

Presentation of the document “Querida Amazonia” by Card. Czerny



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).

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[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