through the hands of these peoples that the Amazon remained as a gift for the Amazonian peoples, but also for humanity and for the whole Earth.

1.2 The care of the ancestral wisdoms of the indigenous peoples.

Along the road of life, the indigenous peoples have gone moving from one place to another. In every moment of

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history, a connection has been achieved with the territory, as we the peoples are a part of the territory, not apart from it. The closeness that is produced with the territory is mediated by the contemplation that provokes acute listening to the surroundings, giving place to a knowledge of the possibilities of changes in relation to the climate, production, or natural risks. We could say that the indigenous person is attentive to the beating of the heart of the cosmos, creating synchrony between the cosmos and the human being. However, there are people who develop with more precision these abilities and inform/educate the population. They sharpen their feelings, because listening to and entering into dialogue with the “common home” implies the appropriate listening of the human being to himself, as his first territory is his body, and the territory which he inhabits—his community—, does not cease to be a part of his body, because “we are earth.”

Many of the movements that have occurred throughout history among the indigenous peoples have been due to changes in nature; others, because of disputes with other indigenous peoples, and also because of the ritual movement of the search for the Holy Hill. Apparently, for what we today call migration, there was a taking of a collective decision, a spiral process of leadership, based on an outlook and attentive listening to the context and to the evaluation of the needs of the community. This drove them to look for other territory that would not put them at risk with nature and would also not dominate another people, unless they had intentions of fighting or colonization.

What is interesting is that these “migrations” did not leave families unprotected, nor did it create ruptures of internal relations; on the contrary, it was a time of consolidation for families and for the community to discern what was absolutely necessary

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to take, the possible routes to traverse, and the risks that it implied. All this was done under a ritual logic of consulting the owners of the forest, the owners of the animals, and the ancestors who lived in the present location, the same as the owners of the territory (of the biome) to which they could head. These ritual systems still live on in distinct indigenous peoples.

In these processes, there is no cultural loss; rather, it is reinforced through the occasions of storytelling around the fire when they arrive at their destination, although there is a rereading that occurs in the encounter with other peoples, a rereading that is possible only if the people knows its own history and cultural weave. The ritual dialogue of asking permission to go out from the present territory and asking permission to enter into the other territory creates the recognition of and the listening to the respective characteristics of the animals, the plants, the waters, etc. This process requires a time of contemplation and pragmatic learning, but also a ritual dialogue with the beings that inhabit the territories.

In the great history of migrations, the indigenous peoples have learned to coexist in/with the “common home,” without destroying its fertility and prosperity, without polluting the rivers, and maintaining the fauna. The levels of consumption of the peoples have not resulted in the destruction of the surroundings and, in many cases, they have instead supported the growing of the forests and the flow of the rivers.

Feel-thinking about the Earth, to be part of the “common home” causes the indigenous peoples to recognize in the forest, in the water, in the earth, and in the animals, other beings with which they relate it is related, generating dialogues through symbols, rites and, telling their histories through myths. The care of the human being

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and the satisfaction of his needs are fundamental for the whole community, but this does not imply the deterioration of the surroundings, of the other beings that are also part of the “common home.” Even though the earth is cultivated, animals are hunted, fruits are gathered from the forest, trees

are felled, and the courses of rivers are modified, all these actions are organized in agricultural cycles tied up with ritual cycles that accompany the beginning and the close of every task.

The times of dialogue around the fire or on the banks of the rivers ensures that the wisdoms of these peoples are shared with the youngest and with whom they are integrated into the community. There is not one single indigenous wisdom; there exist indigenous wisdoms, because, like the rivers, the knowledges are added to from generation to generation and from the encounter with other “relatives” to be renewed, to be dynamic, and to share their vitality in their passage through history.

There is a listening to the rhythms of production that determined what to plant, when to plant it, and until when to do it; if the earth requires rest, it is respected, and they move to cultivate in another place. Hunting is necessary to complement nutrition, but it is determined by what the family and/or community needs. The felling of trees is based on what is required to care for the community. It does not try to leave the human population at risk; it tries to create a harmony in the satisfaction of needs and in the city of the biome. This harmony is achieved only in this contemplative listening that connects the human being with his own community, the community with the extended community. It is these bonds that show up the presence of divinity in all of history, in the whole biome.

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All of this, connected to relations that co-create an integral ecology, can be sustained in the long term only if it is shared, and this spirituality of reciprocity and harmony that seeks equilibrium in the “common home” is passed on. For it, we need to be conscious of the educative processes that the native peoples live through storytelling, of community work, and of participation in rituals and celebrations, and we need to learn about these processes of collective construction of knowledge that are continually updated.

In this context, the Catholic communities, called to be missionary disciples who guard the “common home,” take on with a humble attitude the learning of these ancestral wisdoms that bind them existentially with the commandment of God of the good and abundant life¹⁷ and have in mind the call of Pope Francis, who affirmed—meditating on the mystery of the Virgin of Guadalupe—that, “In short, our fecundity demands that we defend our peoples from an ideological colonization that invalidate their wealth, be they indigenous, Afro-Americans, mestizos, peasants, or suburban.”¹⁸ Pope Francis himself, in *Laudato Si’*, recalls that:

In this sense, it is indispensable to pay special attention to the aboriginal communities with their cultural traditions. They are not just one minority among others, but, rather, they should become the principal interlocutors, especially when grand projects that affect their spaces advance. In effect, for them, the earth is not an economic good, but a free gift of God and of the ancestors who rest in it, a sacred space with which they need to interact in order to maintain its identity and its values. They, when they remain in their territories, are those who care for it best.

¹⁷ Cf. John 10:10.

¹⁸ Francis. Homily in St. Peter’s Basilica. 12 December 2017.

In several parts of the world, however, they are the object of pressures to abandon their lands and leave them free for extractive and farming projects that pay no attention to the degradation of nature and culture.¹⁹

1.4 Transition toward an ecological economy

In the Amazon occur the seven great factors that demonstrate the planetary crisis, according to the diagnostic of chapter 1 of the Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*:²⁰ (1) climate pollution and change; (2) harmful effects on the water; (3) loss of biodiversity; (4) deterioration of the quality of human life and social degradation; (5) inequity; (6) weakness of the responses; and (7) diversity of opinions. In Puerto Maldonado, Pope Francis warned that:

The indigenous Amazonian peoples have probably never been so threatened in their territories as they are now. Amazonia is disputed land on several fronts: on one side, the neo-extractivism and strong pressure by large economic interests point to their avarice for petroleum, gas, wood, gold, agro-industrial monocultures. On another side, the threat against their territories also comes with and because of the wickedness of certain policies that promote “conservation” of nature without keeping the human being in mind, and in particular, you Amazonian brethren who live in them.²¹

An analysis of the voices embraced in the listening phase of the synodal process also accounts for the deep causes of these symptoms of the planetary crisis, which are so strongly evidenced

in the Amazon. What is transpiring in the biome and in the life of the peoples who make up a part of it is a reflection of a technocratic paradigm that “tries to control both the elements of nature and those of human existence,”²² placing financial profitability at the center “without paying attention to eventual negative consequences for the human being.”²³ At the root of the problem there is an irresponsible anthropocentrism, a forgetting of God, a rupture of the vital relations of creation. Thus, before the “omnipresence of the technocratic paradigm and the adoration of limitless human power, in these matters there grows this relativism where everything becomes irrelevant if it does not serve one’s own immediate interests.”²⁴

¹⁹ *Laudato Si'*, 146.

²⁰ Cf. *Laudato Si'*, 20-61.

²¹ Francis. *Encounter with the peoples of Amazonia*. Puerto Maldonado, 19 January 2018.

²² *Laudato Si'*, 108.

²³ *Laudato Si'*, 109.

²⁴ *Laudato Si'*, 122.

Therefore, “there will not be a new relationship with nature, but a new human being. There is no ecology without an adequate anthropology.”²⁵ The evangelizing efforts in the Amazonian territory should not lose sight of the fact that their objective is to achieve land, a roof, and work for all, like the expression of the “new heaven and new earth in which justice dwells.”²⁶ The defense of human rights and of Mother Earth, in the perspective of the peoples, the resistance to mega-projects that cause premature death; the discernment of an economic model that is truly sustainable; the planning of an economy that is circular, prophetic, solidary, friendly to the ecosystems and ancestral wisdoms of the people; all these require having clear criteria, such as those proposed by the Pastoral Letter of

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CELAM, *Missionary disciples, custodians of the “common home:” discernment of the light of Laudato Si’*.

For example, faced with the mining, oil, agro-industrial, traffic, and hydroelectric mega-projects that threaten Pan-Amazonia, it is fundamental to respond to these questions that Pope Francis formulates, “In order to discern if it will support a true integral development: For what? Why? Where? When? In what manner? For whom? What are the risks? At what cost? Who pays the costs, and how will he do it?”²⁷ From this perspective, the Bishop of Rome continues, affirming that:

In this test, there are questions that must have priority. For example, we know that water is a scarce and indispensable resource and is a fundamental right that conditions the exercise of other human rights. That is indubitable and overrides all analysis of environmental impact on a region.²⁸

Regarding the economic model, it is clear that a substantial change is needed. The Pope advocates for “the promotion of a circular economy and a focus on “reduce, reuse, recycle” in accordance with sustainable consumption and the models of production promoted in the 12th Sustainable Development Goal of the United Nations,”²⁹ and invites us, with urgency, to imagine “the global energy transition in a way that takes into account all the peoples of the Earth, as well as future generations and all species and ecosystems,” with

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the horizon of “eliminating poverty and hunger” and under the guideline that “the majority of fossil fuels be kept underground,” and the consciousness that “the demand for a continual economic growth has brought with it grave ecological and social consequences, given that our present

²⁵ *Laudato Si’*, 118.

²⁶ 2 Peter 3:13.

²⁷ *Laudato Si’* 185.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ Francis. *Speech to the participants in the Encounter promoted by the Dicastery for Integral Human Development on the mining industry*. Vatican, 3 May 2019.

prosperous economic system is increasingly owed to a rise in extraction, consumption, and waste.”
“Civilization requires energy, but the use of energy should not destroy civilization!”³⁰

This involves expanding the outlook to “limiting technology, guiding it, and placing it at the service of another type of progress that is healthier, more human, more social, more integral.”³¹
Liberation from the reigning technocratic paradigm is achieved when, for example:

Communities of small producers opt for systems of production that are less pollutant, sustaining a model of life, of joy, and of coexistence that is not consumerist. Or when technology is oriented primarily to resolving concrete problems of others, with passion for helping others to live with more dignity and less suffering...”³²

For this same reason, “It is not possible to think of uniform prescriptions, because there are specific problems and limits in every country or region.”³³ It is possible to implement “measurements and technologies of transition, as long as they are accompanied by the framing and acceptance of gradual binding commitments.”³⁴

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But at the national and local levels there is always much to do. The Pope says, “It is so much, what can indeed be done!”³⁵ for example:

- Promoting forms of energy saving. That includes favoring forms of industrial production with maximum energy efficiency and a smaller quantity of raw material, removing from the market products that are little effective from the energy point of view or that are more pollutant.
- A good process of transport or forms of construction and sanitation of buildings that reduce energy consumption and their level of pollution.
- Local political action directed toward the modification of consumption, the development of an economy of residues and recycling, the protection of species, and the programming of a diversified agriculture with crop rotation.
- Encourage the agricultural improvement of poor regions through investments in rural infrastructure, in organization of the local or national market, in irrigation systems, in development of sustainable agricultural technologies.
- Facilitate forms of cooperation or of community organization that defend the interests of small producers and preserve the local ecosystems from depredation.³⁶

³⁰ Francis. *Speech to the participants in the conference “Energy transition and the care for our common home.”* Vatican, 9 June 2018.

³¹ *Laudato Si’*, 112.

³² *Ibidem.*

³³ *Laudato Si’*, 180.

³⁴ *Ibidem.*

³⁵ *Ibidem.*

³⁶ Cf. *Laudato Si’*, 180.

In this setting, the implementation of an ecological economy, in which the protagonists, both of the changes on the human scale, and of the productive landscapes, environmentally conserved and economically prosperous, are the

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rural and indigenous families, is a critical task for the ecclesial communities.

What is fundamental is to become conscious of “the defects of an economic system whose principal motor is profit, where man is seen as subordinate to capital, becoming a piece of the immense productive machine, his job being reduced to simple merchandise at the mercy of the vicissitudes of the law of supply and demand.”³⁷ Moreover, “the respect owed to the environment must always be guarded above exclusively economic interests or those of abusive exploitation of resources in lands and seas.”³⁸

In this order of ideas, in the ecclesiastical jurisdictions of Pan-Amazonia, communitarian plans of life can be implemented, with a focus on abundance, and which are inspired by the Tree of Life, a mystical narrative that coincides with the purpose of the Gospel.



Image text (clockwise from top): Processing, Commercialization, Water, Soil, Forest, Seeds, Plants, Animals

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The circle of agro-ecological sustainability one of the pedagogical tools of learning developed to drive the said changes, under a systemic focus on abundance. Its bases are formed by water, soil, the forest, and seeds. The crops, livestock, processing, and commercialization complete the circle of environmental, alimentary, and economic cycle. However, so that all the aforementioned may have sustainability in time and space, it becomes necessary to have the presence and interaction of the rural and indigenous family, forger of values, talents, hopes, and dreams of life (see graphic on the previous page).

³⁷ John Paul II. *Speech to the indigenous people in Izamal, Yucatán*. 11 August 1993.

³⁸ John Paul II. *Speech to the representatives of the Amerindian peoples in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic*. 12 October 1992.

Another of the strategies to pass through scarcity to abundance has been the construction of the Plan of Life, combined with Agroforestry Systems and the Living Classroom³⁹ on behalf of the Platform of Amazonia and Orinoquia (PAO).

The Plan of Life helps the community to determine what crops and livestock to prioritize, emphasizing processing and commercialization as a local strategy to earn aggregated value, generate employment, improve family incomes, and favor family and collective organization.

For its part, Agroforestry Systems and the Living Classroom constitute a bold tool of co-creation and re-creation of ancestral knowledge and practices, able to recover in the brevity of time the seed, the nourishment, the mildness of the climate, and the vindication of rights, especially of the indigenous peoples. It is, moreover, a space of coexistence,

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communion, and interaction of the human being with the cooperative farm, in which come together the interchange of seeds, group work, and the consumption of rich native food, with the rites, the dances, the poetry, the songs, and the joy of children, youth, women, and men, united by a single collective goal of living well and abundantly.

The aforementioned tools of sociopolitical empowerment have helped the indigenous and rural peoples recover the nourishment, the economy, the wisdom, the unity, the autonomy, and the confidence, in favor of conservation, administration, and the defense of the rain forest, whose sustainability involves reconnecting with the real essence of their history, their ancestor, their culture, their spirituality, their worldview, and their territory, from which come forth strength and living memory.

With their testimonies of life, their solidary economy, their ingenuity, their capacity for affection, and their well-being, they make us see that one of the greatest contributions to social sustainability and the sustainability of a collaborative economy sprouts from their own human roots, homes, and territories, precisely there, where is still heard the voice of the springs, the rivers, and the forests; the voice of the wild fauna, of the indigenous knowledge, of the colored African, and of the empowered peasant. It is there where one begins to think that the richness of the rainforests, more than being in monocultures, petroleum, ranching, and mining, is in their people, their water, their nourishment, and their territory.

In this sense, the processes of an ecological economy must attend, first of all, to the fundamental necessities, promoting the focus on local development, the non-monetary economy, reciprocity, solidarity, and the common good above

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the particular. In other words, to tend toward the economy of care and responsible consumption.

³⁹ The Agro-ecological Cosmopolitan Cooperative, or the Paths of Identity Foundation (FUCAI), are some of the spaces that have implemented this type of practice of ecological economy. Developing these initiatives that already exist in every country in Amazonia is a path of interconnection and coherence.

This whole concept of an economy that is collaborative and, in general, protective of life, then indicates a profound difference in the face of the search for immediate profit, based on the economy of extraction, despoiling, and disposal. As has been mentioned, the ancestral wisdoms have achieved productive systems that can be and are sustained without mercilessly chopping down the jungle, mixed with an economy of the quotidian, with the rhythms of a spirituality of reciprocity and harmony that maintains the biome's equilibrium, with a feeling of coexistence in a great common village.

When we expand the outlook on the great Amazon watershed and the world like it, it is shown that the dominant universal model of development goes through all possible dimensions. From the economic, the market governs all without care for the concentration of wealth and growing inequality. From the environment, it is confirmed that the law of the market is above all the goods of creation, and that, in effect, ecological disequilibrium and climate change exacerbate the global human drama. From the sociopolitical, it is observed that everything revolves around the economic agenda and that capital, in turn, becomes the motor that sets up democracies and debilitates institutions. As a result, it is observed that the mercantilization of culture, in its intent to homogenize and universalize the consumption and thought of the people, at the cost of losing authenticity, identity, and autonomy, appears as the highest value of free competition and of the free market.

Facing all these models of development that infringe upon nourishment, the habitat, the economy, and

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one's own human existence, it is imperative to find alternatives of more local impact, which permit us to return to the origin and, with it, recover hope. This return, from the agro-ecological experiences—mentioned above—, involves stripping ourselves of many distractions, restrictions, and mental ties that put creativity, intuition, and imagination to sleep, in exchange for understanding and recognizing again the virtues, with wisdoms, and the worldviews existing among the ancestral tribes, which still retain the ability to read and conceive of nature as the true mother. It is imperative to conceive, likewise, of the tropical forests as a living library, a living supermarket, a living pharmacy, the best hostel, the cathedral of life, and our true home of life.

