

Report of the Relator General: Cláudio Card. Hummes



The subject of the Synod we are inaugurating is, “Amazonia: New Pathways for the Church and for an integral ecology.” The theme addressed follows the broad pastoral guidelines characteristic of Pope Francis for creating new pathways. From the very beginning of his papal ministry, Pope Francis has emphasised the Church’s need to move forward. The Church cannot remain inactive within her own closed circle, focused on herself, surrounded by protective walls and even less can she look nostalgically to the past. The Church needs to throw open her doors, knock down the walls surrounding her and build bridges, going out into the world and setting out on the path of history. In these times of momentous changes, the Church must always walk next to everyone and especially those living on the margins of humankind; an “outgoing” Church. Why outgoing? So as to turn on the lights and warm the hearts of those who help people, communities, countries and all humankind to discover the meaning of life and of history. These lights are above all the announcement of the person of Jesus Christ, dead and risen, and of His Kingdom, as is the practice of mercy as well as charity and solidarity above all towards the poor, those who suffer, the forgotten and the marginalised in today’s world such as migrants and indigenous peoples.

It is moving forwards that makes the Church loyal to its true tradition. Traditionalism, which remains linked to the past, is one thing, but true tradition, which is the Church’s living history, is something else through which every generation, accepting what has been handed down by previous generations, such as understanding and experiencing faith in Jesus Christ, enriches this tradition in current times with their own experience and understanding of faith in Jesus Christ.

The light means announcing Jesus Christ and untiringly practising mercy in the Church’s living tradition. It means showing the path to be followed in moving forwards inclusively in a way that invites, welcomes and encourages everyone, with no exceptions, as friends and siblings, respecting the differences between us.

“New pathways.” One must not fear what is new. In his 2013 Pentecost homily, Pope Francis already expressed the idea that, “Newness always makes us a bit fearful, because we feel more secure if we have everything under control, if we are the ones who build, programme and plan our lives in accordance with our own ideas, our own comfort, our own preferences... (...) We fear that God may force us to strike out on new paths and leave behind our all too narrow, closed and selfish horizons in order to become open to his own. Yet throughout the history of salvation, whenever God reveals himself, he brings newness - God always brings newness -, and demands our complete trust.” In the *Evangelii Gaudium* (no. 11), the Pope portrays Jesus Christ as “eternal newness”. He is always new, He is always the same newness, “yesterday, today and forever” (Heb 13, 8) He is what is new. That is why the Church prays using the words, “Send forth your spirit and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth.” So we must not fear newness, we must not fear Christ, the new. This Synod is in search of new pathways.

In his speech to Brazilian bishops during the 2013 World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro, speaking of the Amazon as “a litmus test for Church and society in Brazil,” the Pope proposed that the “the Church’s work needs to be further encouraged and launched afresh [in Amazonia], consolidating the results achieved in the area of training a native clergy and providing priests suited to local conditions and committed to consolidating, as it were, the Church’s Amazonian face.” Pope Francis added, “In this, please, I ask you, be courageous, and have parrhesia! In the “porteño” language [of Buenos Aires], be fearless.” This inevitably returns us to the history of the Church in that region. Ever since the very beginning of the colonisation of Amazonia, Catholic missionaries were there both to provide assistance to the colonisers and to evangelise the indigenous peoples. This marked the beginning of the Church’s evangelising mission in the region. Amidst light and shadow – certainly more lights than shadows – later generations of missionaries of both genders, above all religious Orders and Congregations, but also diocesan priests and lay people– in particular women – tried to bring Jesus Christ to local people and establish Catholic communities. In this synod, it is right to remember, acknowledge and exalt the heroic history, and often martyrdom, of all the missionaries of the past as well as those who are today in Pan-Amazonia. In addition to missionaries, there have also always been many lay and indigenous leaders who provided heroic testimony and were often killed, as still happens today. Furthermore, one cannot forget that the missionary Church of Amazonia distinguished itself – and still does today – for the great and essential services provided to local populations in terms of schools, health care, the fight against poverty and human rights violations. On the other hand, the history of the Church in Pan-Amazonia shows us that there has always been a great lack of material resources and not enough missionaries for the full development of a community with, in particular, an almost total absence of the Eucharist and other sacraments essential for daily Christian life.

