



*The Holy See and the People of the Amazon:  
Towards Integral Human Development*

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**BEFORE**

With the arrival of the Europeans, the Catholic Church began its evangelisation and pastoral ministry in this great region of the Amazon. Even with the acknowledged historical errors, the Church's role of *madre et magistra* has been, and still is today, decisive for the life of the peoples of the region.

To document a most recent chapter in this complex history, we have the important new volume titled: *Amazzonia, nuove cammini per la Chiesa e per una ecologia integrale*. It conveys the commitment of the Holy See, through the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development (DSSUI), to the integral human development of the entire Amazonian community.

In recent times, the Vatican has accompanied the peoples of the Amazon via the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace; since 2016 the role is part of DSSUI. The Church's interest in the whole Amazonian reality is deep—a true experience of missionary reciprocity marked by solidarity, communion and, undoubtedly, growth and shared learning.

Personally, I had the happy opportunity to assist in the creation of the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM). The missionary Church in the Amazon was deeply fragmented, isolated and disconnected. This called for a network for effective dialogue and collaboration. REPAM seeks to integrate many of the different existing bodies of the Church—Bishops, Clergy, Religious Life, various pastoral actions—together with the peoples themselves), all within an inclusive and flexible network. Since its founding in 2014, REPAM's aim is to listen closely to the populations of the territory and to help them to secure their rights, defend their territories, care for their common home, and promote socio-environmental justice... always grounded in the Gospels and with the participation of the peoples and communities themselves as real agents of *Buen vivir*.

A huge priority must be sister-mother earth, among the poorest of all, as Pope Francis has often said. The Amazon is a living and dramatic expression of the socio-environmental dimension of care. God's creation has its profound beauty and majesty. To this we humans have recently added a tremendous fragility because of the way our societies have decided to "develop". Thus it happened that, between 2017 and 2019, and accompanied by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and then DSSUI, through REPAM and other voices, the Church and peoples petitioned the Holy Father for a Special Synod for this territory. In preparation, REPAM carried out a listening process unprecedented in its breadth, depth and diversity. On 19 January 2018, Pope Francis officially launched the synodal process at Puerto Maldonado in the Peruvian Amazon.

## DURING

Looking back on the entire Synod, what remains foremost in my mind is the voices of the indigenous and other Amazonian peoples: how they began to speak, how they kept on speaking, how their speaking was welcomed during the Synod and in its final document and in Pope Francis's exhortation, *Querida Amazonia*. In effect the Amazonian people said, "Do not abandon us; continue to walk with us," and in reply, the Bishops promised, "We will not abandon you; we will continue to walk with you."

This encounter and mutual commitment constitute a huge, sincere, transparent engagement in reading the signs of the times, in honestly discerning what those signs mean, and in embracing God's will for the Amazon and the whole world.

Pope Francis is convinced that the concerns of the Amazonia are deeply relevant for the entire world. *Laudato si'* clearly explains that the whole planet and its inhabitants are inextricably connected with the Amazon. *Querida Amazonia* invites the whole Church and the wider world to learn from the major documents in this volume. Choices that people are making worldwide in what we consume, what we invest in, how we earn money, what goals we aim for, are often in destructive contradiction with the very survival and flourishing of the Amazon and its peoples and, finally, of the whole world and its peoples.

## AFTER

The Amazon Synod marked the beginning of a new and more important stage in this shared journey. A very significant fruit of the synodal process is the creation of the Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon, or CEAMA, with the explicit participation of the peoples, communities and the Amazonian Church. CEAMA is already spawning many new initiatives, which DSSUI is committed to assist as requested.

Priorities for the integral human development of Amazonia include

- to stand with the original and other peoples of the Amazon Region in defence of their rights and their homelands.
- to build networks of solidarity and development that overcome the various colonial mentalities.
- to seek forms of sustainable crop and livestock agriculture, the use of clean energy, the exploitation of resources without destroying the environment and cultures.
- to help preserve their cultures and protect the Amazon's overflowing life, including the rainforests that are so vital to and the planet's future.

Our role in DSSUI is to listen and accompany, encourage, advise and support the people and their local Church as they strive for healthy, sustainable, culturally sensitive and future-oriented development throughout Amazonia. And there are farther-reaching impacts. New networks and initiatives, inspired by the ecclesial process around the Amazon biome, are being born in other territories such as the Congo Basin, the Mesoamerican biological corridor, the Asia-Pacific Ocean biome, the Guarani Aquifer and the Gran Chaco. May these new dynamics work well for the good of the Church and of the people of each biome.

## **CONCLUSION**

We know that renewal can come from the periphery. Amazonia is a privileged place where life expresses itself and where God himself makes his presence felt. This beloved Amazon constitutes a call to commitment and an eloquent expression of hope for the future of the world.

Just as the biodiverse Amazonia plays a vital role in the health of the planet, so too a Church with an Amazonian visage calls the wider Church and all society to conversion. What is at stake is the Amazon's chance for the future for, without it, the entire planet is at risk. Later, it will be too late.