1.4 The processes of ecological education and spirituality in the Amazonian context.

The contemplation and custody of the biome in its biodiversity, valuing, protecting, and assimilating the ancestral wisdoms of the indigenous peoples, conduce to the implementation of an ecological economy that promotes the plenitude of life in Amazonia. These processes are intertwined with the ecological conversion (integral and radical) that makes possible the transition from a throwaway culture to a culture of care. As Pope Francis lays out in Chapter 6 of *Laudato Si'*, the first step in an ecological education is to bet on another style of life,⁴⁰ distancing oneself

⁴⁰ Cf. *Laudato Si'*, 203.

from the mechanisms of a compulsive and obsessive consumerism that is the reflection of the technoeconomic paradigm. But the goal point of an environmental education

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is to “dispose ourselves take that leap towards the Mystery, from whence an ecological ethic acquires its deeper sense.”⁴¹ This sacred experience is verified in solidarity, responsibility, and care based on compassion.

When we speak of “Amazonizing” the Church, it is not only to put on the ecclesial agenda the strategic value of the biome, but a sense of life that is temperate and happy, communitarian and solidary, in search of abundance and peace. It is the bridge to arrive at a “*Laudato Si*’-ification” of society, understanding by it the attitude of praise (Be Thou praised!) that joyfully binds every creature with its Creator. Only by recovering that capacity for astonishment, admiration, mystical perplexity before the miracle of life revealed in Amazonia, is it possible to become sensitized, be moved, be indignant in the face of the destruction of every species, experience their extinction “as if it were a mutilation,”⁴² experience something similar in the face of the “disappearance of a culture,”⁴³ and become aware that “because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God with their existence, nor will they be able to communicate their own message to us.”⁴⁴

Only by having compassion on the creation of which we are a part⁴⁵ can we implement personal and community actions, in the spirit of the “good Samaritan” who committed himself to that fallen man on the road. To care is to treat, is to heal. Our sister, Mother Earth, has been assaulted,

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violated, maltreated, and therefore the ecological attitude has economic implications: “Look after him, and, if you spend anything more, I will pay it to you when I return.”⁴⁶

The eco-pedagogical itineraries—which is to say, accompaniment to learn to live and coexist as the family of God in the common home—are based on a culture of encounter. In the Pan-Amazon territory, there are hidden, isolated, uncontacted cultures; there are others that absolutely reject Western civilization; there are others that relate with the Catholic Church as an ally, but with no intention of accepting the Gospel as a premise of life. There also exists an indigenous Church, made up of indigenous peoples who have accepted Christ and that interweaves their ancestral wisdoms with the “good news” of the Kingdom of God. In each one of those scenarios, there is the possibility of learning that new style of life that *Laudato Si*’ proposes and that, in the majority of cases, is already a daily experience in the Amazonian communities.

⁴¹ *Laudato Si*’, 210.

⁴² *Laudato Si*’, 89.

⁴³ *Laudato Si*’, 145.

⁴⁴ *Laudato Si*’, 33.

⁴⁵ Francis. *Message for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation*. 1 September 2016.

⁴⁶ Luke 10:35.

If every parish in Amazonia resolves to become an eco-parish.⁴⁷ If every temple, every pastoral center, every school, changes into a living classroom to put into practice the new style of life, there will be an experiential niche so that the communities may begin to take on ecological conversion. It is taught by example. Integral ecological coherence is the principal evangelizing testimony.

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In this same sense, the dioceses, parishes, and religious congregations, can consider divestment of money in the financial sector that favors projects that threaten the health of the Amazonian territories, in order to invest in those entities that strengthen an alternative, solidary, circular, and prophetic economy. Education should reach the roots of cultures and firmly confront the technocratic paradigm, irresponsible anthropocentrism, and moral relativism.

To live *Laudato Si'* in the Amazonian context is the fundamental premise to transform mentalities, attitudes, and behaviors. A Church with an Amazonian face expresses in its own way the spirituality that sustains it. To accomplish the task, it works with concepts and images of the everyday, that make up its existence, in communion with nature. Jesus did so when He spoke of the Kingdom of God, of the Father, of the “good news” of salvation and liberation, through the use of parables and symbolic gestures.

In telling who we are, our mission, and the spirituality that nourishes us, using analogies of the Amazon, we feel that we touch upon the mystery of God, without having the pretension of explaining everything. Because the Trinity is an inexhaustible fount of meaning, every time that we come close, like Moses before the burning bush, we revere the God of life, the burning fire that heats and illumines without being consumed, the inexhaustible fount of life for us and for the rest of creatures.

⁴⁷ See, for example, the Global Catholic Climate Movement’s *Guide of Eco-Parishes* (<https://catholicclimatemovement.global/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/GCCM-Eco-Parish-Guide-English.pdf>) [The original text links to the Spanish version: https://catholicclimatemovement.global/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Guia_de_Eco-Parroquias.pdf], or *Bandera Azul Ecológica Eclesial* (<https://banderaazulecologica.org/landing-de-categorias/eclesial-ecologica>) [website in Spanish], or *Green Church* [*Iglesia Verde*] (<https://egliseverte.org>) [website in French].

2. INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Introduction

On the political scene, dark clouds loom over the Amazon and its inhabitants. Precisely in this critical moment, the voice of Pope Francis, through the Synod for the Amazon, comes to encounter the indigenous peoples, not to defend privileges, but to support them in the defense of their rights and territories in Greater Amazonia. What is happening today with the peoples of the Amazon is political, economic, ecological, and pastorally relevant for the whole world.

For the study of the indigenous peoples in the Amazon, five axes have been selected: (1) territoriality; (2) incarnation/enculturation; (3) interreligious dialogue; (4) reciprocity; and (5) paschal life. These axes are inspired by the Amazonian reality, by the listening to the indigenous peoples, and by

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many writings and encounters of Pope Francis, but, above all, his speech-summary of 19 January 2018 to the representatives of the peoples of the Amazon and their current bishops at the event in Puerto Maldonado, Peru.

Territoriality

For the indigenous peoples, the land has a mystical-spiritual and material value, like one's own life, which is sacred, and it is given to them to live in it as the People of God and to coexist in justice and fraternity with everything that has been created by God. Pope Francis warns and recognizes—as has already been said—that, “probably, never before have the indigenous Amazonian peoples been so threatened in their territories as they are now. The Amazon is a land disputed from several fronts. [...] The defense of the land has no other purpose than the defense of life.”⁴⁸

Fraternal coexistence with the land is threatened by the system of life based on the exploitation of the land and its inhabitants. To reverse this situation, it is necessary to become aware of the gravity of the threats, and the presence of defenders is required. God is the first defender of that land that is life. To be close to His threatened creation, He dwells among us, which permits us to understand the land as a “theological place.”

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Incarnation/Enculturation

⁴⁸ Francis. *Encounter with the Peoples of Amazonia*. Puerto Maldonado, 19 January 2018.

The great separations and diversities of the Amazon warn of a danger of a cultural neocolonialism, of administrative centralization, and of a unilateral vision of human thought. These three dangers also affect the conduct of the region's own Church, and the Pope asks indigenous leaders to help overcome these dangers:

The culture of our peoples is a sign of life. The Amazon, in addition to being a reserve of biodiversity, is also a cultural reserve that should be preserved in the face of the new colonialisms. [...] Help your bishops, help your men and women missionaries, so that they become one with you, and thus dialoguing among all, you can express a Church with an Amazonian face and a Church with an indigenous face.⁴⁹

The results of this Synod also need to be enculturated. After the Synod:

The phase of its implementation must follow it, with the goal of initiating, in all the particular Churches, the reception of the synodal conclusions, accepted by the Roman Pontiff [...]. It is necessary in that regard to be very clear that the cultures are very different between themselves and any general principle [...] must be enculturated if it is to be observed and applied.⁵⁰

It does not attempt to be faithful to formulas that do not transmit the substance: "Let us remember that the expression of the truth can be multiform."⁵¹ A Church with an indigenous face will be a Church that is postcolonial, pluralistic, and close to the respective local cultures,

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taking into account that not only the Amazon, but the world is a multiethnic, multicultural, and multireligious reality.

Interreligious Dialogue

To coexist in peace, the world, in its multiplicity of ethnic groups, cultures, and religions, demands dialogue. In the pluralistic world of the religions of Amazonia, the Catholic Church is a minority that demands to follow in all its action the evangelical example of the "good Samaritan," who came from Jerusalem, but not from the Temple, and whose presence works in favor of the life of that man who fell into the hands of robbers. In the "other" we recognize the presence of God. "Recognition and dialogue will be the best path to transform the historical relations marked by exclusion and discrimination."⁵²

Pope Francis thanked the indigenous leaders for their "diverse face" that is a "reflection of this land" of Pan-Amazonia: "A diverse face, of an infinite variety and of an enormous biological,

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ *Episcopalis Communio*, 7.

⁵¹ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 41.

⁵² Francis. *Encounter with the Peoples of Amazonia*. Puerto Maldonado, 19 January 2018.

cultural, and spiritual richness.”⁵³ The exercise of recognition of the “other” in his own historical and cultural context is sometimes difficult. But there is no alternative. Whoever rejects dialogue opts for hostile silence and war. Thus, the Pope considers it “essential to conduct efforts to create institutional spaces of respect, recognition, and dialogue with the native peoples; assuming and rescuing the culture, language, traditions, rights, and spirituality that belong to them.”⁵⁴

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Reciprocity

Dialogue with the “other” does not always flow easily, but it benefits us with the grace of gifts and abilities present in the life of the “other.” This intercultural and interreligious reciprocity broadens our horizon and permits us, in the diversity of paths, to encounter God.

Faced with the diversity of the peoples represented in Puerto Maldonado, the Pope indicated the riches that we receive through coexistence with others: “Each culture and each worldview that receives the Gospel enriches the Church with the vision of a new facet of the face of Christ.”⁵⁵

Reciprocity also invites us to renounce privileges and prejudices that consider our own cultural autonomy to give us the right to act as a guardian of the religion and the culture of the “other.” It points out the debt of a reciprocity, delayed for more than 500 years, with a current face of missionaries and anthropologists, which is still not Amazonian. The Pope observed it when he said, “I also congratulate all those young people of the indigenous peoples who make an effort to make, from their own point of view, a new anthropology and who work to re-read the history of their peoples from their perspective.”⁵⁶

Paschal Life

Easter is the hope that has conquered the despair of death. Easter introduces us into a new dimension of *territoriality*. We were not abandoned by God. He remains

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Among us, *incarnated* in the unassuming places, in the manger and on the cross. He left us his Word as a gift, not to shut it up in vaults of truth, but to share it in *dialogues* and encounters, where it reveals its true content in the *reciprocity* of giving and receiving. Life is received by giving, in resistance, in hope, and in gratuitousness. When taking leave of the indigenous leaders, Pope Francis reaffirmed “a sincere choice for the defense of life, defense of the land, and defense of

⁵³ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁴ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁶ *Ibidem.*

cultures.”⁵⁷ Life shall conquer death; hope shall conquer despair: “It is just to recognize that there exist inspiring initiatives that emerge from your same bases and your organizations.”⁵⁸

The faces of the Amazon have cultural and social characteristics. Some remind us of the beauty of creation and of the resurrected Jesus; in others we recognize “the suffering traits of Christ.”⁵⁹ The Synod for the Amazon considers with new rigor the challenges of the acceptance of the sociocultural reality and of enculturation in the pastoral guidelines of today. The practices of integral ecology are also practices of an integral indigenous pastoral approach.⁶⁰ Pope John XXIII, with Vatican II, opened the windows of the Church. Pope Francis opened the door to the “Church on the way out,” following the Teacher, who is “way, truth, and life.”⁶¹

2.1 Territoriality: The Territory as a Theological Place

In the Old Testament of the Bible, the People of God wanted to live in a land that God had promised them and in which they would have to live according to “His” plan. The land is holy,⁶² and, consequently, they had to inhabit it in justice and fraternal solidarity.

Injustice and corruption destroy not just the relation with the land and between the inhabitants who form a people, but also the relations with God Himself, the true owner of the land. To live truly as the People of God in justice and equality, the Hebrews divided the land among their peers and constantly renewed that equity every seven years⁶³ with the sabbath year, and every fifty years⁶⁴ with the jubilee year. In that way, the inhabitants also rested from their work every seven days (*shabath*) since the Creator Himself rested on the seventh day of His creative work.⁶⁵

The Bible tells us that we live in an umbilical relationship with the earth: we have been made from the earth,⁶⁶ and our Pope Francis confirms it in saying in his encyclical *Laudato Si'* that “we are earth.”⁶⁷ This affirmation makes us change the traditional conception of our relationship with the earth. The human being cannot be owner and proprietor of the earth, but both are destined to form part of the mystery of life. The Pope—like his patron, Francis of Assisi—calls the

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earth “our sister,” with which we lead a shared existence: the “common home.” In that sense, it is also “our Mother that embraces us in her arms.”⁶⁸ The indigenous Amazonian peoples to this day

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁹ *Puebla Document*, 31.

⁶⁰ Cf. *Aparecida Document*, 176; *Evangelii Gaudium*, 88.

⁶¹ John 14:6.

⁶² Cf. Amos 8:7.

⁶³ Cf. Leviticus 25:1–4.

⁶⁴ Cf. Leviticus 25:10.

⁶⁵ Cf. Genesis 2:2–3; Exodus 20:10; 16:23.

⁶⁶ Cf. Genesis 2:7.

⁶⁷ *Laudato Si'*, 2.

⁶⁸ *Laudato Si'*, 1.

have preserved this relation of pertinence and participation with the life of the earth: it forms a part of their identity.⁶⁹

However, today, modern society no longer maintains that relationship with the earth. Modern society has changed its vision: the earth has been degraded into an object, into merchandise; it shares the destiny of the maltreated poor, being exploited, devastated, and poisoned; in such a calamitous situation, together with the entire creation, it “groans and suffers birth pains.”⁷⁰ What right do we have to treat it thus, if it precedes us and has been given to us as a gift?⁷¹

In that sense, the earth is also the site where life occurs, where we relate with others, where we express our identity through culture, and it is also the place where our material (economic, political, social) and symbolic (spiritual, religious, psychological, identitarian) interactions are established, yielding as a result the notion of territory.

Territory is much more than a concatenation of mechanical equilibria where people play a role as interchangeable particles. It is, rather, the place where life acquires meaning, and in which God is experienced in

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history. A God who has willed to take on the territorial condition to be one with us and to take on our joys, sorrows, and hopes, as a part of His project of incarnation.

In this, the territory is expressed as a theological place; it is a site where the relation occurs with the “other,” with the site from which I come and everything that makes it up, and with the divine. In the tradition of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola, God watches the people upon the face of the earth (in the territory), recognizes the enormous diversity, and discovers the loss of meaning and of direction of many women and men who are true daughters and sons, on account of which God Himself experiences internally the desire to “work the redemption of the human race.” And, so that this may be possible, He becomes territorialized, which is to say, He becomes incarnate.

This notion of territory as a theological place, which emanates from the Incarnation, is also true for the Amazonian communities, above all the indigenous peoples, who, even in their great diversity, experience the territory as a sacred place, where every living thing reveals the sacred, and where all vital dynamism expresses the presence of the diverse spirits that give meaning to their existence in search of a “good living.”

⁶⁹ Cf. *Laudato Si'*, 38.

⁷⁰ Romans 8:22; cf. *Laudato Si'*, 2.

⁷¹ Cf. *Laudato Si'*, 67.

The territory is a place of the Epiphany⁷² because there is manifested the reserve of life and wisdom for the planet as caresses from God.⁷³

2.2 Incarnation/Enculturation

The great geographic distances and the cultural diversity of the Amazon also produced great pastoral differences. “In order to hear the indigenous peoples and all the communities that live in the Amazon, like the first interlocutors of this Synod [...] we need a closer coexistence.”⁷⁴ The great pastoral efforts of the post-conciliar Church in the Amazon have not managed to completely overcome its colonial past in its structures, observances, and theologies, or to construct Churches that are closer, decentralized, and with an Amazonian face. The mystery of the incarnation, the practice of enculturation and decentralization, and the social policy of solidarity, as integral parts of an “integral ecology,”⁷⁵ can guide toward the real overcoming of those distances and motivate, following the proposal of the Synod, the “new paths for the Church and for an integral ecology.”

Jesus, according to His human nature, was born in Bethlehem and was raised in Nazareth, where He obtained a social existence (He was enculturated) in the culture of His parents. Up to here there was no enculturation in a foreign culture. He learned from infancy His own culture, as we do. As a Divine person, however, we can say analogically that He came out of His “Divine fatherland” and was enculturated in His “human fatherland.” His “Divine fatherland” was not just another country or continent, but another reality, understood in our Faith as a totally different reality, where He was “begotten, not made” (*genitum non factum*).