The Amazonian aspect of the local Church must be consolidated, as Pope Francis said in the aforementioned speech made to Brazilian Bishops and, as exhorted by His Holiness in Puerto Maldonado (19.01.2018), so must its indigenous aspect within indigenous communities. Ever since the Synod was announced, the Pope has made it clear that the Church’s relationship with indigenous people and the Amazon Forest is to be one of its central subjects. In announcing the Synod and in explaining its objectives, Francis said, “The main purpose of this convocation is to identify new paths for the evangelization of this segment of the People of God, especially the indigenous peoples, often forgotten and without the prospect of a peaceful future, also due to the crisis of the Amazon rainforest, the lungs of paramount importance for our planet” (Vatican City, 15.10.17). In Puerto Maldonado, he also told the indigenous people, “I wanted to come to visit you and listen to you, so that we can stand together, in the heart of the Church, and share your challenges and reaffirm with you a heartfelt option for the defence of life, the defence of the earth and the defence of cultures.” In the synodal consultation stages, the indigenous people made manifest in various ways that they want the Church’s support in defending and upholding their rights as well as in the creation of their future. They ask that the Church be a constant ally. This is because humankind has a great debt towards the indigenous peoples on the planet’s various continents and therefore also in Amazonia. It is necessary that the right to be the leading players in their own history be returned and guaranteed to indigenous populations, as the subjects and not objects of the spirit or the victims of anyone’s colonialism. Their cultures, languages, history, identity and spirituality are humanity’s wealth and must be respected and preserved as well as included in global culture.

The Church’s mission today in Amazonia is the Synod’s central issue. This is a Synod of the Church for the Church. Not an inward looking Church, but one integrated in the history and the reality of the territory – in this case Amazonia –, attentive to calls for help and the populations’ aspirations and the “common home” [the creation]. A Church open to dialogue, especially interreligious and intercultural dialogue. A Church that is welcoming and wanting to share a synodal path with other churches, religions, sciences, governments, institutions, peoples, communities and persons. A Church respecting differences, with the intention of defending and promoting life for the populations in the area, above all those who originated there, while preserving biodiversity in the Amazon

region. An updated Church, “*simper reformanda*”, according to the *Evangelii Gaudium*; an outgoing missionary Church, explicitly announcing Jesus Christ, welcoming and communicative, merciful, poor, for the poor and with the poor. Therefore a Church with a preferential, encultured, inter-cultural and increasingly more synodal attention paid to the poor. A Marian Church, fuelled by devotion for the Most Holy Virgin Mary, according to many local titles, especially that of Maria de Nazaré, whose festivity brings together millions of pilgrims and faithful every year in Belém do Pará.

Inculturation of the Christian faith in the various different cultures is necessary. As St. John Paul II says about the missionary mandate of the Christian faith in the various different cultures, “The need for such involvement has marked the Church's pilgrimage throughout her history, but today it is particularly urgent.” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 52). Together with inculturation, the evangelisation of the peoples of the Amazon also requires paying particular attention to inter-culturality, because it is there that cultures are many and diversified, although they continue to share a number of common roots. The task of inculturation and inter-culturality lies above all in the liturgy, in interreligious and ecumenical dialogue, in popular piety, in catechesis, in daily coexistence in a dialogue with autochthon peoples in social and charitable works, in consecrated life and urban pastoral care.

One cannot however forget that nowadays and already for a very long time, the Church in Amazonia has suffered a great lack of the resources needed for its mission and that it needs to increase its communications potential (radio and television).

