

THE PAN-AMAZONIAN SYNOD AND THE CHALLENGE OF EDUCATION IN THE AMAZON

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Introduction

The Pan-Amazonian Synod is a "kairos" in the Church, a manifestation of the power of the Spirit who wants to guide the Church of the Pan-Amazonian region through new paths. Education has always played a central role in the mission of the Church. Does it also need new roads in the Amazon region? And once found, how and with whom to travel them?

In Part I, I approach this topic with a reflection on the mentality of both the migrant populations of the Amazon and that of the aboriginal peoples of this region. This is important because education can transform a mentality, a way of thinking and confronting oneself before others and before the natural environment that surrounds us. In this sense, *Laudato Si* and the proposal of integral ecology offer the Church a horizon of new paths in its educational work.

However, this proposal must overcome the challenges presented by the educational centers where students are trained, some challenges of a structural nature and others that arise from a region with characteristics specific to the Amazon. In this search for a more contextualized education, what would be the Church's contribution to travel these new paths?

In Part II I take up again an educational project but from the perspective of *Fe y Alegría* ("Faith and Joy"), an educational model in the Pan-Amazonian region, the concrete challenges for an intercultural, bilingual education and care for the natural environment in primary and secondary schools. On the basis of the results of this experience, I will consider some avenues that illuminate the possibility of a configuration of a broader ecclesial educational project, taking into consideration the role and the decisive importance that consecrated life has in the education of the peoples of Panamazonia.

In the Amazon we urgently need to respond to the appeal made to us by Pope Francis to become a Church "which goes forth",² a Church that goes out to the geographical, cultural and social frontiers, to the peripheries of the cities, that gets into the boat and goes to meet those Amazonian and indigenous faces of the riverside and native peoples. Only through an education in integral ecology that *reaches everyone* can we hope to achieve the "serene future"³ that this region deserves.

PART I

The city and the distorted view of the forest

Currently 75 to 80 per cent of the total population of the Amazon, numbering approximately 34 million, live in cities. They are large, medium and small and they have already become part of the Amazon landscape. Migration to this region continues to be increasingly nourished and fluid for various reasons: employment offered by extractive companies, national or foreign, encouraged by

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² Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n.24

³ cf. Papa Francisco, Convocation of the Panamazonian Synod, October 15, 2017

agreements with the government; the colonization of the territory from neighboring regions opening businesses and demanding and offering health services, education, food, communication, entertainment, and so on. The Amazon has become a powerful magnet that attracts migrants from other cultures and customs, offering them a life of new opportunities or earnings and a promising future.

What is the mentality brought by these new guests to the Amazon? It is a mentality that tacitly or explicitly supports an extractivist model of natural resources where the forest is considered only an economic good. Moreover, it is a neo-colonizing mentality that still sees the original peoples with the prejudices of a collective illusion that was born with the first colonizers and has been fed and sustained by the media. They're still seen as enemies of civilization and considered "savages."⁴ Others show a paternalistic attitude by calling them "indiecitios", and consider them dependent people who need our help. Still others consider them idle or lazy without even asking themselves what they consider "productive". And there is no shortage of those who idealize the original peoples, thinking of them as members of an ideal society that in reality never existed and never will exist, because it conceives them without the limitations and imperfections of any human group.

The nightmare of cities

But the dreams of well-being, security and wealth of migrants in Amazonian cities may soon turn into a nightmare. The problems generated in the cities of the Amazon, on the one hand, are similar to those that exist in other non-Amazonian cities, that is to say, they suffer from "centralism", which only benefits the capital and the most important cities of the country.

Consequently, the Amazonian peoples, as in other regions, suffer the negligence of the government and its authorities, and their needs for basic health services and education are not met. But to these problems are added others from the Amazon region itself, such as the toxic pollution that comes from the large plantations nearby and also from the rivers by mercury, affecting the fishing and food of the population; the great poverty and child malnutrition, human trafficking promoted by the exploitation of minerals, tropical diseases, etc. Added to this is the problem of security in a territory that is more difficult to control and where armed groups or terrorists easily hide, or are involved in the cultivation of supplies and drug trafficking, which is much more visible in the border areas of the Amazon countries.