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“Since the beginning of the world, in a particular way since the Incarnation, the mystery of Christ operates in a hidden manner in conjunction with natural reality.”⁷⁶ “In the fullness of the mystery of the Incarnation, He wanted to arrive at our intimacy. [...] United to the Incarnate Son, present in the Eucharist, the whole cosmos gives thanks to God. In effect, the Eucharist is in itself an act of cosmic love.”⁷⁷ By bringing us close to enculturation, the Incarnation addresses an analogy of this love, of “an analogy that is not mediocre” as *Lumen Gentium* clarifies.⁷⁸

Otherness, which is the third concept in discussion in this text, is closely bound with identity. In a multicultural context or one of cultural hegemony, the taking on of one’s own otherness is essential. The Amazonian peoples, indigenous and non-indigenous, require us to continually resist against any attempt to destroy their identity/otherness for assimilation or integration under the dominant cultural patrons, corrupted by the perspective of wealth, growth, and acceleration. The most laudatory news from the conquerors about the conquered peoples, in

⁷² ERCRILA. Team of Reflection on Indigenous Cultures and Religions of Latin America. [Equipo de Reflexión sobre Culturas y Religiones Indígenas de Latinoamérica.] Latin American Jesuits, 2019.

⁷³ Cf. *Laudato Si'*, 84.

⁷⁴ Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops. *Preparatory Document of the Synod for Amazonia*, 4. 2018.

⁷⁵ Cf. *Laudato Si'*, 87–162.

⁷⁶ *Laudato Si'*, 99.

⁷⁷ *Laudato Si'*, 236.

⁷⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

the 16th century, was that they—the indigenous peoples—all do “as we do.” In Brazil, they assisted at the first Mass celebrated by Br. Henrique de Coimbra “like us,” and they knelt “like us.” On the cultural plane, the reduction of the diversity of the indigenous peoples, the integration into the hegemonic project, in the imitation of the dominant culture were the demands of a colonial reasoning. Many peoples did not accept to lay down their life

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in the reduction-integration-imitation tripod and were massacred; others took on Christianity as a “strategic religion” in order to relation diplomatically with the evolving society.

Because of the Incarnation, as a prototype analogue of enculturation, God wove anew a broken interrelation between the Creator and the creature, redeemed humanity, nature, the planet Earth, and the whole cosmos. “Redeem” means to put oneself in communication, make humanity and nature newly “close.” The closeness makes possible that everything and all people be in reciprocal service in the interior of an “integral ecology.”⁷⁹ And this “demands that we sit down to think and to argue about the conditions of life and the survival of a society, with honesty, to call into doubt models of development, production, and consumption. It is not better to insist on that everything is interconnected,”⁸⁰ including “the intimate relation between the poor and the fragility of the plant.”⁸¹

“The Pan-Amazonian society is multiethnic, multicultural, and multireligious.”⁸² The cultural diversity points toward a more real enculturation or incarnation, specifically for the assumption of the modes of life and the cultures in their diversity. “In the pastoral order, the principle of the Incarnation formulated by St. Irenæus continues to be valid: what is not taken on is not redeemed.”⁸³

“Incarnation” and “enculturation” will reestablish a communicative, loving, and servant proximity between God,

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humanity, and nature. Neither the Gospel nor the evangelists have a cultural monopoly:

It would do justice to the logic of the Incarnation to think of a monocultural and monotone Christianity. Even though it is true that some cultures have been closely tied to the preaching of the Gospel and to the development of a Christian thought, the revealed message does not identify with any of them and has a trans-cultural content. Because of it, in the evangelization of new cultures or of cultures that have not received Christian preaching, it is not indispensable to impose a determinate cultural form, on account of however much more antique or beautiful it sounds,

⁷⁹ Cf. *Laudato Si'*, 137ss.

⁸⁰ *Laudato Si'*, 138.

⁸¹ *Laudato Si'*, 16; cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 216.

⁸² *Aparecida Document*, 86.

⁸³ *Puebla Document*, 400.

along with the proposal of the Gospel. The message that we announce has some cultural apparel, but at times in the Church, we fall into the vain sacralization of our own culture, with which we can show more fanaticism than authentic evangelizing fervor.⁸⁴

The Gospel and the magisterium of the Church will open the doors so that the Synod can opt for a Church with an Amazonian face, an Incarnate and encultured Church that takes on the otherness of the local cultures in their pastoral activities, liturgical expressions, and languages.

2.3 Interreligious Dialogue

*“There will not be peace between nations without peace between religions.
There will not be peace between religions without dialogue between religions”
(Hans Küng).*

We know that religion constitutes that heart of the culture of each people and that it becomes an inspiring spring that influences conscience together with the current that sociocultural reality exerts.

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The present world is profoundly “multi-religious,” and Christianity is a minority in that network. With all the more reason, we must put into practice interreligious dialogue in which both parties make use of and are nourished by a mutual collaboration in interdependence.

In that exercise, we must not forget that for any dialogue, there are certain presuppositions. One of them, the most important, is that both interlocutors feel that they are part of a whole that they are seeking and, at least, puts them in a relationship. It is necessary to understand the “other” in the context of his own worldview.⁸⁵

Knowledge of the religion of the “other” promotes their understanding and comprehension and increases their acceptance. One should not expect to convince them, but to respect him in their diversity so that it is possible to mutually open new horizons and discover and recognize the universal importance of the diversity of religions. Almost all religions have intrinsically the “Golden Rule,”⁸⁶ which contains the practice of one same ethic, both inside and outside one’s religious circle.

The cultures, marked by their religions, enclose a whole worldview of life, of humanity, and of the divine world. It is important that the interlocutors of different religions keep this aspect in mind in order to understand the point and that they see it inside its context. Both interlocutors should respect that “each one of us is the fruit of a thought

⁸⁴ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 117.

⁸⁵ Cf. *Laudato Si'*, 78.

⁸⁶ The Golden Rule says: treat others as you want them to treat you.

of God;”⁸⁷ therefore, an interreligious dialogue should necessarily be at the same time an intercultural dialogue.

With Vatican Council II, interreligious dialogue received a strong propulsion and a new importance. Recently, Francis affirmed that we must assume the “culture of dialogue”⁸⁸ as a path to arrive at peace. Reciprocal knowledge of the religion of the “other” makes it possible to discern some transcultural values, like, for example: the recognition that it is of the same God that they are speaking; also the recognition that the pluralism and the diversity of religions are expressions of a wise Divine will, which carries us to the encounter of a “human fraternity,” which is realized coexisting in diversity. This Divine wisdom must be recognized as a source of the right to be different and as a source of justice, based on mercy, on the way toward a life worthy of all.

We conclude that interreligious dialogue means to meet in the space of common human, spiritual, and social values. Interreligious dialogue is based on the theology of religious pluralism; therefore, one must care for and cultivate one’s own sources and experiences and, at the same time, be open to receiving a new focus in that dialogue. Dialogue must always be at the service of building fraternity, beginning from the same conviction that “God has created us to know ourselves, to cooperate amongst ourselves, and to live as brothers who love one another.”⁸⁹

2.4 Reciprocity: A gift to care for life and for the world.

[HW: *Caveat lector*: the following paragraphs refer to God in a manner that is at least proximate to, if not actually, blasphemy.]

The Pan-Amazon region is inhabited by many indigenous peoples. They possess their sacred histories, languages, knowledges, traditions, spiritualities, and theologies. They all seek to build a “good living” and communion of the persons among themselves, with the world, with living beings, and with the Creator-Creatress. They feel themselves living well in the “home” that the Creator-Creatress entrusted them, the Earth. The wisdoms of each people, in recognition and respect of the goods received, perform diverse rituals and ceremonies of songs, dances, and corporal paintings. They perform rituals of protection of human life, of nature, of living beings, and of the world in general.

The Earth, understood as “home,” is a place to live-dwell, a space of familial coexistence, of care for life, of the growing of human qualities, of sharing life, of nourishment, of dreams, of joy, of worry, sadness, and overcoming difficulties. It is a space for procreation, for love, affection, welcome, hospitality, and pardon. That communion is marked by reciprocity. Each people sets it in its own way. Among the Guaraní, for example, reciprocity is expressed with the word *jopói*: open hands for each other. Anthropologists distinguish “gratuitous reciprocity,” “balanced reciprocity,” and “negative reciprocity” (rather, vengeance, which is also the price of things).

⁸⁷ *Laudato Si’*, 65.

⁸⁸ Francis. *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Common Coexistence*, prepared by the Muslims of the East and West together with the Catholic Church of the East and West.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*.

“Gratuitous reciprocity” is one of the great values of the indigenous peoples of the Amazon. It originates in the comprehension that each people is born of one some ancestral Father-Mother.

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They are brothers and sisters, inhabitants of the same “home.” All persons assume the responsibility of securing the good of the “home,” of the life of those who live there, and of the spaces where they conduct work, fishing, hunting, etc.

Reciprocity lived as “reciprocal responsibility” gives rise to the “good living” of a people, harmony with itself and with others. The practice of “distribution” and “payment” of human goods, material and immaterial (spirits) is the manifestation of reciprocity. It contributes so that one feels good, feels the desire to offer a good for other people, and to ask for that which he needs. Thus, trust and generosity grow and are strengthened.

Reciprocity creates satisfied communities, gives vitality, unity, fraternity, enthusiasm, participation, and pardon. Reciprocity is the heart/soul of the community. It is a guarantee of quality of personal and community life.

The sharing of nourishment during community meals is the expression of reciprocity. It is practiced among many indigenous peoples. It creates joy of living as members of a community. All collaborate of the benefit of life. The brothers and sisters who are original leaders and chosen leaders encourage, care for, and motivate their brethren. They safeguard the continuity of the life and values inherited from their grandfathers and grandmothers.

Reciprocity, understood as gratuitousness, is the donation of the person himself and the donation of material goods obtained through the sweat of work, sacrifice, perseverance, and persistence. These attitudes show the maturity of persons, leaving them happy, welcomed, welcomers, valued, and loved.

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Reciprocity helps to live well as individuals, families, and members of one same people. It allows the deepening, more and more, of the value of the practice of fraternity and the growth of the spirit of family. It fortifies that union of persons, making them strong from ethnic or interethnic unity.

Reciprocity combats individualism, egoism, and self-absorption, through plainness and humility. Each person feels at ease sharing what he possesses and valuing the other person, in accord with his condition. Those who possess material goods share them for the good of the people of the community, and those who do not feel supported by the community. Participation and their personal presence in the community is also reciprocity. Humility is the capacity to appear as one is, with what he possesses and what he does not possess. It is the capacity to overcome egoism, envy, fear, and embarrassment.

The reciprocity practiced by the indigenous peoples can enrich understanding of the gratuitousness of the message of the Gospel of Jesus, not only on a discursive level, but as a practical value. It is a Divine value that the indigenous peoples, under Divine inspiration and ancestral wisdom, construct: the project of life that guarantees harmony and equilibrium among themselves, with the Creator-Creatress, with the world, and with living beings.

[HW: The original Spanish of the previous paragraph uses the term *Creador-Creador*, which would be literally rendered ‘Creator-Creator,’ but this is almost certainly an error for intended *Creador-Creadora*, used in the preceding paragraphs, which is translated ‘Creator-Creatress’ throughout.]

The reciprocity put forth by the indigenous peoples points to their “good living” and to living in plenitude, according to the Kingdom of God, already here on the Earth, in their territories, with their modes of life. Reciprocity, as proposed of the Kingdom of God on Earth, has on its horizon the construction of a communal life, of the good and the defense of human life, of nature, of the world, and of all living beings.

2.5 Paschal Life: Resistance, Martyrdom, and the Kingdom of God

The indigenous peoples’ resistance, martyrdom, and the Kingdom of God have something in common: the surrender of one’s own life for a greater cause: the life of the suffering, of the persecuted. And it seems that the Kingdom of God is built in the demands and needs of the peoples. To tell the truth in these circumstances and to commit oneself to it has a price that must be paid. This is the Amazon: a territory of sorrow and of offer, a theological place where the Pascha of Jesus is brought up to date. For thousands of years, in a tremendously hostile context, these peoples have been able to live there. They made life possible, even as “good living.”

2.5.1 Resistance

The UN declared the year 1993 the year of indigenous peoples. There exist in the world 300 million indigenous peoples, and 90% live in poverty. But they contribute cultural diversity.

In this sense, to understand the present situation of poverty and marginalization of indigenous peoples, statistics, indices of nutrition, of mortality, or of education—which can help—are not enough, but we must appeal to historical and cultural analysis of the peoples. At the root—for the sake of brevity—we can say that it is about an identity denied to the indigenous peoples of these lands. An identity that was denied as a historical, political, social, cultural, and religious project of the Indian peoples. What seemed to be the case in the 16th century, given the circumstances and the ideology of those times, was the impossibility of an intercultural encounter

between two or more peoples and the inability on the part of the conqueror to accompany the project of the nation and of the indigenous peoples of Latin America.

The most dreadful part was this: the cutting off of the historical project that each people had forged for thousands of years with its own worldview. In effect, when the conquerors and missionaries arrived here, they did not meet Indians in the “New World,” but the only thing they found was Nahuatl, Mayans, Quechuas, Aymara, Guaraní, Tuyucas, etc. Each people with its historical project, with the glories, problems, and vicissitudes of every living being that walks and makes history.

It is not enough then to see the little piece of history that contains the last 527 years, but our vision should span the 25,000 or 30,000 years that these peoples spent walking, creating culture, doing theology, and leaving behind them marvelous remnants of wisdom and strength, as we can appreciate on the whole continent.

Throughout history these peoples have resisted hunger, illnesses, wars, assassinations—in Brazil alone in the year 2018, 180 persons were murdered—the looting of their resources, of their gold and of their silver; they have resisted discrimination and marginalization; they have received another religion that many times they felt to be imposed and a different faith, not negotiated, incorporating the best that they encountered of that new message in their ancestral wisdom. And above all, they have resisted time.

It is not true that with the conquest everything changed; there were profound changes, yes, but there are 290 indigenous peoples still standing in Amazonia with their culture and traditions, with their own language and their way of feeling God and creation, with

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their way of organizing and expressing themselves. It is a theology of resistance, resilience. They want to put an end to the indigenous peoples, but they transform themselves, they change. In Latin America and the Caribbean, 522 indigenous peoples resist.

In some of the continental summits of the indigenous peoples, they have denounced this situation with strong words:

We condemn that the national governments of the Americas are increasingly employing violent repression characterized by violations of our human rights and rights as peoples; the criminalization of our acts in defense of life and spiritual ceremonies; para-militarization; evacuations of our lands, military occupation; cooptation and corruption of local ruling authorities; promotion of projects that attempt to “compensate” for the damage that these transnational enterprises do; the supposed equitable distribution of benefits; forced migration; they promote division, confrontation, and armed clashes between communities in order to impose their exclusionary, racist, and oppressive policies.⁹⁰

2.5.2 Pascha-Martyrdom

⁹⁰ *Second Continental Summit of the Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of Abya Yala*. Quito, Ecuador Declaration. July 2004.

This resistance has had a very high cost in human lives, in suffering, but also in high costs of valor and of martyrdom. What are the deepest roots of martyrdom?

“Every martyrdom, at its heart, is an act of love,” Justin shared with us, a priest belonging to the Tuyuca people in the Brazilian Amazon. He who dies as a martyr does not seek sorrow, poverty, or death, but seeks life, bears the pain and suffering of those whom he makes his brothers, and because he

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so loves the life in those from whom it is snatched, he lays down his own. Thus did Vicente Cañas in Brazil.

The martyr is a lover of life in all its forms. Therefore, there are martyrs of ecology like in the Amazon region, martyrs of the *favelas* or in the fight for the land, martyrs for the cause of the fight against extractivist mining or in defense of water, martyrs for the defense of human rights, martyrs for the cause of justice and of peace like our St. Romero of the Americas.

[HW: N.B.: *favela* is the Portuguese term for a type of Brazilian slum, especially in Rio de Janeiro.]

And martyrdom is an explosion of life as a sign of the Kingdom; it touches a plenitude and a ministry of our Christian faith that we can only understand through the Jesus’ Pascha, His death and resurrection. Martyrdom is an interreligious sign of the Kingdom, open to all religions in which God is the center of all life. The Pan-Amazonian land, for having collected the blood of its so many martyrs, is truly “sacred land.”

3. New Paths for the Church

Introduction

In his speech in Puerto Maldonado, Pope Francis, after thanking those who have spread the Gospel with so much effort in the Amazonian lands, affirmed that today the Church of that region is called to traverse “new paths.” This conviction is not recent: it appears already in the title with which he decided to convoke this special Synod. What can indeed turn out to be surprising for many is his affirmation that this vocation to novelty is already present in the root of our memory as a believing people, in other words, in the original experience of Jesus Himself. Francis says, “Christ also became incarnate in a culture, the Hebrew culture, and starting from it, He gave Himself as a “novelty” to all peoples in such a way that each one, from its own

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identity, feels self-affirmed in Him.”⁹¹ Precisely because of this self-affirmation that the novelty of Jesus produces, “every culture and every worldview that receives the Gospel enriches the Church with the vision of a new facet of the face of Christ.”⁹² Therefore, in these lands and in this time also, concludes the Pope, “we need the indigenous peoples to culturally mold the local Amazonian Churches.”⁹³

With this Christological basis of his proposal for pastoral conversion for Amazonia, Pope Francis seeks to avoid its being interpreted as a strategy of the Church to win followers of the indigenous peoples in exchange for renouncing their deepest identity. This question of how to maintain ecclesial identity in a decidedly multicultural and postcolonial Church is precisely that which brings us to reassess the “paradigm shift” and “the return to the sources” that are at the heart of the Second Vatican Council. Only from the conciliar horizon can we understand what Francis proposes to us today for a Christian community that must take on with boldness its calling to transform itself into “a Church with an Amazonian face and a Church with an indigenous face.”⁹⁴

[HW: Although the French term is not used, it is probable that “the return to the sources” alludes to the *ressourcement* of the *Nouvelle Théologie*.]