Within this broad context, the Church and integral ecology are united in this region. Ours is a Church that is aware that its religious mission, in keeping with its faith in Jesus Christ, inevitably includes “care of the common home”. This bond also proves that the cries of the land and those of the poor in this region are one and the same. Life in Amazonia has perhaps never before been so threatened “by environmental destruction and exploitation and by the systematic violation of the basic human rights of the Amazon population. In particular, the violation of the rights of indigenous peoples, such as the right to territory, to self-determination, to the demarcation of territories, and to prior consultation and consent.” (IL,14). According to synodal consultations with local populations, the threat to life in Amazonia derives from the financial and political interests of dominant sectors in today's society, in particular those of companies that extract riches below the ground in a predatory and irresponsible manner [legally or illegally] also altering biodiversity. This often takes place in collusion or with the compliance of local and national governments and at times also with the consent of some local authorities.

Numerous consultations held throughout the Amazon show that the communities consider that life in the Amazon is especially threatened by: (a) criminalization and assassination of leaders and defenders of the territory; (b) appropriation and privatization of natural goods such as water itself; (c) both legal logging concessions and illegal logging; (d) predatory hunting and fishing, mainly in rivers; (e) mega-projects: hydroelectric and forest concessions, logging for monoculture production, construction of roads and railways, or mining and oil projects; (f) pollution caused by the entire extractive industry that causes problems and diseases, especially among children and young people; (g) drug trafficking; (h) the resulting social problems associated with these threats such as alcoholism, violence against women, sex work, human trafficking, loss of original culture and identity (language, spiritual practices and customs), and all conditions of poverty to which the peoples of the Amazon are condemned (IL,15).

Integral ecology teaches us that everything is connected, human beings and nature. All living beings on the planet are children of the earth. The human body is made of the “dust of the ground”, into which God “breathed” the spirit of life as the Bible says (cf. Gen 2,7). Consequently, all damage done to the earth damages human beings and all the other living creatures on the earth. This proves that one cannot address ecology, economy, culture and other issues separately. In the *Laudato si'* it is

stated that they must be considered as one; an environmental, economic, social and cultural ecology (cf. LS, cap. IV).

The Son of God too became a man and his human body comes from the earth. In this body, Jesus died for us on the Cross to overcome evil and death, he rose again among the dead and now sits to the right of God the Father in eternal and immortal glory. The Apostle Paul writes, "For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things for him (...) whether those on earth or those in heaven." (Col. 1,19-20). In *Laudato si'* we read that, "This leads us to direct our gaze to the end of time, when the Son will deliver all things to the Father, so that "God may be everything to everyone" (1 Cor.15:28). Thus, "the creatures of this world no longer appear to us under merely natural guise because the risen One is mysteriously holding them to himself and directing them towards fullness as their end" (LS, 100). It is thus that God has definitively connected Himself to His entire creation. This mystery is accomplished in the sacrament of the Eucharist. This Synod is held within the context of a serious and urgent climatic and ecological crisis, which involves our entire planet. The planet's global warming caused by the greenhouse effect has resulted in an unprecedented, serious and pressing climatic imbalance as stated in the *Laudato si'* and the Paris COP21, where practically all the countries in the world signed the Agreement on climate that for the moment has remained almost unimplemented in spite of its urgency. At the same time, the planet is experiencing galloping devastation, depredation and degradation of the earth's resources, all fostered by a globalised, predatory and devastating technocratic paradigm reported by *Laudato si'*. The earth cannot take this anymore.

The immense urban reality of Amazonia, partly the result of internal migrations, and the presence of the Church in cities are another central theme in this Synod, because in cities the Church too must develop and consolidate its Amazonian face. It cannot be a reproduction of the urban Church in other regions. The Church's mission in Amazonia includes the care and defence of the Amazon Forest and its people: indigenous, caboclos, ribeirinhos, quilombolas, poor of all species, small farmers, fishermen, seringueiros, coconut splitters and others, depending on the region. This mission will certainly not be a burden, but a joy such as only the Gospel can offer. Nowadays migrations are a global phenomenon, marking current times in Pan-Amazonia, amidst those of Haitians in the past and Venezuelans today, but, above all, those of the indigenous people and others groups of the poor in the region's interior. The Church has made a great effort to welcome them. One must, however, highlight the migrations of indigenous people to the cities in their thousands. They need effective and compassionate attention so as not to culturally and humanly succumb in cities, faced with extreme poverty, abandonment, rejection, disdain and denial, thereby experiencing a desperate internal void. "Indigenous individuals in the city are migrants, landless human beings, survivors of a historic battle for the demarcation of their land, with their cultural identity in crisis." (IL, 132). For many reasons they are obliged to be invisible. One must listen to the often silent but no less real and bitter calls for help of urban indigenous people. The Church in the cities faces all the social and religious problems of its poorest peripheries and of the evangelisation of all sectors of the urban population.