On the other hand, indigenous peoples are also present in the peripheries or belts of the cities where they settle, but in much more difficult economic conditions compared to the rest of the population. When they live without the support of the indigenous reference group that tries to recreate their cultural modes in the cities, they become part of the "invisible natives" that hide their cultural identity.⁵

Consequently, it is difficult for the majority of the population in the large cities and towns of the Amazon to see this positive facet of an economic model of development based on capital, consumption and technological progress. Only the dark shadows of this model are experienced. The disadvantages are great and the damage incalculable for the region, especially for the original peoples and the forests surrounding them. It is still a strange model, because it does not seek to adapt to the Amazon, but rather seeks for the Amazon to adapt to it by tempting it to an ecological suicide.

Indigenous Peoples and the Difficulty of "Good Living" ('Sumaq kawsay')

The original peoples who have inhabited this region for a long time, long before the migrants of this century, teach us with their ancestral wisdom that there is another way to situate themselves in the context of the Amazon. The forest for the indigenous, is part of them: the forest is life; the forest is the house and the temple; the forest sustains them, gives them shelter, bathes them, dresses them, cures them of diseases, etc.

⁴ cf. Instrumentum Laboris, n. 76.

⁵ cf. IL, n. 132

For the indigenous Amazon there is no such difference and "objective" and asymmetric distance between man and the forest that surrounds him, between beings considered alive and beings considered inert. The Amazonian Indian is located in the forest, surrounded by all life and in which with a horizontal look, he integrates the other beings as a whole and is able to contribute to the harmony or disharmony of this reality.

This way of understanding life in its various elements and interconnected dimensions, in this search for harmony of relationships between water, land and nature, community life and culture, God and the various spiritual forces, is what helps to understand the ancestral wisdom of "Good Living".⁶

Now, in an Amazon region assaulted by a technocratic and capitalist system which has already established bridges with the most distant indigenous and riparian peoples, this cosmivision of "Good Living" is weakened. Missionaries and those who have had the opportunity to visit distant riverside and indigenous villages know how difficult it is for these populations to cope with a pragmatic, individualistic mentality that spreads across the rivers and that when it is accepted without discernment, it harms the common good. Some indigenous communities already rent their lands or the shores of their communities to settlers, in many cases becoming their accomplices and in the end imitating those practices against which they had first fought.

But we are wrong if we generalize and think that they already have a mentality like ours. Indigenous peoples continue to be the best caretakers of nature in the Amazon⁷. What is notorious is that there are symptoms of a deterioration of an ancestral wisdom that is in great danger of crumbling, but that still resists in large pockets of the Amazon and that is why it is urgent to empower it.

Education in the Amazon: Integral Ecology at the Dialogue Table

Apparently there are only two ways of looking at the reality of the Amazon, one based on a technocratic model of global reach, on science and technology, based on a logic of capital accumulation and reinventing itself from the cities; the other way, based on a socio-environmental model, more consistent with the Amazon reality, more native, identified with the wisdom of indigenous peoples, with a comprehensive vision and care of the forest. The first model expands from the cities as its center and moves along riverbanks to native communities. The second model, based more on the margins, tries to subsist and not surrender to the aggressiveness and seduction of the first model.

But we want to point to a third model that has been woven and consolidated with the Church's vision of the "**Integral Ecology**"⁸ of the encyclical *Laudato Si*. It also joins the great national and global movements that have grown enormously over the last decade and are firmly rooted in the consciousness of humanity, as demonstrated by the recent movements of protest and ecological proposals. In addition, they are movements that have already taken root in new generations such as the 16-year-old Swedish teenager, Greta Thunberg, etc.

This model of Integral Ecology in *Laudato Si* fits very well with the perspective of the "Buen vivir" of the original peoples. In fact it gathers these good seeds of the Kingdom of God present in the indigenous cultures of the Amazon. "Sumaq kawsay" seeks harmony or abundant life through "good living"⁹ and "good doing". At the end, it is the *practice of the original peoples* that sustains this "Good living" and saves it from being a mere concept, but rather a practice that is identified with living integral ecology in the Amazon. That is why Pope Francisco in Puerto Maldonado invited the local Amazonian churches to allow themselves to be culturally "shaped" by the original peoples¹⁰. We could compare this with the phrase "the poor evangelize us"¹¹ in the Puebla Document, saying that the indigenous peoples evangelize us in the Amazon. And a grateful response from the Church

⁶ cf. IL, nn. 12 - 13

⁷ cf. IL, n. 29 and WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature), *Living Amazon Report 2016*, pp. 69, 84.