We know that every Ecumenical Council constitutes a privileged expression of the action of the Spirit of Jesus in the bosom of the Christian community. Its pastoral,

⁹¹ Francis. *Encounter with the peoples of Amazonia*. Puerto Maldonado, 19 January 2018.

⁹² *Ibidem*.

⁹³ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁴ Let us not forget, on the other hand, that there exist in the Amazon diverse peoples, nations, ethnic groups, and cultures that live in quite different contexts, like the forests, the jungles, the riverbanks, the countryside, the peripheries of large cities, or dragged along by a migratory process

doctrinal, and normative importance is born of this action of the Spirit. It is the ultimate guarantee of the identity of the Church with the community founded by Jesus Christ and of the appropriate updating of His message in the diversity of territories, times, and cultures. The fidelity of the ecclesial community to Christ is not a static postulate: its remaining in the truth is a constant returning to read, interpret, and testify to the Gospel in situations always that are unprecedented through everyday deeds and decisions. “The Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the Gospel resounds in the Church and, through Her, in the whole world, leads the faithful into the full truth and makes the Word of Christ dwell intensely in them.”⁹⁵

This dynamic conception of fidelity to the Christian tradition brings with it a way of being and acting to the interior of the diverse territories, peoples, and cultures. The Council says:

The People of God, moved by faith, which inspires them to believe that the one who moves them is the Spirit of the Lord, who fills the universe, is able to discern in events, needs, and desires, in which it takes part together with its contemporaries, the true signs of the presence or of the plans of God.⁹⁶

Therefore, the life that we Christians share on an equal footing with the men and women of all peoples inside our “common home” has in itself a theological value. In it occurs the salvation offered by God and received—or rejected—by humanity.

According to the Second Vatican Council, the relation of the ecclesial community with the world of which it forms a part is intrinsically marked by a reality that includes and links both: The Kingdom of God. The Church-world pairing is thus replaced by the Kingdom-Church-world triad. If yet in the midst of our errors and sins, the Kingdom is offered to us inside reality by the gratuitous initiative of the same God, then every “estrangement” from social construction or culture on the part of the Church is a renunciation of Her mission: to be the sacrament of God’s salvation in history. And this is true even knowing full well that in all human reality, the simultaneous growth of the wheat and the cockle is permitted and, therefore, it a permanent and careful discernment is necessary to identify the signs of the Kingdom and to distinguish them from those of the anti-Kingdom on which they are parasitic.

We must overcome, however, a “cut-off” vision of the Second Vatican Council, imagining it as the result of a sudden eruption of the Spirit disconnected from what He had wrought in the bosom of the universal Church throughout time and, especially, in the preceding decades. In reality, through the conciliar process, the fruits of the Biblical, liturgical, and ecumenical movements are gathered from the return to the Fathers, from the consciousness of being called to a new missionary phase, and from unprecedented modes of ecclesial presence in working, intellectual, university, and rural. The Council constitutes in this sense an “arrival point.”

But it will also be a “point of departure.” As happened at previous councils, Vatican II propelled processes that transformed ecclesial life in many aspects. Of them, the change in its

⁹⁵ *Dei Verbum*, 8.

⁹⁶ *Gaudium et Spes*, 11.

relation with the world of the excluded, men and women, has been especially relevant. In the texts of Vatican

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II, the poor men and women, are spoken of. There are indeed some significant texts, like the beginning paragraph of *Gaudium et Spes* about solidarity of Christians with the joys and sorrows of all humanity, but “above all of the poor.”⁹⁷ Or also the affirmation that the Church “recognizes in the poor and in those who suffer the image of Her founder and tries to serve Christ in them.”⁹⁸ But they are mentions that arrive at determining the general perspective of the Council. The world of the poor and of the “others,” their culture, their fights and hopes, were not its principal interlocutor.

It is the Latin American and Caribbean bishops at the Medellín Conference (1968) who place the poor in the center of their sights and their commitment. Not only as victims of oppression, but also as bearers of a special presence of the Lord and of an invisible, but real, historical force. So, the most original aspect of Medellín is that, in its perspective, the poor are not treated as an object of care, charity, or assistance according to a benefactor-benefitted-type model. The poor men and women, are, before all else, “subjects.”

For the bishops, it is about establishing an order in which the dignity of each person and each people is clearly respected, in such a way that men are not objects but agents of their own history. The necessary transformations must be realized thus “from within,” which is to say, by an appropriate consciousness, sufficient preparation, and effective participation of all. It is not about giving gifts but defending the rights of the poor and oppressed.

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There is, moreover, another contribution of indubitable clarity and promise in Medellín. We refer to the use of the concept of “colonialism” to explain the excluding dynamic in our societies.⁹⁹ Although they move in a perspective that highlights the economic and political dimensions of marginalization, the bishops perceive with clarity that colonialism supposes a subordination *a priori* of social sectors through cultural, ethnic, and religious mechanisms. Today the social sciences consider that the category of coloniality is one of the perspectives that permit us to better understand the processes of exclusion of the “other” and our own participation in them. For their part, the so-called “epistemologies of the South” have managed to reveal values and wisdoms that have been historically buried because of their ethnic, cultural, gender-based, or religious origin. Thus, the so-called “decolonial shift” constitutes a great challenge posed to the ecclesial life of the continent in fidelity to the Latin American-Caribbean episcopal tradition from Medellín to Aparecida.

⁹⁷ *Gaudium et Spes*, 1.

⁹⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

⁹⁹ Cf. *Medellín Document, Peace*, 2–10.

It is specifically the Aparecida Conference (2007) that, taking as its own the perspective inaugurated by Medellín, Puebla, and Santo Domingo, incorporates in a new synthesis the cries of the Earth, of the poor, and of the “others,” be they men or women. It says in its final document:

Pan-Amazonian society is multiethnic, multicultural, and multireligious. In it more and more, the dispute over occupation of the territory is intensifying. The traditional populations of the region want their territories to be recognized and legalized. The indigenous and Afro-Americans are, above all, different “others,” who demand respect and recognition.

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Society tends to scorn them, not acknowledging their difference. They are threatened in their physical, cultural, and spiritual existence; in their ways of life; in their identities; in their diversity; in their territories and project.

Already, in Santo Domingo, we pastors recognized that the indigenous are the possessors of innumerable cultural riches, which are at the root of our current identity; and, from the perspective of the Faith, these values and convictions are the fruit of “the seeds of the Word,” which were already present and laboring in their ancestors. Therefore, as a Church that takes on the cause of the poor, we encourage the participation of the indigenous and Afro-Americans in ecclesial life and see with hope the process of enculturation discerned in the light of the Magisterium.¹⁰⁰

3.1 Synodality: Walking Together

3.1.1 Aspirations expressed in the Synodal Consultations and in the *Preparatory Document*

In the diverse concrete consultations on the occasion of the Amazon Synod, there have arisen multiple aspirations regarding the style that the Church should assume for a service to the Gospel adequate for our times and for the historical-cultural reality of the Amazon. It is requested, repeatedly, that we be able to give a concrete form to a Church in the Amazon with an Amazonian face. This perspective includes very varied aspects, like a greater participation of the believers from those environments themselves in the task of shaping that specific form of Church. Joint responsibility of laymen and women in the evangelizing task, recognition of the place of women, reciprocal listening and

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learning between pastors and the whole People of God are highlighted aspects.

In a similar way, Pope Francis himself proposed it in his speech in Puerto Maldonado, in January 2018—as was already said—, referring to the indigenous peoples: only “dialoguing among

¹⁰⁰ *Aparecida Document*, 86, 89, 92, and 94.

all,” which is to say, on a common and shared path that includes all believers, is it possible to give form to a Church with its own face.

We need the indigenous peoples to culturally mold the local Amazonian Churches. (...) Help your bishops and men and women missionaries, so that they may become one with you, and dialoguing in this way among all, you can express a Church with an Amazonian face and a Church with an indigenous face.¹⁰¹

In this way, what the *Preparatory Document* has proposed for the Synodal Assembly of October 2019 is revealed as a permanent task for the region’s ecclesial communities: “We believe that the Church, having taken root in Her synodal and missionary dimensions, can create processes of listening (see-listen), processes of discernment (judge), to be able to respond (act) to the concrete realities of the Amazonian peoples.”¹⁰²

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3.1.2 “What the Lord asks of us, in a certain sense, is already all contained in the word *synod*.” (Francis)

The category of synodality obtains a certain prominence to characterize the Church’s own nature. Good Biblical, historical-theological, ecumenical, and cultural motives advise its use. It has a long, varied, very invigorating tradition; it goes back to the New Testament itself,¹⁰³ holding the heart of the conciliar proposal expressed in the notion of the People of God—which highlights equality and common dignity before the difference in ministries, charisms, and services—; it includes also the community concerns that have been expressed in these decades in Latin America. It represents, moreover, a theological language capable of being followed and understood by the whole Church, not only by a regional Church.

Pope Francis, very particularly, has pointed out the value of this way of understanding the Church when in 2015 he affirmed:

The world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve also in its contradictions, asks of the Church the strengthening of the synergies in all the fields of Her mission. The path of “synodality” is precisely the path that God hopes for the Church of the third millennium. What the Lord asks of us, in a certain sense, is already all contained in the word “synod.” To walk together—laity, pastors, Bishop of Rome—is an easy concept to express in words, but it is not so easy to put into practice.¹⁰⁴

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¹⁰¹ Francis. *Encounter with the peoples of Amazonia*. Puerto Maldonado, 19 January 2018.

¹⁰² Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops. *Preparatory Document of the Synod for Amazonia*.

¹⁰³ Cf. Acts 15.

¹⁰⁴ Francis. *Speech on the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*. 2015.

The International Theological Commission has recently formulated a description of synodality:

It indicates the specific form of living and working (*modus vivendi et operandi*) of the Church of the People of God that manifests and in particular realizes its being as communion in all its members' walking together, meeting in assembly, and participating actively in its evangelizing mission.¹⁰⁵

It highlights, precisely, "the joint responsibility and the participation of the whole People of God in the life and the mission of the Church."¹⁰⁶

The process of enculturation, an essential point of the Amazonian Synod, demands the exercise of synodality; it supposes the active participation of the believers who belong to the cultures in which the Gospel is able to assume a concrete historical form. A Church in the Amazon with an Amazonian face can exist only if the ecclesial communities involved are impregnated with a synodal spirit and, inseparably, with some organizing structures or forms in accordance with that dynamic. It supposes a decentralized Church, on its multiple levels (universal, national, regional, and diocesan), very attentive and respectful of local processes, without the bond with the other sister Churches and with the universal Church herself suffering harm.

In this sense, as a general principle, in the Synod of October 2019 proposals should be suggested and initiatives should be favored that permit and aid the local Churches of the

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region to assume in an increasing way their own responsibilities in a dynamic of differentiated joint responsibility of all the People of God.

3.1.3 Some Proposals

3.1.3.1 It is necessary to strengthen what Francis, in his 2015 speech, calls the "organisms of communion" that "should be valued as an occasion of listening and participation" in the life of the particular Churches. In synodal communion, the whole community, in the diversity of its members, is called together to pray, analyze, dialogue, discern, and advise to collaborate in the taking of the best pastoral decisions. The *diocesan pastoral council* with representation of the diverse strata of the People of God, "above all laymen and women,"¹⁰⁷ intensely recommended by the Council,¹⁰⁸ should become a laboratory of listening, discernment, and co-participation in decisions.¹⁰⁹ The current canon law only recommends its establishment in each diocese.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ International Theological Commission. *Synodality in the Life and the Mission of the Church*. March 2018, 6.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, 7.

¹⁰⁷ CIC 512 §1.

¹⁰⁸ *Christus Dominus*, 27.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. International Theological Commission. *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*. March 2018, 81: "By reason of its nature, the frequency of meetings, the proceedings, and the objectives of its responsibility, the diocesan pastoral council is proposed as the permanent structure most favorable for the actuation of synodality in the particular Church."

¹¹⁰ Cf. CIC 512.

With a renewed synodal mentality, in addition to promoting its adequate functioning, it would be necessary to assure—including juridically—its obligatory establishment. Relevant conciliar teachings—like that of the *sensus fidei* of the whole People of God—reclaim a significant institutional tradition. It

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would be possible to guarantee juridically that they do not make decisions without making it possible to speak and listen and, eventually in certain cases, consent.¹¹¹

This proposal can be applied, analogically, to *parish pastoral councils*. It is necessary to take concrete and precise steps to reestablish a lost balance: communities should not be excessively centered on their ordained ministers. It is essential to re-situate the ministers inside the People of God, not above it. And this, with an assured institutional translation, even juridically.

[HW: In other words, they want to make Susan from the Parish Council mandatory everywhere.]

3.1.3.2 The *presbyterial council*, for its part, represents the whole presbyterate and has as its principal task to collaborate with the bishop in the governance of a diocese.¹¹² It seems opportune to develop its outline. The norms have ruled that its vote is advisory; they oblige the bishop to solicit its opinion in seven precise cases.¹¹³ He needs its “consent only in the cases determined expressly by the law.”¹¹⁴ But the general law has not foreseen any concrete case. Encouraging synodal mentalities and proceedings, multiple concrete cases could be foreseen that demand the consent of the presbyterial council, in addition to increasing the situations that require the consultative vote. To bind the pastors to their organs of discernment and participation, including juridically, represents a step forward in a theologically correct direction.

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3.1.3.3 On the same level of particular Churches, it is possible to suggest that, with creativity and imagination, *new spaces of listening and participation* be proposed, for example, ecclesial assemblies with forms that are flexible and adapted to local reality.

In particular, the *diocesan synods* are instruments well-suited for the development of a Church with its own face, Amazonian in this case. The *Instruction on Diocesan Synods* of 1997¹¹⁵ condenses a perspective that highlights disproportionately the hierarchical role, which can discourage the realization of these important celebrations of a particular Church with a rich history,

¹¹¹ The principle from which the law can establish that “to take certain actions” a superior needs the consent or advice of some colleague or group of persons is already formulated (CIC 127 §1). Therefore, there is no objection to this possibility in line with principle (CIC 127 §2).

¹¹² Cf. *Presbyterium Ordinis*, 7.

¹¹³ Cf. CIC 461 §1; 515 §2; 531; 536 §1; 1215 §2; 1222 §2; 1263.

¹¹⁴ CIC 500 §2.

¹¹⁵ Congregation for Bishops and Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. *Instruction on Diocesan Synods*. 1997.

including on our continent. Here also is seen the necessity of a renewal according to the current synodal conscience and the challenges of enculturation.

3.1.3.4 The call to take advantage of all the possibilities that the existing organisms already offer is opportune, but insufficient. It is necessary to take new concrete and creative steps to reform structures that are still very pyramidal. On the matter of the participation of laymen and laywomen with a voice and vote in the dioceses and parishes—with the specific theological meaning that this testimony possesses—, a possible measure could take place in the form of a voluntary personal obligation contracted by the diocesan bishop. In certain cases, the bishop would obligate himself to hear the voice of the members of diverse diocesan ecclesial organizations (pastoral council, synod) and, eventually, obligate himself to follow the counsel of the People of God given in a representative manner. As the sole legislator in the diocese, the bishop cannot

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be coerced to do so by anyone, but nor can he be impeded. The renunciation of certain juridical positions, voluntarily binding himself, is an open possibility for every person of law.

For all these instances of participation and joint responsibility, the words of Pope Francis in the cited text of 2015 are valuable:

Only in the measure in which these organisms remain connected with the “low” and begin from the people, from the problems of each day, can a synodal Church begin to take form: such instruments, which sometimes proceed with despondency, should be valued as an occasion for listening and participation.¹¹⁶

3.1.3.5 Vatican II inspired the establishment of *episcopal conferences*.¹¹⁷ Since then, they have rolled out a growing task. Notwithstanding the progress, it is verified that many insufficiencies persist in relation to this important collegial institution. Francis manifested his dissatisfaction in *Evangelii Gaudium*:

The Second Vatican Council expressed that, in a mode analogous to the ancient patriarchal Churches, the episcopal conferences can “develop a multiple and fertile work, so that collegial fondness has a concrete application” (LG 23). But this desire was not fully realized since a statute of the episcopal conferences that conceives them as subjects of concrete responsibilities, including also some authentic doctrinal authority, has still not been made sufficiently explicit. An excessive

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centralization, rather than helping, complicated the life of the Church and Her missionary dynamic.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Francis. *Speech on the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*. 2015.

¹¹⁷ *Christus Dominus*, 37.

¹¹⁸ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 32.

“To express a Church with an Amazonian face,” as Francis expressed in Puerto Maldonado, demands the strengthening of these “intermediate organizations of collegiality.”¹¹⁹

Therefore, it is necessary to encourage initiatives that tend to increase the diverse competencies of the episcopal conferences. At the same time, it is necessary to motivate in the *Roman Curia* a growth of consciousness of its character of service to the particular Churches within the framework of a “healthy decentralization.”¹²⁰ On the contrary, an “excessive centralization, rather than helping, complicates the life of the Church and Her missionary dynamic,”¹²¹ as was already said. Both the growth of the synodal profile of the Church and the necessary processes of enculturation invite us to deepen these dynamics that are already underway. Courage and creativity seem necessary today. The Synod of October 2019 could explicitly highlight this necessity.