Another issue consists in the lack of priests at the service of local communities in the area, with a consequent lack of the Eucharist, at least on Sundays, as well as other sacraments. There is a lack of appointed priests and this means pastoral care consisting of occasional instead of adequate daily pastoral care. The Church lives on the Eucharist and the Eucharist is the foundation of the Church (St. John Paul II). Participation in the celebration of the Eucharist, at least on Sundays, is essential for the full and progressive development of Christian communities and a true experience of the Word of God in people's lives. It will be necessary to define new paths for the future. During the consultation stages, indigenous communities, faced with the urgent need experienced by most of the Catholic communities in Amazonia, requested that the path be opened for the ordination of married men resident in their communities, albeit confirming the great importance of the charisma of celibacy in the Church. At the same time, faced with a great number of women who nowadays lead communities in Amazonia, there is a request that this service be acknowledged and there be an attempt to consolidate it with a suitable ministry for them.

Another important chapter concerns water, “Clean drinking water is an issue of primary importance. It is indispensable for human life and to sustain terrestrial or aquatic ecosystems.” (LS 28). The lack of safe drinking water is a growing threat all over the planet. “The questions that you are discussing are not marginal, but basic and pressing.(...). All people have a right to safe drinking water. This is a basic human right and a central issue in today’s world,” said Pope Francis in a speech made on February 24th, 2017. The Amazon is one of the planet’s largest reserves of freshwater. “The Amazon River basin and the surrounding tropical forests nourish the soil and regulate, through the recycling of moisture, the cycles of water, energy and carbon at the planetary level. The Amazon River alone sends 15% of the total fresh water of the planet every year into the Atlantic Ocean. The Amazon is essential for the distribution of rainfall in other distant regions of South America and contributes to the great movements of air around the planet. Moreover, it nurtures the nature, life and cultures of thousands of indigenous, peasant, Afro-descendant, river and urban communities.(...). Its generous natural abundance of water, heat and humidity means that the ecosystems of the Amazon host around 10% to 15% of the terrestrial biodiversity.”(IL,9). The role played by the forest and the indigenous populations also matters. In Amazonia the forest effectively takes care of the water and the water takes care of the forest, as together they produce biodiversity and the indigenous people have been the guardians of this system for millennia. It is for this reason that the Church also feels it is called upon to look after the water of our “shared home”, threatened mainly in Amazonia by global warming, deforestation and the contamination caused by mining and pesticides.

In conclusion, to comply with the working dynamics of this synodal assembly, I wish to suggest a number of core issues: a) The outgoing Church and its new pathways in Amazonia; b) The Church’s Amazonian face: inculturation and inter-culturality in a missionary-ecclesial context; c) Ministries in the Church in Amazonia: presbyterate, diaconate, ministries and the role played by women; d) The work done by the Church in looking after our “shared home”; listening to the earth and to the poor; integral environmental, economic, social and cultural ecology; e) The Amazonian Church in the urban reality; f) The issues concerning water; g) others.

I would like to conclude by inviting everyone to allow themselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit during these days of the Synod. Allow yourselves to be enveloped by the cloak of the Mother of God, Queen of Amazonia. We must not allow ourselves to be overcome by self-referentiality, but by mercy when faced with the pain expressed by the poor and the earth. We will need to pray a great deal, to meditate and discern a real practice of ecclesial communion and a synodal spirit. This Synod is like a table that God has prepared for His poor and He is asking us to serve at that table.