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Press Conference for the Presentation of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “Querida Amazonia” of the Holy Father Francis

The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “Querida Amazonia” of the Holy Father Francis, the outcome of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region on the theme “*Amazonia: New paths for the Church and for integral ecology*” (6 to 27 October 2019) was presented in the John Paul II Hall of the Holy See Press Office today.

The speakers were His Eminence Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, secretary general of the Synod of Bishops; His Eminence Cardinal Michael Czerny, S.J., under-secretary of the Section for Migrants and Refugees of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, special secretary of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region; Fr. Adelson Araújo dos Santos, S.J., theologian and professor of spirituality at the Pontifical Gregorian University; Sr. Augusta de Oliveira, S.M.R., vicar general of the Sisters of Mary Reparatrix; and Professor Carlos Nobre, scientist, Nobel Laureate 2007, member of the Commission of Environmental Sciences of the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development. A video contribution was screened, from Bishop David Martínez de Aguirre Guinea, O.P., of the vicariate of Puerto Maldonado, special secretary of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region.

The following are the interventions by His Eminence Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, His Eminence Cardinal Michael Czerny, S.J., and Bishop David Martínez de Aguirre Guinea, O.P.:

Intervention by Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri

During the Angelus on 15 October 2017 Pope Francis called a Special Assembly for the Pan-Amazon Region on the theme “Amazonia: new paths for the Church and for integral ecology”. From that moment a synodal process began, which continued for two years, during which there was a preparatory phase guided by this General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, along with the pre-synodal Council – specifically appointed by the Holy Father – with the valuable collaboration of the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM).

Thus an extensive consultation took place with the entire People of God in the Amazon, starting with the Preparatory Document and the related Questionnaire, published on 8 June 2018. In this phase the activity carried out by REPAM was decisive, in the organization of about 260 events throughout the Amazon territory, including 70 territorial assemblies, 25 thematic forums and more than 170 other activities. It can therefore be said that, in total, more than 87,000 people took part in these initiatives. No less significant was the Study Seminar organized in Rome by the General Secretariat from 25 to 27 February 2019 on the theme: *Toward the Special Synod for the Amazon: Regional and Universal Dimension*. During the preparatory phase, an international conference was also held from 19 to 21 March 2019 at Georgetown University in Washington to address the theme of *Integral ecology: a synodal response from the Amazon and other essential biomes/territories for the care of our common home*.

All this material converged in the drafting of the *Instrumentum laboris* or Working Document, published on 17 June 2019, which then formed the base text for discussion during the Synod event itself.

The Synodal Assembly was characterized by choral and lively participation, rich in testimonies and proposals by the 185 Synod Fathers. Among the participants, there was a significant presence of 25 experts and 55 auditors, including 16 representatives of various indigenous ethnic groups and original peoples, 10 women religious presented by the International Union of Superiors General (U.I.S.G.), 6 fraternal delegates and 12 special guests selected on the basis of their high scientific competence and also for their membership of international bodies and organizations.

The Synod event was held over a period of three weeks (from 6 to 27 October 2019), during which an accurate methodology was followed to facilitate the work. Therefore moments of listening in plenary sessions alternated with other moments of active participation in working groups. All this great work then converged in the drafting of a Plan for the Final Document, which, once amended in the working groups, became the Final Document, voted for by a large majority of more than two thirds. Following the vote, in accordance with Synod praxis, the Document was submitted to the Holy Father and, at his behest, published immediately in the press.

During the Synod event there was no lack of interventions by Pope Francis, who offered significant reflections for synodal discussion.

For example, in his opening address, the Holy Father underlined “four dimensions: the pastoral dimension, the cultural dimension, the social dimension and the ecological dimension”, which are then in some way reflected in the final document. Indeed, this – after an initial chapter dedicated to integral conversion – the theme of the new paths is developed in four chapters, each one of which is dedicated to a type of conversion: pastoral conversion, cultural conversion, ecological conversion and synodal conversion.

Also in his address at the conclusion of the Synod, the Holy Father considered the content which had emerged in the Assembly, dividing it into four diagnoses: cultural, which includes inculturation and interculturality in Amazonian peoples; ecological, in accordance with an integral perspective that denounces the destruction of creation, of which the Amazon is one of the most important points; social, which implies not only the exploitation of creation but also of people along with the destruction of cultural identity; and finally pastoral, the principal, since the proclamation of the Gospel is urgent, but what is important is that it is heard, assimilated and understood by the diverse cultures in the Amazon region.

With the submission of the Final Document to the Holy Father, the Synod Assembly phase was concluded. The Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops has since then awaited the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, presented today.

Intervention by Cardinal Michael Czerny, S.J.

The Exhortation begins “Querida Amazonia”, beloved Amazon, like a letter, a love letter. At its heart is Pope Francis’s love for the Amazon and its many different people, indeed his love for the world and all of its people. And running through it is the truth that “Only what is loved can be saved. Only what is embraced can be transformed.”[1]

Someone who loves cannot resist talking passionately about the beloved. In this case, the beloved Amazon has obviously struck the Pope “in all its splendour, its drama and its mystery” (§ 1) but, at the same time, the great region is marked by suffering and destruction to the very edge of despair. The effect on Pope Francis is like on an artist who discovers a terrible beauty and, stimulated to contemplate and to create, now communicates a new epiphany of beauty and suffering, of vast promise and of great peril.[2] So his warm and caring letter necessarily includes many a forceful denunciation of injustices and many warnings of dangers, as well as urgent invitations to share his dreams and respond.