In particular, it could support the idea of analyzing and discerning the benefits of the establishment of *an episcopal organism that encompasses the Amazonian region*, in the manner of a regional conference. Diverse aspects should be considered and studied. *A permanent synodal organism* (with the inclusion of the diverse members of the People of God), not just of episcopal collegiality, would be even more recommendable. The Synod of October 2019 could advise the analysis of

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these proposals, settings deadlines and institutional forms for the realization of these necessary studies. The same synodal process has shown the richness that the walking together of this region represents.

3.1.3.6 Throughout the history of the Church, there have existed diverse *forms for the selection and election of future bishops*. In the Church of the first millennium, the designation of new bishops was not regarded as though it were a specific prerogative of the Bishop of Rome. Only when the Popes resided in Avignon did they try to name all the Latin bishops. This practice was consolidated in the following centuries, above all after the French Revolution. The 1917 *Code of Canon Law* converted this practice, rather recent, into a general principle, with a formula that was later taken on in the 1983 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [sic]: “The Supreme Pontiff freely names the bishops or confirms those who have been legitimately elected.”¹²²

[HW: the mention of the *Catechism* is clearly an error; the intended reference, correctly given in the footnote, is to the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*.]

The ancient practice of local participation in the naming of bishops, already attested to in the second and third centuries, was founded in that which, later, was characterized as the *sensus*

¹¹⁹ Francis. *Encounter with the peoples of Amazonia*. Puerto Maldonado, 19 January 2018.

¹²⁰ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 16.

¹²¹ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 32.

¹²² CIC 377 §1.

fidelium, not in political reasons. The progressive historical forms of clericalization, or of exclusion of the laity, particularly in the West, had to do, above all, with the Church's quest for independence in the face of the secular powers. The principal end of the greatest Papal intervention was to protect the liberty of the Church and to improve the election of the candidates. Later, the pneumatological deficit, the obscuring of the synodal dimension, and the progressive concentration

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in the Roman Primate conditioned the participation of the diocesan bishops and of the local Churches in the processes of discernment and election.

Renewed proceedings that include a larger participation of the local community through the consultation of its diverse members, a greater intervention and recognition of the bishops of the neighboring or regional Churches, and, finally, the decision of the Bishop of Rome, can better express a theology of synodal and collegial communion on its distinct levels.

Although it is not a simple task, it would be very fruitful to find more balanced forms than the present ones according to the three levels of exercise of synodality (local, regional, universal). A new regulation could stipulate with some binding force more consultations and make possible—and even prescribe—procedures that include spaces of discernment that are more inclusive and sensitive to the needs of the dioceses, like the presbyterial council or the pastoral council. On this point also, the profile of a more synodal Church and the taking on of proceedings more favorable for the processes of enculturation are in play. The Amazon Synod could propose new steps in this direction, which is, all at once, historically more ancient, theologically more correct, ecumenically more acceptable, and culturally more appropriate.

3.2 The Catholic Church as a Church of Churches

“A face of its own for the Church in Amazonia!” is a cry directed to the Synod by the Christians of the forests and of the urban zones of the region. Theologically, it expresses the legitimacy of an indigenous Church, which refers to a pluriform ecclesiality

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that the Second Vatican Council recovered with its “return to the sources.” Pastorally, it indicates the necessity of the enculturation of the Faith, a condition for expressing a face of its own, starting at the characteristics and needs of its own context.

At the start of Jesus' movement, the “daughter Churches” were born from “Mother Churches,” different, but without being excommunicated. Incarnating the Kingdom of God, of which they are the sacrament in their particular context, the differences between the Churches, far from being a danger to unity, bore witness to the practice of a unity of diversities. On its way, for centuries, the adoption of a multiform ecclesiality shaped a multicultural Church. However, in the measure in which centralization transformed the unity in diversity that reigned for centuries into uniformity with respect to a self-referential center that should be reproduced on the peripheries, it imposed itself as a universal model of a markedly monocultural Church.

The renewal of Vatican II, in conceiving the universality from the particulars, made the enculturation of the Faith a pastoral imperative. The Church in Latin America, in Medellín (1968), with its “creative reception” of the Council, ceased to be a “reflection Church” or box of resonance of a supposed “universal Church,” in order to become an inspirational and programmatic fount of the local Churches of the subcontinent. The holding of five General Conferences is the proof of the effort of the Church in Latin America to affirm Her autonomy and of determination in the implementation of indigenous Churches in the region.

Unlike the first millennium, in which the New-Testament ecclesiological model prevailed—the universality of the

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Church present in each local Church in communion with the other Churches—, the ecclesiology of the second millennium sacrificed the “local” and “particular” character in favor of an abstract ecclesiality around the Pope. The universality of the Church was thus confused with the Roman particularity, which expanded and imposed itself on the other particularities. Above all, after the protestant reform, for the Church of the Counter-Reformation, “Catholic” is a synonym of “Roman.”

Although belatedly, Vatican II recovered the ecclesiology of the first millennium, affirming that in the local Church is present the “whole Church,” entire, although She is not “all the Church,” so the Church is a “Church of Churches.” In the preconciliar ecclesiology, there exists a supposed universal Church, which precedes and occurs in the local Churches, of which the Pope is the representative and guarantor. Now in the conciliar ecclesiology, there is no Church either prior to nor outside the local Churches. Just as appears in the New Testament writings, the Churches that are born are not established as “Churches of,” materializing a supposed universal Church that precedes them, but as “Churches in” the same and only Church, which is entire in each local Church and which is formed not as a subsidiary or copy of the “mother Church” from which it was born, but as a different Church, with its own face, culturally new, incarnating the universality in its particularity. There does not exist a Church outside the concretion of the local Churches. The local Church is a “portion” of the People of God, not a “part;” the portion contains the whole, the part does not. In it is “the whole Church,” so each one of them is a deposit of the totality of the mystery of salvation. However, it is not “all the Church,” given that none of them exhausts this mystery. From there comes the imperative to not close in on

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itself, opening itself to the other local Churches, constituting a “Church of Churches.”

For Vatican II, Catholicity is not a generalized uniformity that is imposed over the particularities, absorbing them or annihilating them. In the measure in which the entire Church, the Catholic Church, is present in each local Church, it is in the particularity that the universality makes present. And as the Church is a “Church of” local “Churches,” the universality of the particularities necessarily brings us to a multicultural Christianity. The universality of the Church

is owed not to one single form of being, but to the same Faith, to its Trinitarian source, and to the gift of salvation that God offers to the whole human race, present in each local Church. According to the Acts of the Apostles, unity consists in “having the same” in common,¹²³ although of a different form, according to the diversity of contexts.

The project of reform of the Roman Curia, carried out by Pope Francis since the first hour of his pontificate, points toward a “healthy decentralization” of the primacy and a greater autonomy of the episcopal conferences and of the local Churches. The objective at its root is to recover the exercise of synodality between the Churches and within them. For the shaping of indigenous Churches on the subcontinent, it is fundamental that the episcopal conferences, either continental or national, have a recognized magisterial role and a greater autonomy in relation to the Roman Curia, also in disciplinary or juridical matters.

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A Church incarnated in the Amazon involves doing or continuing to do, among other things:

- Assure that the Word of God arrives in the language of those peoples, making it present in the bosom of small communities of a domestic mark.
- Introduce symbols of the native cultures compatible with the Gospel in the celebration of the Christian rites.
- Admit local musical expressions in liturgical song.
- Multiply the number celebrants of the Word, of catechists, and other ministries in the ecclesial communities, especially in those that do not have the weekly Sunday celebration of the Eucharist.
- Intensify pastoral actions of human promotion as an expression of an integral evangelization.

Other fronts, however, need to be opened, such as:

- Embrace and support Indian, Afro-American, feminist, and eco-theology, as a foundation for the shaping of a Church with its own face.
- Create new ministries, especially for laymen and women, above all for outside the Christian community, in defense and promotion of life and an integral ecology.
- Form a clergy of its own, with an Amazonian face, according to the profile of the local cultures.
- Overcome structures and modes of organization of the Church that do not adhere to ecclesial synodality, like clericalism,

¹²³ Cf. Acts 2:42ff.

parochialism, universalism of ecclesial movements, and the isolation of some local Churches.

- Assure the celebration of the weekly Sunday Eucharist in the ecclesial communities through the ordination of married priests.
- Discern the opportunity for ordination of women to the diaconate, just like the creation of other ministries of their own, according to the needs of the local Church.

3.3 Indigenous Church: Towards a Spirituality and a Theology with an Amazonian Face

Introductory Note

The *Preparatory Document* of the Special Assembly for the Pan-Amazon Region invites us to think of a Church with an Amazonian face and to outline new paths that “will have an impact on ministries, liturgy, and theology,”¹²⁴ an invitation that, referring to the identity of the indigenous peoples, echoes the speech of Francis in Puerto Maldonado (2018): “their worldview, their wisdom, have much to teach us, who do not belong to their culture.”¹²⁵

The synodal listening carried out by REPAM as part of preparation for the Special Assembly for the Pan-Amazonian Region gathered the voices of 21,943 persons in multiple assemblies and forums in which was considered the necessity of being acquainted with the cultures of the peoples of the Amazon and exchanging

customs, wisdoms, practices, and religiosities for the light of the Gospel; of studying the religious experience and the form of relating with God of each people; of resuming ancestral rituals; of evangelizing from the indigenous spirituality and worldview; with the purpose that each Amazonian people be the principal actor of its walk of faith.

The invitation of the *Preparatory Document* and the voices of the synodal listening are useful as a point of departure to make “brave” proposals—as the said document calls them—for a theology and spirituality with an Amazonian face that integrates a view of the Amazonian religious reality, a theological interpretation of said reality, and some suggestions for a theology and a spirituality with an Amazonian face.

¹²⁴ Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops. *Preparatory Document of the Amazonian Synod*, 15, 2018.

¹²⁵ *Ibidem*, 3. [sic].

[HW: this citation is an error; correct citation is given in, *inter alia*, note 119, *supra*.]

3.3.1 A View of the Amazonian Religious Reality

Since time immemorial and in the case of *cuius regio eius religio*, the religion of the conqueror was imposed on conquered peoples. Thus, the Christianity that arrived on the Spanish and Portuguese ships to the lands discovered by Columbus, shaped during nearly 800 years on the Crusade to convert or expel the Moors, encountered, upon its arrival on the American continent, different cultures, languages, religions, customs, and forms of family and social organization that also had to convert. That is to say, to impose the religion of the conqueror, which was, in Medieval Europe, the universal religion—the “Catholic”—from which the Christian Faith had converted in the 4th century into the religion of the Roman Empire and the only true one, a pretension expressed as *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*. History sheds some light on how the missionaries imposed the foreign

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religion and culture on the traditions and values of the indigenous peoples.

Having said that, to evangelize in a globalized, diverse, and pluralistic world, as the present world is, is not the same as when it was uniform and Catholic: it needs dialogue with other religious confessions, with other rationalities, with other worldviews,¹²⁶ which includes moving “from the intolerant exclusivism to an attitude of respect that accepts that Christianity does not have the historic monopoly on salvation.”¹²⁷ That is to say, a paradigm shift that is fixed on admitting that “Latin American Christianity has been replaced by a plurality of cultures and spiritualities”¹²⁸ and allows itself to respectfully approach the multiethnic, multicultural, and multireligious world that the landscape of the Amazonian religions offers in order to think of an indigenous theology and spirituality.

According to the previously-cited *Preparatory Document*, “Amazonia is a region where diverse cultures, with distinct modes of life, live and coexist,”¹²⁹ specifically:

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¹²⁶ “All evangelization is confronted today with the pluralism of the distinct religious truths and, at the same time, with the skepticism of a profane scientific knowledge that owes its social authority to responsible fallibility and to a process of learning based on a permanent revision. [...] Every confession has to initiate dialogue both with the alternative principles of other religions and with the objections of science and the secularized and semi-scientific *common sense*.” Habermas, Jürgen. *Israel or Athens. Essays on Religion, Theology, and Rationality*. Eduardo Mendieta (ed.). Madrid: Trotta, 2001, p. 187.

[HW: This is a figure associated with the Marxist Frankfurt School.]

¹²⁷ Estrada, Juan Antonio. *Christianity in a Lay Society. 40 Years After Vatican II*. Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 2006, p. 36.

[HW: This author is, perhaps predictably, a Jesuit.]

¹²⁸ Irrázaval, Diego. “Epilogue: Open and Closed Routes Towards God.” In Vigil, José María, Tomita, Luiza E., and Barros, Marcelo (eds.). *Along the Many Paths of God II: Toward a Christian and Latin American Theology of Religious Pluralism*. Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2004, p. 228.

[HW: The author and at least one of the editors are priests. While the original text was published in Quito, Ecuador, the English edition appears to have been printed in Germany. (No surprises there.) Page numbers in citations to these documents refer to the Spanish editions and may not correspond to the proper page in the English version.]

¹²⁹ Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops. *Preparatory Document for the Amazonian Synod*, 2, 2018.

Three million indigenous people, representing about 390 distinct peoples and nationalities, [...] between 110 and 130 Indigenous Peoples in Voluntary Isolation (PIAV) or “free peoples.” Moreover, in recent times, there has appeared a new category made up of the indigenous peoples who live in the urban fabric, [...]. Each one of these peoples represents a particular cultural identity, a specific historical richness, and a particular way of seeing the world and the environment and of relating with this from their own specific worldview and territoriality.¹³⁰

In this multicultural and multireligious panorama coexist, in addition to the indigenous peoples, many Afro-Americans in rural and urban communities. There are places where the Catholic religion is the majority, places where Catholics are simultaneously followers of other cults because cultures and religions coexist with their corresponding worldviews, as well as places where the ancestral religion is conserved in its totality.

3.3.2 Theological Interpretation of the Amazonian Religious Reality

For the rapprochement with the religious reality of Amazonia as a hermeneutical field, the following are proposed, as a referential guide: (1) studies of religious practice, (2) theology of Latin American religious pluralism, (3) the outlines for interreligious dialogue traced by the Second Vatican Council and their creative reception in Latin America, and (4) the ecclesiological vision of Pope Francis.

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3.3.2.1 The Religious Practice of Amazonia

Studies of religious practice address, from an interdisciplinary perspective, the relation between religious experience and the diversity of its manifestations, which is to say, the religions,¹³¹ with their worldviews and their traditions, each one of which lets them interpret and express the experience of transcendence that is personal and at the same time communal. Leonardo Boff beautifully compared the diversity of religions with the biodiversity of nature:

Just as there exists immense biodiversity in nature as a fact and as an immense value that deserves to be conserved, in a similar way there exists diversity of religions, which are facts and values that should be valued, since they are manifestations of what is human and of the religious experience of humanity.

¹³⁰ *Ibidem*, 3.

¹³¹ “The religions, each and every one of them, are complex totalities of response to the Divine, with their different forms of religious experience, their own myths and symbols, their theological systems, their liturgies and their art, their ethics and styles of life, their scriptures and traditions—all elements that interact among themselves and mutually reinforce one another. And these different totalities constitute diverse human responses, in the context of the different cultures or forms of human life, to the same Divine, infinite, and transcendent reality.” Torres Queiruga, Andrés. *Dialogue on Religions and Christian Self-Understanding*. Santander: Sal Tarrae, 2005, pp. 21–22.

It is not just of us to think and say that only one species should thrive, but the contrary; all species have value and together reveal the virtualities of the mystery of life. In a similar way, it is not just to affirm that only one religion is true and that the rest are decadent, since they all reveal the mystery of God and reveal the many ways that we have of walking in fidelity and love toward God¹³²

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3.3.2.2 The Theology of Latin American Religious Pluralism

The theology of Latin American religious pluralism is written on the framework of liberation theology, as Gustavo Gutiérrez proposed it, highlighting “the pluralistic religious dimension present in the situation of the continent’s poverty”¹³³ and in the concept of macro-ecumenism that Msgr. Pedro Casaldáliga coined and from which “derive the relations of Latin American Christianity with the indigenous religions, the Afro religions, and the unbelieving Latin American militants who participated in the working-class struggles.”¹³⁴

It is worth mentioning, among many works and many authors, the studies of the relation of Christianity and Candomblé of Brother Volney Borkenbrock, François de l’Epinay, and Marcelo Barros from their respective pastoral experiences in Brazil; those of Bartomeu Meliá, a Spaniard living in Paraguay, and the Bolivian Xavier Albó from their cultural surroundings; and the theology of religious pluralism that Diego Irarrázaval has elaborated from his work with Andean communities and starting at the religiosity of the indigenous and Afro-descended peoples.

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3.3.2.3 The Outlines for Interreligious Dialogue of Vatican II and their Creative Reception in Latin America

The Second Vatican Council, for the first time in a document of the ecclesial magisterium, referred to the Church’s relations with non-Christian religions without condemning them—“The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is holy and true in these religions”¹³⁵—and admitted that salvation in Christ comes “not only to Christians, but also to all men of good will, in whose heart grace works in an invisible way.”¹³⁶

These conciliar declarations frame themselves in the vision of concentric circles, which Paul VI expounded in his encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964), and *Lumen Gentium* embraced it: an

¹³² Boff, Leonardo. “Prologue.” In Vigil, José María, Tomita, Luiza E., and Barros, Marcelo (eds.). *Along the Many Paths of God III: Latin American Pluralist Theology of Liberation*. Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006, p. 8.

