

From the synod on young people to the Pan-Amazon synod : the same trend of inculturation, synodality and proximity



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*Sr Nathalie Becquart, xmcj, was observer at the Synod on Youth in October 2008 and has been appointed Consultor to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops in May 2019. In this article about the upcoming synod on the Pan-Amazon region, she describes how there is a kind of continuity between those two synods at a time where Pope Francis is calling the Church to emphasize synodality.*

The upcoming Pan-Amazon synod : a « synod of urgency » and « the child of Laudato Si »

One year after the last synod of Bishops on « Young people, the Faith and Vocational Discernment », the next synod will take place in Rome from 6 to 27 October 2019. Its theme is "Amazonia: new paths for the Church and for an integral ecology". Focusing on a strategic and vital region for the future of humanity, this coming synod is qualified by Pope Francis as "our synod of urgency"[1] and as « the child of Laudato Si ». In the light of the current news about dramatic record numbers of wildfire in Brazil, the care of the Church for this Pan-Amazon region seems all the more accurate and profetic. The Pope explains the choice of Amazonia because this huge territory that involves as many as nine States "is a representative and decisive place. Together with the oceans, it contributes decisively to the survival of the planet. Much of the oxygen we breathe comes from there. That's why deforestation means killing humanity." Thus this synod concern all of us and especially religious who have a long tradition of social commitment and are increasingly engaged in the care for our common home.

The working Document for this upcoming Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazonian Region has been released in June and is the result of a strong listening process. This one has began with Pope Francis' visit to Puerto Maldonado in Peru, in January 2018, the publication

of the Preparatory Document in June 2018 and continued with many consultations and gatherings throughout the Amazon Region with a particular concern to listen to the indigenous populations.

### **A great continuity between those last two synodal processes : a call for a synodal Church**

If those two synods seem rather different in appearance - one was an Ordinary General Assembly, for matters concerning the good of the universal Church and was focused on all young people from 16 to 29 years old, the other is a Special Assembly, for matters which mostly concern one or more specific geographical regions - in fact there is a great continuity between those two synodal processes[2]. It is amazing to discover that many topics and issues are similar. Indeed through those two major church event processes, we can discern the same call for a synodal and inclusive Church, the same primary issue of inculturation and the same missionary challenge to be a creative close presence among the people to answer the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth. As an active player of the synod on youth and now following the synod on the Amazon as « consultor for the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops », I discern a true continuity between those two synods that can be interpreted as the current of « missionary synodality »[3]. The tracks drawn through both series of materials[4] are those of a Synodal Church that is : a Church that listens, a Church in dialogue, a missionary Church, a welcoming Church, a participatory Church, a creative Church, a harmonious Church, an inculturated Church, a Church engaged with the poorest that fights against injustices.

### **For Pope Francis, synodality is a key issue**

Since Pope Francis was elected, he has emphasized the synodal dynamics, considering the promotion of Synodality as a strong call of the Spirit : " The world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthen cooperation in all areas of her mission. It is precisely this path of *synodality* which God expects of the Church of the third millennium »[5]. In a way, synodality is a constitutive property of the Church deriving from its nature as a communion in that it is rooted in the Trinitarian mystery and allows for the establishment of greater effective communion. It is an appropriate form of the exercise of collegiality which passes through a process of community discernment - common listening to the Spirit in a dynamic of consensus seeking - whose aim is intrinsically missionary and communion-based. The instrument of the Synod of Bishops has been created by Paul VI after the Second Vatican Council but Pope Francis clearly wants to stress it as a key to strengthen the Reform of the Church. The aim is to implement the urgent missionary transformation of the Church so that she could be focused on reaching out to the peripheries. Synodality, because fundamentally missionary, is to be developed not primarily for reasons of internal organization but to respond to the calls coming from the reading of the « signs of the time » through a process of See, Judge, Act. A synodal church is therefore intrinsically in history and for the world : « A synodal Church is like a standard lifted up among the nations (cf. *Is* 11:12) in a world which — while calling for participation, solidarity and transparency in public administration — often consigns the fate of entire peoples to the grasp of small but powerful groups. As a Church which “journeys together” with men and women, sharing the travails of history, let us cherish the dream that a rediscovery of the inviolable dignity of peoples and of the function of authority as service will also be able to help civil society to be built up in justice and fraternity, and thus bring about a more beautiful and humane world for coming generations.(32) » [6]

In this changing time and complex world where « discernment » is to be the « missionary style » of Christians. This upcoming synod on the Pan-Amazon region is a crucial event to remind us this urgent call and challenge. May all our Christians communities accompany this « synod of urgency » in prayers and seeks to find creative ways to promote a synodal Church for the common good of our « common home ».

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[1] Interview of Pope Francis with the Italian daily La Stampa-Vatican Insider, August 9, 2019.

[2] With the new Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis Communio* of Pope Francis on the Synod of Bishops released on September 18, 2018, the Synod is understood as a process composed of three parts: 1/ the preparatory phase, in which the consultation of the People of God on the themes indicated by the Roman Pontiff takes place; 2/ the celebratory phase, characterized by the meeting of the assembly of Bishops; and 3/ the implementation phase, in which the conclusions of the Synod, once approved by the Roman Pontiff, are accepted by the local churches.

[3] In the Final Document of the Synod<sup>[3]</sup> there is an entire chapter on this theme of « missionary synodality » : §118 « The fruit of this Synod, the choice that the Spirit has inspired in us through listening and discernment, is to walk with young people, reaching out to all, to witness to God's love. We can describe this process by speaking of mission synodality or missionary synodality: "The implementation of a synodal Church is an indispensable presupposition for a new missionary impulse that involves the whole People of God" (International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, March 2, 2018, No. 9). This is the prophecy of the Second Vatican Council, which we have never yet assumed in all its depth and developed in its daily implications, and to which Pope Francis drew our attention by affirming: "The path of synodality is the path that God expects from the Church of the Third Millennium" (CCSO). We are convinced that this choice, the fruit of prayer and confrontation, will enable the Church, by the grace of God, to be and appear more clearly as the "youth of the world"<sup>[3]</sup>.

[4] That can be read here <http://www.synod.va/content/synod2018/en.html> for the Synod on Youth and here <http://www.sinodoamazonico.va/content/sinodoamazonico/en.html> for the Synod for the Amazon

[5] In Pope Francis address for the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the synod of bishops, Paul VI Audience Hall, Saturday, 17 October 2015

[6] *ibid*