In the introduction to *Querida Amazonia*, Pope Francis explains that he does not want to replace or repeat the Synod’s Final Document. Rather, he presents it. He prays that the whole Church will allow itself to be enriched and challenged by the Synod’s work.

The Pope urges the Church to a renewed and innovative missionary effort to accompany the Amazon’s people in all the significant challenges they face. He asks the whole Church in the Amazon to “strive to apply” the synodal work, and he hopes that all people of good will be inspired by the Final Document and, certainly, by its diptych companion, the beautiful *Querida Amazonia*.

What is the status of these two documents? Where do they fit in the magisterium, the body of official Church teaching? Let me try to apply generally accepted norms in the interpretation of magisterial documents.

Querida Amazonia is a post-synodal exhortation. It is a magisterial document. It belongs to the authentic Magisterium of the Successor of Peter. It participates in his ordinary Magisterium.

The Amazon: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology is the final document of a special assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazonian Region. Like every other such synodal document, it consists of proposals which the Synod Fathers have voted to approve and have entrusted to the Holy Father. He in turn authorized its publication with the votes cast. At the beginning of *Querida Amazonia*, he says, “I would like to officially present the Final Document, which sets forth the conclusions of the Synod” (QA § 3) and encourages everyone to read it in full.

So, apart from formal magisterial authority, this official presentation and encouragement confer on the Final Document a certain moral authority. To ignore it would be a lack of obedience to the Holy Father’s legitimate authority, while to find one or other point difficult could not be considered a lack of faith.

Being a “special” synod that focused on one region of the world, the synodal process, the Final Document and its companion *Querida Amazonia* will require creative and sympathetic understanding for their lessons to be applied beyond the Amazon. They touch the whole Church and the whole world, although not uniformly. *Querida Amazonia* “can help guide us to a harmonious, creative and fruitful reception of the entire synodal process” (§ 2).

So we have two documents of two different kinds. The Final Document is the fruit of the synodal process, while *Querida Amazonia* is the Holy Father’s reflections on the synodal process and its final document. The first, consisting of proposals made and voted by the Synod Fathers, has the weight of a synodal final document. The second, reflecting on the whole process and its final document, has the authority of ordinary magisterium of the Successor of Peter.

The Pope prays that “the entire Church be enriched and challenged by the work of the synodal assembly,” that everyone in the Amazon “strive to apply it”; and that everyone “of good will” be inspired by it “in some way” (§ 4).

In conclusion, Pope Francis encourages “everyone to advance along concrete paths that can allow the reality of the Amazon region to be transformed and set free from the evils that beset it” (§ 111).

[1] *Address at the Vigil with Young People, XXXIV World Youth Day in Panama (26 January 2019): L'Osservatore Romano, 28-29 January 2019, 6.*

[2] Cf. St John Paul's 1999 *LETTER TO ARTISTS* addressed to all who are passionately dedicated to the search for new “epiphanies” of beauty. https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii LET_23041999_artists.html

Intervention by Bishop David Martínez de Aguirre Guinea, O.P.

From Puerto Maldonado, right in the middle of the Amazon rainforest, on the banks of the Madre de Dios River, we wish to join in this celebration for the publication of Pope Francis' Post-Synodal Exhortation.

It was precisely here, in Puerto Maldonado, where this beautiful story of the Pan-Amazonian Synod began. On 19 January the Pope told us: “today here, this afternoon, the work of the Synod begins”. And from that date, a process of listening was initiated by more than 87,000 people, from our native communities, farmers, riverside communities, cities... Together we were tracing the new paths for the Church and for an integral ecology.

In October of last year, the Pope called us to Rome. He wanted to place the Amazon in the heart of the Church, even at the risk of bringing disorder to the house. I am a witness of the hope with which many of our indigenous brothers arrived at the Vatican, at “the Pope's house”, they said – and there it was felt even more. Their desires and concerns were heard and, together, with all the bishops and missionaries, we shared the passion for proclaiming Christ.

And today, Pope Francis, gives us this exhortation, the fruit of the whole process: *QUERIDA AMAZONIA*, Beloved Amazon. The title is already a reflection of the heart of the Pope who shows a deep love for this particular territory and its peoples. The exhortation is a *POEM* of love proclaimed to the whole Universal Church and to all people of good will. It is a poem which weeps for the crimes and injustices, and which marvels at the beauty of these forests and their inhabitants.

The Pope once again does not offer us a goal. He wants to be a light on a continuing path. The exhortation, which is complemented by the post-synodal document, generates processes. It encourages us to transcend tensions and to continue searching for new paths of consensus in order to encounter Christ, Who makes us dream of His Kingdom present in society, in culture, in ecology and in the Church.

Thank you, Pope Francis, for the encouragement and impetus you give us. Your exhortation, *Querida Amazonía*, makes us feel more closely the love of Christ and of the Church, and impels us to assume the great challenge that we have of being close to the most vulnerable and with them to take care of our planet.