¹³³ Teixeira, Faustino. “The Theology of Religious Pluralism in Latin America.” In Vigil, José María, Tomita, Luiza E., and Barros, Marcelo (eds.). *Along the Many Paths of God III: Latin American Pluralist Theology of Liberation*. Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006, p. 18.

¹³⁴ Vigil, José María. “Macro-ecumenism: Latin American Theology of Religions.” In Vigil, José María, Tomita, Luiza E., and Barros, Marcelo (eds.). *Along the Many Paths of God III: Latin American Pluralist Theology of Liberation*. Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006, p. 74.

¹³⁵ *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

¹³⁶ *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

inclusive vision of interreligious dialogue, because salvation has Christ as the “sole mediator and path of salvation”¹³⁷ and includes, in the first place, the baptized, members of the Church;¹³⁸ in the second place, those who “are honored with the name of Christians but do not profess the Faith in its totality or do not preserve unity of communion under the successor of Peter;”¹³⁹ in the third place, the peoples who do not know Christ, recognizing that “all the good that is found planted in the heart and in the mind of men and in the rites and cultures of these peoples, [because of which] the Church prays and labors so that the totality of the world may be integrated into the People of God.”¹⁴⁰

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In the time immediately after the Council, the bishops of Latin America met in Medellín with the purpose of re-reading, translating, and applying the conciliar teachings in the Latin American context. The *Medellín Document* (1968) mentions the indigenous in relation to their condition as marginalized¹⁴¹ and the necessity of human promotion of the indigenous populations,¹⁴² but it does not refer to the religious traditions of the indigenous peoples.

In the *Puebla Document* (1979), in speaking of the situation of poverty, there appear the “faces of the indigenous and Afro-Americans who, living as marginalized and in inhumane situations, can be considered the poorest of the poor,”¹⁴³ but neither does it refer to their religious traditions.

The *Aparecida Document* (2007), for its part, occupies itself with the Amazon in regard to its biodiversity;¹⁴⁴ it denounces the exclusion and poverty of the indigenous and Afro-American peoples;¹⁴⁵ it recognizes that the indigenous peoples “are the possessors of innumerable cultural riches”¹⁴⁶ and emphasizes their values and convictions.¹⁴⁷ It affirms, likewise, that it “views positively and with empathy the distinct forms of culture present on our continent”¹⁴⁸ and recognizes:

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The “seeds of the Word”¹⁴⁹ present in the traditions and cultures of the indigenous peoples of Latin America. Of them, we value their profound communal esteem for life, present in all creation, in day-to-day existence, and in the thousand-

¹³⁷ *Lumen Gentium*, 14.

¹³⁸ Cf. *Ibidem*.

¹³⁹ *Lumen Gentium*, 15.

¹⁴⁰ *Lumen Gentium*, 17.

¹⁴¹ *Medellín Document*, 4, 3.

¹⁴² *Medellín Document*, 1, 14.

¹⁴³ *Puebla Document*, 34.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. *Aparecida Document*, 83–84.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. *Aparecida Document*, 88–89.

¹⁴⁶ *Aparecida Document*, 92.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. *Aparecida Document*, 93.

¹⁴⁸ *Aparecida Document*, 477.

¹⁴⁹ *Santo Domingo Document*, 245.

year-old religious experience, which invigorates their cultures, which reaches its fullness in the revelation of the true face of God through Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁰

3.3.2.4 Ecclesiological Vision of Pope Francis

Francis refers to the Church as a “mystery that buries its roots in the Trinity, but has its historic concretion in a pilgrim people,”¹⁵¹ that “is incarnate in the peoples of the Earth, each one of which as a culture of its own”¹⁵² and that, because of the diversity of cultures, has a “pluriform face”¹⁵³ but does not threaten the unity of the Church, since “it would not do justice to the logic of the Incarnation to think of a monocultural and monochord Christianity,” since “in the history of the Church, Christianity does not have a single cultural mode,” and the revealed message identifies itself with no culture: “it has a transcultural content.”¹⁵⁴ And of this diversity, it can be said with Francis that “the model is the polyhedron, which reflects the confluence of all the partialities that in it preserve their originality.”¹⁵⁵

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Evangelii Gaudium takes responsibility for the indigenous peoples in saying that “in their poverty and fragility, we are called to recognize Christ suffering,”¹⁵⁶ and of interreligious dialogue, it says that it is “a conversation about human life” to “assume together the duty of serving justice and peace,” without “neglecting the essential bond between dialogue and warning” and, citing *Redemptoris Missio*, “open to understanding the convictions of the other” and “knowing that dialogue can enrich each one.”¹⁵⁷ Above all, it speaks to us of the “pluralistic face, of an infinite variety and of an enormous biological, cultural, and spiritual richness” of the Amazonian peoples in his speech in Puerto Maldonado, as well as of the culture of encounter and of intercultural dialogue, highlighting that “each culture and each worldview that receives the Gospel enriches the Church with the vision of a new facet of the face of Christ,” and proposing, “that the indigenous peoples culturally shape the local Amazonian Churches.”

3.3.3 Some Suggestions for a Theology and a Spirituality with an Amazonian Face

It is possible to think of a theology and a spirituality with an Amazonian face starting from interdisciplinary study of religious practice, the theology of Latin American religious pluralism, and from the ecclesiological perspective of Vatican II, although not, strictly speaking, regarding the inclusive vision of an interreligious dialogue, but regarding the understanding of the Church as the People of God and sacrament of communion.

¹⁵⁰ *Aparecida Document*, 529.

¹⁵¹ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 101.

¹⁵² *Evangelii Gaudium*, 115.

¹⁵³ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 116.

¹⁵⁴ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 117.

¹⁵⁵ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 236.

¹⁵⁶ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 210.

¹⁵⁷ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 250–251.

It is possible, either as a result of the enculturation of the Faith in interreligious dialogue with the traditions and spiritualities of the indigenous peoples, with their worldview and their familial and social organization, or in respect for the religious identity of the indigenous peoples who have not been Christianized.

Likewise, interreligious encounter is also possible on the level of prayer and action, in which people of different religious traditions not only pray together but also act together.¹⁵⁸ And in the encounter from the otherness that is revealed in weakness, as occurs in the encounter of the Samaritan and the wounded man, while the priest and the Levite could not approach the wounded man by the side of the road.¹⁵⁹

It is, moreover, the spirituality of *sumak kawsay*—the “good living” of the Amerindian peoples—that signifies communion with nature, with every living being, and with the Divinity that one perceives in his surroundings, and it translates into actions of respect and care: “this ‘good doing’ works in harmony with the practices of ‘good living’ that we discover in the wisdom of our peoples,” as Pope Francis said in his speech in Puerto Maldonado.¹⁶⁰ It is, as well, a contemplative spirituality committed to the care of the “common home,” as is the spirituality of the indigenous peoples. And it is, as

the *Preparatory Document* proposes, “a spirituality with the style of Jesus: simple, human, dialoguing, Samaritan, that lets us celebrate life, the liturgy, the Eucharist, festivals, always respecting the appropriate rhythm of each people.”¹⁶¹

3.4 Indigenous Church: A Liturgy with an Amazonian Face

3.4.1 Seeing

The Amazon is characterized by a multiplicity of human groups. Indigenous peoples, Afro-Americans, or *quilombolas*, rural communities or *ribeirinhas*, large metropolitan areas, etc., that correspond to a plurality of cultures: those of the indigenous peoples, immersed in the sacred; those of the rural areas, marked by the rhythms of nature; those of the cities, inserted into modernity, etc. And religions: ancestral religions of uncontacted communities, or those preserved by some native ethnic group; those more or less permeated by Christianity; those which result from syncretism with cults brought by slaves from Africa, etc.

¹⁵⁸ Knitter, Paul F. “Religions, Mysticism, and Liberation. A Dialogue Between the Theology of Liberation and the Theology of Pluralism.” In Vigil, José María, Tomita, Luiza E., and Barros, Marcelo (eds.). *Along the Many Paths of God III: Latin American Pluralist Theology of Liberation*. Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006, p. 103.

¹⁵⁹ Susin, Luiz Carlos. “The Absolute in the Fragments. The Universality of Revelation in Religions.” In Vigil, José María, Tomita, Luiza E., and Barros, Marcelo (eds.). *Along the Many Paths of God III: Latin American Pluralist Theology of Liberation*. Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006, p. 138.

¹⁶⁰ Francis. *Encounter with the Peoples of Amazonia*. Puerto Maldonado, 19 January 2018.

¹⁶¹ Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops. *Preparatory Document for the Amazonian Synod*, 15, 2018.

All this translates into an enormous variety of spiritual experiences, of forms of relating with the transcendent, of sacred spaces, and symbols that challenge the liturgy to an enculturation capable of making present and celebrating the mystery of Christ in the life of this diverse humanity.

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On this path, important steps have been taken at various moments in the history of the region, for example, in the translation of the Bible into the languages of the indigenous peoples, still unfinished. But the fact that the Church sometimes puts in place alien rules for the people caused a large portion of the Faithful to remain on the margin of liturgical celebrations and be recognized much more in the popular practices of religiosity. At the same time, a certain rigidity and coldness of the Catholic liturgies has led many people to seek other symbolic experiences and other forms of more attractive and free celebration, as is the case of the Pentecostal churches.

3.4.2 Judging

In the liturgy, the Church expresses Her Faith in a symbolic and communal form. The Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* explains that the liturgy is the “summit” and “source” of the Christian life. “Summit,” because at the foot of the table is presented people’s experience, the way of the community and the sociocultural context in which it operates. “Source,” because from the living memory of the love of Christ and from the encounter with the sisters and brothers, the desire and the capacity for more coherent discipleship and a more efficacious testimony are born. This includes “full, conscious and active participation (...) of the Christian people,”¹⁶² which permits them to fully express their ecclesial dimension;¹⁶³ thus, given that the liturgy belongs to Jesus Christ and is occupied fundamentally with the Kingdom of God on this earth, through it, the

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assembly that celebrates is in communion with the whole Church, humanity, and creation.

This tension between the rite in the local Church and global solidarity shows that the Christian liturgy is, in itself, universal and particular, and should be enculturated in the different traditions, without ceasing to be a sign of the communion of the whole Church. The liturgy of the universal Church is enriched in the measure in which it blooms in the liturgy of the particular Churches that are nourished from the tradition of the whole Church. The particularities of the local liturgies make real and concrete the universal Church.

In a change with respect to the post-Tridentine period, marked by the commitment to standardize it first and maintain it without alteration afterward (judging that this identity was the guarantee of the “Catholicity” of the Church), the Second Vatican Council re-evaluates the pluralism of liturgical style in the light of a new relation between liturgy and culture. In consequence, declaring that “the Church does not seek to impose a rigid uniformity in that which

¹⁶² *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14.

¹⁶³ Cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 26.

does not affect the Faith or the good of the whole community, not even in the liturgy,”¹⁶⁴ it clarifies that, “the substantial unity of the Roman Rite being preserved, legitimate variations and adaptations shall be permitted to diverse groups, regions, and peoples,”¹⁶⁵ and “it will belong to the competent territorial ecclesiastical authority (...) to determine these adaptations within the established limits, in the typical editions of the liturgical books, above all in what touches on the administration of the Sacraments, of the sacramentals, processions, liturgical language, and sacred music and art,”¹⁶⁶ recognizing that “In certain

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places and circumstances, a more profound adaptation of the liturgy is imperative.”¹⁶⁷ Similarly, the *motu proprio Magnum Principium* of 2017 emphasizes the role of the episcopal conferences in the translation of the liturgical books.

Following the Decree *Ad Gentes* and the encyclical letter *Redemptoris Missio*, in the Amazon, it is necessary to build indigenous particular Churches, which is to say, profoundly rooted in the social life and with a reflection of the Faith, a spirituality, a liturgy, and ministries that correspond to their culture.¹⁶⁸ An indigenous Church is Roman among the Romans, Aymara among the Aymara, and Yanomami among the Yanomami. An indigenous Catholic Church will always be in communion with the other particular Churches and with the head Church that is at the head of charity.

3.4.3 Act

- It is imperative to take up a serious work of enculturation of the liturgy, returning to consider the attempts accomplished in the last 50 years, to assume the indigenous expressive tradition and the people’s, especially the poor’s, desire for liberation. Recovering the signs, rites, and the celebrations of the Amazonian peoples will permit them to have liturgies of their own, an expression, from their own worldview and spirituality, of their experience of the ministry of Jesus, dead and risen. For that, we must trust in the Faith of the people, pushing experimentations that can be carried out with

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responsibility, liberty, and creativity, without excluding the possibility of arriving at a true “Amazonian Rite.”

- The Pan-Amazon Synod must recognize the dignity of the mode of being and of the identity of each people, of their own vision of the world (myths), of their beliefs, of the daily life and customs, of their forms of celebrating and living the Faith (rites), of their different services (administrators, supplicants, leaders of ceremonial dance and chanting, shamans,

¹⁶⁴ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 37.

¹⁶⁵ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 38.

¹⁶⁶ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 39.

¹⁶⁷ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 40.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. *Ad Gentes*, 6 and 19; *Redemptoris Missio*, 52–53.

witch-doctors, etc.) and of their language. We believe that God manifested Himself and continues to manifest Himself through the symbols, ceremonies, and traditions of the indigenous and Afro cultures, where He sowed seeds of the Word before the proclamation of the Gospel.¹⁶⁹ We know that all culture has to look for its own path of conversion to the light of the Gospel,¹⁷⁰ but the liturgy of these peoples can contribute to that ecological conversion—so urgent!—, transmitting that profound communion with creation that would have to be taken on by all.

- Each particular Church must create a commission composed of experts on the Roman Rite, as well as on the local cultural values, and open to the support of the pastoral experience of the local clergy, especially the indigenous, and of the “wisdoms” of the indigenous groups, so that there may be prepared, with the approval of the bishop and in light of the norms of the universal Church, rituals for every culture, either on the celebration of the Sacraments (for example, Baptism by immersion in a region where water is very plentiful), or on other important celebrations in the life of the community. “Enculturation will have to satisfy the

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requirements of the traditional culture, still having in mind the populations of an urban and industrial culture.”¹⁷¹

- Therefore, it is necessary to recover the worldviews (the memory of the ancestors, the vital relation with nature, the Orixás, the wisdoms, etc.) and the traditional rituals (the Yurupary cult, prayers in sacred places, prayer in the different stations, rites on behalf of the sick and in the at births, blessings of springs and seeds, hills, and roads, etc.), the regional music and dance, etc. In the celebrations, it necessary to consider the social reality and the customs of each place, to use preferably forms and symbols proper to the cultures that sprout from daily life (fruits, work tools, drinks, fish, foods, aromatic herbs, garments, rhythms, songs, paintings, ornaments, festivals, etc.) to arrive at a liturgy incarnate in the genius of each people.

[HW: *Orixás* are spirits believed to be in some measure divine by certain of the indigenous. *Yurupary*, also spelled *Juruparí* or *Yuruparí*, is a male cult among some of the Amazonian peoples, which sometimes involves the use of hallucinogenic drugs.]

- In particular, it must attempt to make the Mass a true community celebration, through the active participation of the assembly, and in which results the bond between Gospel, Faith, and personal and social life. This includes, for example, an adequate layout of the architectural elements, spaces for the involvement of the Faithful laywomen and men (in penitential prayers and petitions, in remarks on the Word, etc.), eloquent gestures and symbols, etc. And, in the case of the native and Afro-descended peoples, celebrating

¹⁶⁹ *Ad Gentes*, 19.

¹⁷⁰ *Ad Gentes*, 11.

¹⁷¹ Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. *Varietates Legitimæ. The Roman Liturgy and Enculturation*, 30. 1994.

outside the temples; expressing the sense of God in creation; assuming a festive character that is more exuberant, joyful, and spontaneous; and highlighting the sacramentality of the body with dances,

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accompaniment of feet, arms, and hands; and integrating the sacramentals of the people as the branch to bless the brethren, the ribbons, the smells, etc. Always without neglecting the prophetic dimension of the celebration, which expresses as much the reality of suffering and oppression as the hope of building the new “common home” for all men and women.

3.5 Indigenous Church: Ministries and Ministers for the Church in Amazonia

The requests stemming from the more diverse initiatives of consultation in preparation for the Special Synod for the Amazonian Region are innumerable: for a Church that is missionary, evangelizing, prophetic, Samaritan, merciful, with its own face, indigenous, in communion, a servant, and ministerial. Faced with them and starting from our ministry of men and women theologians together with the Synod Fathers, we would like to insist on the following points.

3.5.1 Description of Ministry

Ministry is a service, but not every service is ministry. Ministry, in a very brief summary, is a charism in the form of service recognized by the Church.

Theological use tends to designate as ministry some functions assumed by some Christian men and women, functions that have the following characteristics: that are specific services, of vital importance; that are related to the mission of the Church in the sphere of the Word, of the liturgy, and of charity; they include a true responsibility; they suppose a certain stability; they are recognized by the Church.

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Puebla develops a description of the non-ordained ministries:

They are those services regarding really important aspects of ecclesial life (for example, on the level of the Word, of the liturgy, or of the management of the community), exercised by laypeople with stability and that have been publicly recognized and entrusted by one who has responsibility in the Church.¹⁷²

3.5.2 Investing in Ministries

¹⁷² *Puebla Document*, 805.

