



SECRETARIA GENERALIS
SYNODI

PRESS RELEASE

The pastoral challenge of polygamy and listening to the cry of the poor and the earth

Publication of the Final Reports of Study Group No. 2 and of the SECAM Commission

Vatican, 24 March 2026

The General Secretariat of the Synod today publishes the Final Report of Study Group No. 2, *To hear the cry of the poor and the earth*, and that of the SECAM (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar) Commission on *The pastoral challenge of polygamy*.

Final Report of Study Group No. 2

The Final Report of Study Group No. 2 is developed across several sections. Preceded by a reflection from Cardinal Michael Czerny, Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, the Report seeks to respond to the five fundamental questions entrusted to the Group regarding how the Church can better hear the cry of the poor and of the earth. The document proceeds from the theological conviction that listening to the poor and to the earth is not a pastoral option, but an act of faith constitutive of the Church's mission, rooted in the twofold commandment of love and in the example of the Good Samaritan. As Cardinal Czerny recalls in his preface, the term "listening" denotes an integral process that includes encounter, understanding of the problem, action, evaluation, and spiritual support, and concerns every Christian, including those who themselves feel poor. The guiding question of the Group's work thus becomes: how can the Church *better* listen to these two interconnected cries, aware that responding to the cry of the poor also means responding to the cry of the earth, and vice versa?

The Report then outlines the working methods adopted, the limitations encountered, and the lessons learned. It identifies the tools already present within the Church — parishes, basic communities, movements, Caritas bodies, ecumenical and international networks — and highlights their richness, while at the same time calling for the overcoming of the temptation to delegate improperly to specialized structures, recalling every baptized person to co-responsibility. Among the concrete proposals is the establishment of an Ecclesial Observatory on Disability, suggested by a subgroup composed largely of persons with disabilities, as a model that can be replicated at local and regional levels to give voice to all marginalized groups. On the theological level, the Report underscores the need for a theology that arises from listening to the poor and to the earth as authentic theological loci (*loci theologici*), and calls for theologians from the most vulnerable communities to be actively involved in the drafting of magisterial documents. Particular attention is given to formation: training programmes for laity, religious, and seminarians must integrate direct encounter with existential peripheries, competence in listening as a spiritual discipline — not merely as a technique — and social analysis. The document concludes with a vision of a synodal Church capable of becoming itself an instrument of listening, not merely possessing structures for listening, but transforming each of its members into a missionary presence alongside the most vulnerable.

Report of SECAM

The Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) has developed an organic reflection on the pastoral challenge of polygamy, rooted in the cultural, anthropological, and theological context of the African continent. The Report begins with the recognition of the sacred value of the African family, founded upon the covenant among human groups, with the ancestors, and with God, in which the child is considered a divine blessing and the desire for numerous offspring forms an integral part of communal identity. It is within this horizon that the historical existence of polygamy is situated — a phenomenon not exclusive to Africa but particularly rooted there and pastorally urgent. The biblical analysis reveals its ambivalence: tolerated in the Old Testament, it is progressively surpassed by the New Testament revelation, in which Jesus — recalling the original plan of the Creator — clearly affirms the unity and indissolubility of marriage. The document firmly reiterates the Church’s teaching: Christian marriage is monogamous by theological nature and not by cultural imposition. On the pastoral level, SECAM excludes any form of recognition of polygamy and recommends that polygamous catechumens not be admitted to baptism before freely embracing the commitment to monogamous marriage. This is not a matter of exclusion or stigmatization, but of patient and respectful accompaniment, inspired by the mercy of Christ. The dignity of women is placed at the center of this pastoral approach, with Mary — the Mother of Jesus — offered as a model of evangelization incarnated within culture. The conclusion opens toward a “pastoral care of proximity” capable of opening the doors of the Church to those living on spiritual and existential peripheries, recognizing in every person a child of God called to faithful love and to the Covenant.

Both Reports, in their thematic diversity, bear witness to the synodal journey of the Church: a Church that listens, discerns, accompanies, and, rooted in the Gospel, never ceases to draw near to every man and woman, responding to the challenges of our time.

The Final Reports and a brief summary in five languages are available on the website of the General Secretariat of the Synod: www.synod.va