Greatly varied groups of laymen and women, but no less bishops, priests, and deacons, ask that the Synod support the emergence, development, and fulfillment of diverse ministries that respond to the multiple and complex necessities of the distinct types of Amazonian ecclesial communities and their cultures, valuing personal charisms, the desire for participation, commitment to the mission and the community, and identification with the social context and appropriate culture.

Without a regionalist spirit, but respecting the social realities and the different cultures of the Amazonian region, the Synod is called to value each vocation with its own ways and Amazonian expressions, facilitating the emergence and elaboration of a rich and pluriform ministeriality among the Indians, peoples of the rainforest, fishers, riverside dwellers, country people, populations of the urban peripheries, and migrants of every type.

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3.5.3 Egalitarian Treatment for Men and Women

In various synods, very many Synod Fathers have insisted that there be no difference of treatment between men and women in the area of ministries, that is, of non-ordained ministries, which can be exercised by laymen and women. Regrettably, this request has still not been heeded. We suggest proposing a new wording of Can 230, § 1 of the *Code of Canon Law*, to overcome, in a definitive way, the unnecessary differentiation between men and women in the sphere of non-ordained ministries, especially of the lector and the acolyte.

Specifically, we propose this wording:

Christifideles laici et laicæ (in place of Viri laici), qui ætate dotibusque pollent Episcoporum conferentiæ decreto statutis, per ritum liturgicum præscriptum ad ministeria lectoris et acolythi stabiliter assumi possunt; quæ tamen ministeriorum collatio eisdem ius non confert ad sustentationem remunerationemve ab Ecclesia præstandam.

3.5.4 Overcoming of the Inadequate Distinction of Ministries *Ad Intra* and *Ad Extra*

The distinction of “ministries *ad intra*” and “ministries *ad extra*” deserves a deeper reflection. That, on one hand, there exist functions oriented to the edification and maintenance of the Christian community and, on the other, markedly distinct functions for the action of the Church in society, is a fact. However, it is also clear that, in the present circumstances, the majority of our particular Churches have a much greater number of laymen and women in

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catechetical and liturgical works than, for example, in social pastoral activity or in missionary activity.

The distinction between “ministries *ad intra*” and “ministries *ad extra*” is based on a vision that rigidly and inappropriately separates “Church” and “world” and, therefore, “life” and “mission” of the Church. In truth, the expression “mission of the Church” or “ministry of the Church” encompasses, in a unique, complex and articulated dynamism, the life of the Church and Her acting in the world. If we understand that the Church is the portion of humanity that processes, proclaims, lives, celebrates, and serves the mystery of salvation that God carries out in the world and in history, everything in the Church and everyone in Her are at the service of this same plan of salvation and liberation.¹⁷³

3.5.5 Ordination of Married Men in “Mature” Communities

In the Amazon region and also in other regions, we have thousands of communities in which the Eucharist is celebrated only on limited occasions (from once a month to every two years or so) due to a lack of priests.

Given that the civil state, single or married, is not an intrinsic element of the priestly ministry but only advisable, according to the doctrine of the Magisterium,¹⁷⁴ it seems dispensation from the obligation of celibacy in situations like those of the Amazon region, for those who possess the other conditions to fruitfully assume the priestly ministry in their community, could be imposed by the proper sense, nature, and

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function of the law in the Church. Thus, Canon 1752 expresses it concretely, *salus animarum suprema lex est*, which should make secondary the *ius legislationis* (right of the law or of legislation) to the *ius gratiae* (right of grace), as competent theologians and canonists have demonstrated.

This being said, it is not only convenient but necessary and just to permit access to priestly ordination of men indicated by their own communities, independent of their civil state. There would be other criteria for the ordination of married men, among which we highlight: a profound integration in the local cultures; an active and constructive commitment with their ecclesial community; a strong testimony of missionary discipleship in the family, the community, and society; a good conjugal, family, and professional experience; a human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation that deals with the functions of priestly ministry and appropriate to the sociocultural conditions of their community; a profound communion with their grassroots community and with the local Church.

The other pole of the question is the communities that would be prepared to receive married men who are members of the same communities as their priests, the “mature communities.” By *communitates maturae* is understood those that have a good walk (*caminhada*) of faith and life; that live and evangelize in their social and cultural environments; that guarantee the roles of the Word, of the liturgy, and of charity; and are accompanied by the current priests of total dedication, in profound communion with the local Church and the diocesan bishop.

¹⁷³ CNBB, *Mission and Ministries of Christian Laymen and Women*, 90. 1999. [Original in Portuguese.]

¹⁷⁴ Cf. *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* 3, 18, 31, 35, 37, 40, and 60.

These “communal” priests would not act alone, but in teams, formed by a ministerially diversified group: “communal” priests, deacons and deaconesses, and some

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laymen and women ministers. This team would not be the community pastoral council, organically composed by this group and by all the coordinators of the services and ministries of the community in question, but its nucleus of reference. The objective of those two community institutions, the ministerial team and the community pastoral council, is exactly that of avoiding centralization, authoritarianism, oligarchy, and clericalism, and facilitating, on the other hand, participation, the style of service, joint responsibility, and communion in life and mission.

3.5.6 The Ordination of Deaconesses

We are confident in the restoration of the female diaconate. We say “restoration” since, for centuries, the Church was served by duly ordained women deaconesses who carried out, in a differentiated manner, the same tasks as the men deacons. We warn, however, to avoid every anachronism, since it should be more a re-creation than a reproduction of the past. It also should leave aside every form of patriarchalism since the deaconesses will have to have the same rights as the deacons and, evidently, carry out their ministry in communion, in relation, with the priests, although with liberty and autonomy. It will be necessary also to avoid a uniformization of the deaconesses. And also, other men and women ministers of the indigenous cultures will have to incarnate and express the values and styles of those cultures.

We hold the conviction that the ordination of women to the diaconate, in the hands of the women of the local Church of Amazonia, will be a signal that the Church indeed

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wants to recover the dignity of the woman, recognize her multiple diaconates, and give a new face to ordained ministry.

3.5.7 The Matter of Priestly Ordination of Women

We are fully conscious of the position of the Catholic Church in relation to this question. We recommend, however, that the men and women theologians, reverently respecting the givens of the Faith and in profound communion with the Magisterium, can continue with full liberty to reflect on the priestly ordination of women, enriching their analysis with resources coming from psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, philosophy, and hermeneutics, in order to be able to discern the presence of the Spirit in this sign of the times that is, according to John XXIII, the presence of women in public life.

This phenomenon occurs with greater rapidity on the peoples that profess the Christian Faith, and more slowly, though always on a grand scale, in countries of tradition and different civilizations. The woman has acquired a consciousness,

every day clearer, of her own human dignity. Because of this, she does not tolerate being treated like an inanimate thing or a mere instrument; she demands, on the contrary, that as much in the sphere of domestic life as in that of public life, her rights and obligations proper to the human person be recognized.¹⁷⁵

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3.5.8 The Embrace of the Present Ordained Ministers

We will never be able to recognize and give the thanks owed to the dedicated, sacrificial, and responsible work of the most diverse categories of people who worked in vocations and distinct ministries in the past and continue doing so today in favor of the life of the peoples of the Amazon, at the service of the Kingdom of God, in the name of Christ and of the Church.

The Church wants to continue counting on their presence, their participation, and their support in this moment in which She seeks synodally to consolidate the good accomplishments of the past and open new perspectives of evangelization in the countries that make up the Amazon region.

The changes bring impacts, destabilize, and create discomfort and insecurity. In a spirit of communion, of mutual respect, of dialogue, with deep charity, all we men and women are called to make our contribution so that the novelty of the Gospel and of the Spirit can open a path in history and in our small histories.

3.5.9 The Inestimable Value of the Other

Walking together does not mean taking the same steps, maintaining the same rhythms, following exactly the same paths always and in everything.

In the Church there is a place of unity and diversity, for communion and liberty, for the common and for the proper, for the universal communion of the Churches and the particularities and peculiarities of each local Church in all Her existential and institutional expressions.

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St. Cyprian († 258), bishop of Carthage in Roman Africa, was characterized in his ministry by the search for consensus. He always tried to involve his collaborators in the government of the Church of Carthage: “From the beginning of my ministry, I established that I would not decide anything independently, but in consultation with you and with the people.”¹⁷⁶ When problems went beyond Carthage or were common to the other Churches of Roman Africa, he met the bishops in synods, seven in total, the last in 256, to seek common opinions and behaviors. But he never imposed, nor claimed to impose, his personal positions or the synodal decisions on the bishops or on the faithful. Unity, yes—and how Cyprian fought for it!—uniformity, no.

¹⁷⁵ *Pacem in Terris*, 41.

¹⁷⁶ St. Augustine, *Letter 14*.

It may be that in the Synod for the Amazon, a unanimous consensus will not be reached on all the points that we have noted freely above, seeking to interpret the thirsts of large segments of the People of God that were manifested in the preparatory phase. That is not a problem. We recall St. Augustine: “In the essential, unity; liberty in the incidental; in all, charity.”

We would like, however, with all respect and much humility, to ask that the Synod Fathers refuse to individually impede the formation of a majority opinion on certain material when it has a good basis, even though they personally do not judge its introduction or implementation in their local Church to be necessary, useful, or convenient. And, vice-versa, that no one break communion, even if he is not fully in agreement with the others.

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3.5.10 *Adsumus*

[The prayer *Adsumus—Here We Are*—, formulated at the fourth regional council of Toledo (Spain, 633), was prayed at the start of the daily sessions of the Second Vatican Council].

Here we are, Lord, Holy Ghost,
Here we are hampered weight of sin,
But gathered foremost in Thy Name.

Come to us and remain with us,
Deign to penetrate into our interior,
Teach us what we must do,
Where we should walk,
And show us what we must practice
So that, with Thine assistance, we may know how to please Thee in all things.

Be Thou alone the inspirer and finisher of our decisions,
Thou alone who, with God the Father and His Son, dost possess a glorious name.

Permit not that we should violate justice,
Thou who lovest equity above all,
Let not ignorance sweep us along paths of error,
Let not partiality subdue us,
Let not the respect of persons nor of riches corrupt us.

Contrariwise, unite us efficaciously to Thee alone with the gift of Thy grace,
So that we may be one in Thee and deviate in nothing from the Truth.

And inasmuch as we are gathered in Thy Name,
So also may we hold fast in all things to justice,
So that today, our judgments may depart from Thee in nothing.

And, in the future, laboring rightly, may we come to the possession of eternal reward.

Amen.

3.6 The Ordination of Women to the Diaconate for the Amazonian Church

For the purpose of exposition, the arguments that attempt to justify the ordination of women to the diaconate are ordered—in the arrangement of seeing, interpreting, and acting—, starting from a look at the present reality that motivates theological reflection from the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council and its creative reception in Latin America, to finally lay out some arguments from which to propose the ordination of women to the diaconate in the Churches with an Amazonian face.

3.6.1 A Look at the Present Reality that Justifies Proposing the Female Diaconate: Arguments of Circumstance

In referring to “ministries with an Amazonian face that the synod should contemplate,” the *Preparatory Document* of the Special Assembly for the Pan-Amazon Region speaks of “giving women some official ministry,”¹⁷⁷ including the diaconate.

The listening carried out by REPAM as part of the preparation for the Pan-Amazonian Synod gathered the voices of 21,943 people in multiple assemblies and forums. Many of said voices asked for the ordination of women (33.41%), some specifying that they be ordained as deaconesses

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and have the faculty to administer Sacraments or celebrate the Eucharist, or as priestesses or presbytresses, as well as the permanent diaconate for men and women and the priesthood for married indigenous persons without distinction of sexes (11.31%). And there were mentioned activities of evangelization that women perform, proposing to empower them to offer the service of the diaconate in the community.

To these voices is joined that of Sister Teresina, who asked the Pope during the audience in which the religious women of the International Union of Superiors General were received in May 2016: “What impedes the Church from including women among the permanent deacons, the same as happened in the primitive Church?” His response represents a step toward the ordination of women: “With respect to the diaconate, yes, I agree.”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops. *Preparatory Document of the Synod for Amazonia*, 14. 2018.

¹⁷⁸ Francis. *Speech to the International Union of Superiors General*. 12 May 2016.

3.6.2 Arguments from the Ecclesiology of Vatican II and its Creative Reception in Latin America to Deconstruct Outdated Models of Ecclesial Ministeriality

3.6.2.1 From the Pyramidal Church to Communion Church

Before the Second Vatican Council, the Church was the priests, which responded to the pyramidal vision of the Church that the Gregorian Reform enshrined (9th century), and it was captured in the well-known text of Gratian: “there are two types of Christians, one bound to the Divine service [...] it is made up of the

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clerics. The other is the type of Christians to which belong the laity.”¹⁷⁹

The Second Vatican Council showed a new face of the Church from the vision of it as People of God¹⁸⁰ and sacrament, which is to say, sign and instrument of the union of the human race among itself and with God¹⁸¹ and universal sacrament of salvation,¹⁸² a vision that lays the foundation for the ecclesiology of communion that the Council did not develop but to which it refers as a gift of the Holy Spirit who “with diverse hierarchical and charismatic gifts directs and enriches the Church, which [...] He united in communion and mystery.”¹⁸³

In the reception of Vatican II in Latin America, the Medellín Document specified that “the Church is before all else the mystery of Catholic communion.”¹⁸⁴ For its part, the Puebla Document proposed that “the communion that must be built among men must be manifested in the whole of life, even in its economic, social, and political dimension. Led on by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, it is the communication of His own Trinitarian communion.”¹⁸⁵ it is communion and participation, of which the option for the poor of the Latin American Church is an expression. The Aparecida Document, in turn, affirmed that “the Church is communion in love.”¹⁸⁶

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3.6.2.2 From a Priestly Church to a Ministerial Church

In the postconciliar period, theology questioned the model of the Old-Testament priesthood that was introduced in ecclesial praxis and theology with the transposition of the cultic institutions of Judaism to the ecclesial community to show the continuity between the Old and New Testament that Gnosticism questioned. As a consequence of the process of sacerdotalization, the leaders

¹⁷⁹ Gratian. *Concordia Discordantium Canonum ac Primæ de Iure Divinæ et Humanæ Constitutionis*. C 7, c. XII, q. 1 P. L. 187.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 9.

¹⁸¹ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

¹⁸² Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 45.

¹⁸³ *Lumen Gentium*, 4.

¹⁸⁴ *Medellín Document*, 15.5.

¹⁸⁵ *Puebla Document*, 215.

¹⁸⁶ *Aparecida Document*, 261.

became functionaries of worship, and their office—priestly office of cultic mediation—was interpreted as dignity, naming them priests, Levites, sons of Aaron, and even relating them with Melchizedek, which does not correspond to the experience of the first communities that had broken with the Old Testament religious mediations.

And what served as an argument to respond to a relevant circumstance was made into doctrine with the elaboration of the theology of the Sacrament of Orders as the Sacrament of the Priesthood, tightly and intimately related to the Eucharistic sacrifice. Thus, the cultic priestly perspective became consecrated in the liturgy and in the priestly spirituality, as also in the imageries that they confer a character of dignity and honor to the men of the Church.

In this process, women were excluded, and, from the androcentric opinion of the inferiority of the women, St. Thomas denied their ordination with the *impedimentum sexus*: “the state of subjection of the woman makes her inept for the reception of this Sacrament”¹⁸⁷ and to act *in persona Christi*.

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The ecclesiological outlines of Vatican II opened the door to the self-understanding of the Church, all of Her ministerial, and to a renewal of ecclesial ministries, although the Council only referred to the traditional ministries of bishop, priest, and deacon, but it introduced changes like the reestablishment of the permanent diaconate and the reform of the minor orders, replaced by the ministries of Acolyte and Lector, changes that were solely for men. Having said that, the most significant support was to have recalled the common priesthood¹⁸⁸ and required that baptismal consecration be the basis for participation “in the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world,”¹⁸⁹ which it identified with the triple priestly, prophetic, and real function of Christ.¹⁹⁰

In the Latin American Church, the *Medellín Document* referred to the revision of ecclesial structures “inspired and oriented by two directing ideas, highlighted very much at the Council: that of communion, and that of Catholicity”¹⁹¹ and specified that in communion there is a “multiplicity of specific functions, since, so that She can fulfill Her mission, God raises up in Her bosom diverse ministries and charisms.”¹⁹² For its part, the *Puebla Document* affirmed that in the Church of communion, ministries are functions of service in the community that presuppose the fundamental gift of the Spirit by baptism and the charisms for the building of said communion, as also they suppose the recognition on the part of the Church, in

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¹⁸⁷ St. Thomas Aquinas. *STh, Supplementum*, q. 39, a. 1.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 10.

¹⁸⁹ *Lumen Gentium*, 31.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 34–36.

¹⁹¹ *Medellín Document*, 15.6.

¹⁹² *Medellín Document*, 15.7.

the person of the bishop, who confers a responsibility on the mission according to the needs of evangelization as an expression of the ministeriality of all the Church, sometimes as an ordained minister and others as a diversified ministry.¹⁹³ The *Aparecida Document* spoke of “the diversity of charisms, ministries, and services for the exercise of communion.”¹⁹⁴

Having said that, although from the ecclesiology of Vatican II the ecclesial ministries are not interpreted in a priestly perspective, neither as dignities nor as a function of a power or authority that the Sacrament of Order confers, but as service to the community, in practice the use of priestly imagery and vocabulary continues. The roles continue to be associated with the *potestas sacra* and consequently with power games, and it continues to be thought that bishops, priests, and deacons are ordained to exercise cultic functions and that they occupy superior and hierarchically ordered ranks. With regard to the place of women in the Church, the documents of the ecclesial magisterium that deny their priestly ordination resort to preconciliar theological arguments that do not correspond to the ecclesiological lines traced by Vatican II.

3.6.2.3 From a Kyriarchal Church to an Inclusive Church

[HW: The term *kyriarchy* and its derivatives are, to my knowledge, used only in Marxist-inspired intersectional feminist variants of Critical Theory. It is not unlike their notion of “patriarchy,” except that it exists at the intersection of all axes of “oppression” rather than along that of sex alone.]

In the patriarchal context, the cultural matrix of Christianity, the feminine and masculine archetypes were developed, identifying the man of the male sex with the human being as such and attributing to the man reason and to the woman, by contrast,

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irrationality. Moreover, the treaty of limits was established that reduces women to the sphere of the family and obliges them to keep silence, charging men with the use of words and with public matters, from the supposition of the superiority of the man and inferiority of the woman. This androcentric and kyriarchal setting conditioned the practices and doctrines of Christianity throughout its history.

From such conditions, the Fathers of the Church and the medieval theologians laid the foundation, one after another, for the thought of the Church on the being and duty of women: St. Augustine (5th century) reduced the women to the procreative function;¹⁹⁵ according to the *Decretum* of Gratian (12th century), “the image of God is in the man, [...] and the woman was not created in the image of God;”¹⁹⁶ St. Thomas (13th century) repeated Augustine in saying that the woman was necessary for procreation and needs to be governed by the man. And from this

¹⁹³ Cf. *Puebla Document*, 804.

¹⁹⁴ *Aparecida Document*, 162.

¹⁹⁵ “When it is asked unto what class of help for the man that sex is made, it seems to me to be solely for progeny.” St. Augustine. *De Genesi*, c. IX, n. 5.9.

¹⁹⁶ Gratian. *Concordia Discordantium Canonum ac Primæ de Iure Divinæ et Humanæ Constitutionis*. C. 5, c. XXXIII, q. 2. P.L. 187.

androcentric and medieval vision, access of women to priestly ordination continues to be denied: “Only the baptized man validly receives sacred ordination;”¹⁹⁷ “The Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women.”¹⁹⁸

An inclusive ministerial renewal stumbles over this androcentric and kyriarchal tradition, even though women were not excluded in the New Testament communities and in primitive Christianity. The New Testament draws attention to the women disciples of Jesus, to those who remained at the foot of the Cross and

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to those who went to the sepulcher; to Mary Magdalene, charged with announcing that Jesus had risen; to those who, with Mary, formed a part of the group that received the Spirit on Pentecost; to those who exercised functions of leadership and service in their communities, among them “our sister Phoebe, deaconess in the Church of Cencrae.”¹⁹⁹

3.6.3 Arguments for Proposing the Ordination of Women to the Diaconate in the Churches with an Amazonian Face

- It is possible and desirable, moreover necessary, to lay out again the forms of ecclesial ministeriality established from other contexts. However, the scarcity of clergy is not nor can be a theological argument to propose the female diaconate. It is about a formal recognition of the participation of women in the Church.
- As *Ecclesia semper reformanda*, during the 2,000 years of Her walk through history, the Church has assumed varied forms in Her ministerial structure and organization with their consequent theoretical and practical interpretations.
- The New Testament texts do not record cultic actions, since the communities of believers met in houses, which explains how women could bring the word and exercise functions of leadership. On the other hand, in said communities, there did not exist any hierarchical organization nor priestly figures: their leaders did not receive the title of priests, and the diversity of ministries, whose name comes from profane language, was divided into

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the triad of bishops, priests, and men and women deacons.²⁰⁰

- Women were marginalized from ecclesial organization not by the will of Jesus himself, but owing to historic circumstances: the change from domestic communities to public spaces of the official religion; and the sacerdotalization of their leaders, with the consequent

¹⁹⁷ *Code of Canon Law*, 1024.

¹⁹⁸ *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, 4.

¹⁹⁹ Romans 16:1.

²⁰⁰ Cf. 1 Timothy 3:11.

sacralization of the cult that included prohibitions related with cultic purity and marginalized women from sacred spaces, sacred objects, and sacred persons.

- The image of the patriarchal context in which women were considered inferior, weak, lacking in judgment, obliged to keep silence in the public space, and reduced to the domestic sphere, explains how they were, moreover, excluded from ordination. Even so, since the last century, women have come out from their confinement and burst into the space of social and political organization that had traditionally been exclusively male, daring to occupy the place that history had denied them. However, in the hierarchical organization of the Catholic Church, in spite of the new presence of women in all fields of public life, including of their recent emergence in the theological task, their exclusion is maintained.
- Although practices and documents that affirm the process of the exclusion of women from ordination were framed, for historical reasons, in the priestly perspective and make sense from the said context, from the ministerial diversity of the ecclesiology of Vatican II,

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it is not comprehensible to exclude them from the Sacrament of Orders with arguments from other contexts. It is convenient to highlight that the vetoes of the Pontifical magisterium refer to the priestly ordination of women and not to their possible ordination to the diaconate.

- Vatican II reestablished the diaconate as a permanent rank of the hierarchy and delegated to the episcopal conferences the decision about said reestablishment.²⁰¹ The decree *Ad Gentes* repeated said measure for the mission countries, arguing that those who carry out a truly diaconal ministry, preach the Divine Word as catechists, direct distant communities in the name of the parish priest or of the bishop, or practice charity in social and charitable works could be “strengthened and united more closely to the service of the altar through the imposition of hands, transmitted from the Apostles, so that they can fulfill more efficaciously their ministry by the Sacramental grace of the diaconate.”²⁰² Many women offer these and other services in the Church: could they not also be strengthened and united more closely to the service of the altar through the imposition of hands so that they can fulfill more efficaciously their ministry by the Sacramental grace of the diaconate and the decision of ordaining them be delegated to the episcopal conferences?
- The *motu proprio Omnium in Mentem* (2009) of Benedict XVI modified Canons 1008 and 1009 of the *Code of Canon Law*, justifying the modifications in which “at times the supreme authority of the Church, after

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²⁰¹ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 29.

²⁰² *Ad Gentes*, 16.

pondering the reasons, decides on opportune changes to the canonical norms,”²⁰³ which would permit the introduction of other modifications.

- The instruction *Ecclesiae Sponsæ Imago* (2018) affirms that consecrated women depend juridically on the bishop, “the ordinary minister” of the right of consecration, and in the liturgical celebration they express the *sanctum propositum* that “she is accepted and confirmed by the Church through the solemn prayer of the bishop,” establishing “a relation of special communion with the particular and universal Church that introduces them into the *Ordo Virginum*.”²⁰⁴ A door to the recognition of the *ordo* of female deacons that also existed as an ecclesial ministry in the ancient Church and due to historical circumstances ceased to exist?

²⁰³ Benedict XVI. *Apostolic letter in the form of motu proprio Omnium in Mentem*. 2009.

²⁰⁴ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. *Ecclesiae Sponsæ Imago*. 2018.

Navigating the River, By Way of Conclusion

Our Church is like the rivers of the Amazon. We live at a slow pace, and we go about building up Christian communities in the compass of people and groups, like the river that curves throughout its trajectory, and where it passes, it keeps the soil damp. Thus, the conditions necessary for life are maintained. We plan our pastoral action, and we try to execute it with efficacy. But we also cultivate gratuitous moments, in which we sense the majesty of the trees, the bird corners, the taste of the fruits of our biome, and the beauty of the people, who surprise us with their wisdom. We are a Church to the rhythm of the river.

The birth of the Church in the Amazon is the same Christ and Christian community of the beginning. Jesus is the

fount of living water.²⁰⁵ We inherit the ecclesial tradition of two millennia, a voluminous river! We receive also the waters of the traditions of our peoples, above all the indigenous and riverside dwellers. Therefore, the river-Church of the Amazon is at once Catholic and contextualized. Our waters follow the cadence of our people and of their culture. We are a living tradition, who bring a long history from the past and make history in the present and for the future.

In the Amazonian basin, there exist *igarapés*, which means “canoe path.” They are a stream or a canal that allows one to penetrate into the forest. The *igarapé* makes the connection of the island with the solid ground. It is a cradle of life of fish, birds, and plants; an ecological corridor that favors the procreation and mobility of many species. The riverside dwellers need the *igarapé* for transportation on in small boats, fishing, and gardening on the banks. In a certain way, the *igarapé* nourishes the river and is nourished by it. In the Amazonian basin there also exist lakes and lagoons. In them and around them live various types of insects, plants, and animals. Many species of birds, tortoises, and fish find there a favorable environment to procreate. And with that is maintained the beautiful cycle of life. The Church is comparable to a great river with its tributaries, just like the *igarapés* that come to where the small live, and life blossoms in all their expanse.

The breath of God, which hovered over the waters at the beginning of creation,²⁰⁶ maintains and renews the face of the Earth²⁰⁷ and the whole cycle of life in Amazonia. The same Spirit renews us

²⁰⁵ Cf. John 7:28.

²⁰⁶ Cf. Genesis 1:1. [HW: 1:2 would be a more appropriate citation.]

²⁰⁷ Cf. Psalm 103:30 [HW: The original text gives 104:30, the Hebrew/Protestant numbering. For reasons that should be obvious, I prefer to give the Vulgate/Douay-Rheims numbering instead.]

and drives us as missionary disciples of Jesus. Just as the water of the river needs oxygen so that the fish can live and multiply, we need the Word of the Lord, life in community, and the Eucharist.

We embrace the calling of Pope Francis to realize an ecological conversion, which includes letting emerge, in relations with the world that encircles us, all the consequences of the encounter with Jesus. We assume that the vocation of guardians of the work of God, especially in the Amazon “is not something optional, nor a secondary aspect of the Christian experience, but an essential part of a virtuous existence.”²⁰⁸

In the Amazon, the water and the soil, the sun and the rain, the rivers and the *igarapés* are different and complementary. In the same way, we cultivate an integral spirituality, which brings together body and soul, person and society, human being and nature, community and institution. We develop a spirituality like the three great arms of the river that meet: mysticism, wisdom, and prophecy. Or even: union with God, intercultural dialogue with our peoples, and the socio-environmental dimension of the Faith.

We identify concretely in the Amazon what Pope Francis says: “The whole material universe is a language of God’s love, of His affection without measure for us. The soil, the water, the mountains: it is all a caress of God.”²⁰⁹ We know that our pilgrimage has a goal. Like the Amazon River, we go toward the sea, to the definitive encounter with God. We sow

in grief and hope, with sights on the “new heavens and new earth, where justice dwells.”²¹⁰

We are also the ship and the rowboats of Christ. Our Church also resembles the boats that navigate the rivers of the Amazon. Large, medium, and small, each one has its utility and value. For long voyages, there are larger boats, which transport persons, provisions, and objects. During the voyage, the people nourish themselves, converse, sing, pray, coexist, and relate. Some passengers lodge in cabins, but a large part extends its networks and reposes in them. Our dioceses and prelatures are similar to these spacious boats that embrace men and women of rural communities, of indigenous tribes, and of large cities. In the Church, the peoples of the Amazon celebrate, coexist, speak and listen, feed on the Word, and find a place of consolation, rest, and encouragement to live their faith.

The boat does not exist to remain in the port, but to sail. As safe as it may seem, the port is only a stopping point to restock, embark, and disembark. Thus, we understand the calling of Pope Francis to be a Church on a journey, in movement. If that is good for the entire world, it has much more meaning for us, the missionary Church in the Amazon.

²⁰⁸ *Laudato Si'*, 219.

²⁰⁹ *Laudato Si'*, 84.

²¹⁰ 2 Peter 3:13.

At some moments in history, the Church was represented as “the barque of Christ,” or “the barque of Peter.” That ship comes down and sails upon the river. Our community leaders, pastoral representatives, priests, and bishops act as helmspersons who guide the ships. They must be attentive and

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know where the ship is going, avoiding the dangerous currents that divert it from its route, and escaping the sandbanks, which cause the barque to run aground. A comfortable Church, which simply repeats devotional and sacramental practices is like a ship aground.

In the history of our particular Churches, there are tranquil moments, when the barque comes down the river in a time of floods. There are also the difficult times, marked by storms. Attentive to the callings of God in our reality, we are a prophetic Church that confronts the “shoals” and the tempests. When we denounce the destruction of the Amazon, the annihilation of the indigenous peoples, the disastrous conditions of the life of the poor in the cities, we are unacknowledged and persecuted. But we are convinced that we must sail. Jesus is with us, and He gives us His peace in the midst of conflicts.²¹¹

The river-dwelling peoples and the indigenous people utilize small boats: paddled canoes, or those moved by small motors, which we call *rabetas*. Our small communities, scattered on the shores of the rivers, in isolated regions, or in the peripheries of the city, are like these smallest boats. They help to make the journey. They carry the people, and they penetrate into the *igarapés*. If we form small communities, we arrive at the edges, where our people live.

Thus, we are Church: with the nimbleness, the agility, and the simplicity of the small boats of our communities and the ships sufficient for sailing on the mighty rivers.

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Our spirituality is personal and collective. We feel that Jesus speaks to everyone, like the first men and women disciples. At the same time, He gathers us in community to be salt, light, and yeast in society. Our spirituality is social and environmental. We feed our faith on Jesus and follow Him in the strength of the Spirit to build a just and solidary society. From the Amazonian reality and that of ecological consciousness, we discover that God’s project of salvation includes the whole creation. We are children of the Earth, and we need to take care of it.

With Pope Francis, the peoples of the Amazon, the rivers, and the forests, we pray:

*Lord, take us under Thy power and Thy light,
To protect every life, to prepare a better future,
So that Thy Kingdom of justice, peace, love, and beauty may come.
Be Thou praised!*²¹²

²¹¹ Cf. John 14:27.

²¹² *Laudato Si'*, 246. [HW: The last line, in the Italian, would read *Laudato Si'!*]

Praying with and in Amazonia In a Synodal *Kairós*

[HW: *Caveat lector*: This prayer contains a form of reference to God that is at least proximate to, if not actually, blasphemy.]

Give me, O God of life and beauty, the constancy of that light rain that falleth, scarcely perceptible to our eyes; rain that maketh fecund with life all that it doth touch; rain that doth caress created beings with its gentle and serene presence, and which doth steadily produce the small streams of living water that, little by little, united to much more, shall see the birth of rivers; rivers that, when they converge, shall give tumultuous life to the great Amazon, which is a font of life in abundance for all men and women. May we be able to love Thy mysterious face in this river-sea.

Touch, O Lord, with thy marvelous creation, all my being, and give my insides understanding of the fine fabric of life, from the smallest and simplest to Thy magnificent cosmos in which Thou hast placed the human being, with his soul and capacity to create and reproduce, in a privileged place to a coworker with Thee in communion with hope and with life.

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Teach me with humility and from my smallness the office of co-creator with Thee, that I may learn to hold the delicate lines of Thy creation to understand little by little the wondrous connection of all and of each one of the created things upon the face of the earth. May my heartbeat learn to unite itself to the heartbeat of the life with doth bloom and sound and resound without ceasing in every particle that revealeth Thee and expresseth Thy mystery of love, given in totality.

And with the peoples, O Lord of the incarnation made Earth, Lord delivered unto tragic death caused by the injustice of yesterday and of today, and, above all, Lord of the certainty of new life and the uncontainable Resurrection, may I learn to recognize Thee there in Thine unmistakable Truth and in the beautiful diversity of each culture in this Amazon. May I learn to discern the truth of Thy call in the voice and in the life of the peoples, in their conviction for being and for living, in their harmonious relation with the earth, with others, and with the Divine force.

May I be capable of living an honest friendship with them, may I learn from the tireless resistance and from their serene attitude of care. Purify me of my excesses and my blindness that so many times overshadow and silence Thee.

I ask Thee simply to make me a brother of truth on the path of peoples and communities, from their richness of identity, sharing my gifts and my so many lacks, to assume a shared destiny in this Amazonian territory that is so threatened by superfluous and passing interests. May I become capable of indignation unto shouting and acting in the face of the daily death of this

territory and of many of Thy sons and daughters who live here, and above all, may I be able to recognize Thee always risen also in the hope and joy of their lives, in the millenary wisdom of their spiritualities that are fertilized with mine.

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And, above all, Father and Mother of life, give me the grace to remove my sandals, for this land of the Amazon, and all that the community life and possibility of plenitude in it express, is sacred land where God doth dwell, and from whence speaketh to us the Holy Ghost, who moveth the wind, Giver of unceasing life in the encounter with the spirits of the rainforest.

Thematic Index

[HW: I have re-alphabetized the index after translating it. The items in the index therefore do not occur in the same order as in the original Spanish. Consequently, the page numbering scheme I have followed throughout is here abandoned.]

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These challenges and contributions are the result of a process of joint reflection between *Amerindia* and the Pan-Amazon Ecclesial Network (REPAM) on the theme of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops of the Pan-Amazon region: “Amazonia: new paths for the Church and for an integral ecology.” 28 women and men theologians and pastoralists, principally from Latin America and the Caribbean, participated in its preparation.

It deals, therefore, with a sign of the mission shared by both organization to the service of life and of the excluded of this territory, as a service to the Church so that the cries of the poor and of the Earth may illuminate the Synod in October 2019.