⁸ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si, On the Care of the Common House*, 2015, Ch. 4, (nn. 137-162), . nn. 10, 11,62,124, 225,230

⁹ cf. IL, n. 97

¹⁰ Pope Francis, *Meeting With Indigenous People of Amazonia*, Puerto Maldonado, January 19, 2018.

¹¹ Puebla Document, III General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate, n. 1147.

must be to empower the concept of the “Good Life” of the original peoples through the teaching, practice, diffusion and integration of Integral Ecology.

At the same time, it is necessary and urgent that the different ways or perspectives of approaching the Amazon, which at first sight seem to be excluded, enter into an open, honest and sincere conversation about a notion of development where the common good is the most favored. How can a conversation be established between these models, where the formation of an ecological consciousness can also encourage all disciplines of human knowledge in the search for a just society? The most propitious and hopeful way to reach this objective is still **Education**. As Pope Francis said in his speech to the Amazonian peoples: " Education helps us to build bridges and to create a culture of encounter."¹²

Is it possible to have a different kind of education in the Amazon?

Education is a very broad concept and covers a wide range of fields. I wish to dwell on formal education as we know it in its stages of initial, basic, middle and higher education. This type of education, as we know, is fundamental in the process of incorporation into a given society, in the group confirmation of one's own cultural values and symbols, and in the learning of the skills necessary to exercise a productive activity (not only economic) for the benefit of society, and to harvest a future that allows it to live in a dignified manner.

On the other hand, education in the Amazon is encompassed within a larger system, integrated into the social, political and economic structure of the Amazon countries, in each of which an educational program adapted to an educational policy is elaborated. From this perspective, it is also fair to ask, what happens when education in countries with Amazonian territory in South America are always looking to integrate into a broader and globalized capitalist and technocratic system? And what happens when this integration is never effective or real, especially in regions like the Amazon?

The frustration of a mediocre education

We already know the type of education of children and adolescents that we find after a few hours traveling by road or river out of the large villages of the Amazon. The further away from the city, education is more precarious at all levels: the facilities where they learn are often inadequate, the vocation of teachers is uncertain, the nutrition of students in families or in schools, if there is any, is insufficient and the real time of classes for the child or young person is greatly reduced-- both by the permissions that teachers ask for to go to the city, and also by the parents who ask their children to help in the work that they do. All this leads to a great academic deficiency, especially in the students of the riverside towns and the most distant indigenous communities.

Faced with this frustration with poor education, parents react by overvaluing education in the city. Damage far exceeds economic gains. Families are split up by leaving children in the hands of other families or simply renting them a room. In fact, the desire to provide better education for children so that they can "be better than us" explains much of the exodus from communities to the city. At the same time, the perception of the natural environment as contrary to a good education is reinforced.

¹² cf. Pope Francis, *Meeting With Indigenous People of Amazonia*, January 19, 2018

PART II

Education in the Amazon based on the experience of *Fe y Alegría* (“Faith and Joy”)¹³

Along with the challenge that governments have to be able to provide basic education to all their citizens, even in the most distant points of the country's territory, other challenges arise from the context of the Amazon biome and the diversity of the populations that inhabit it. Faced with a population made up of mestizos, river peoples, afro-descendants, and more than 300 original peoples, with their different languages, the question arises: Is the education offered in the Amazon region relevant to the inhabitants of this region?

The **popular education** movement *Fe y Alegría* led by the Jesuits wanted to answer this question by mapping or assessing their schools in the Pan-Amazonian region (Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela)¹⁴ in 2015-2017. The idea was to strengthen intercultural and bilingual education with the care of the common home. At the educational level, it was a major initiative after the recent publication of the encyclical *Laudato Si* (2015).

Fe y Alegría has a good reputation: it offers an education of quality and values; it has a good management of its educational centers; and, apart from the financial support of NGOs close to the Society of Jesus, it establishes agreements with the government of each country, which undertakes to cover the salaries of the teachers, and to thus guarantee a sustainable education.

The most outstanding thing is that *Fe y Alegría* brings together many religious congregations and secular institutes or former students who run these educational centers. The good esteem in which *Fe y Alegría* is held in the Pan-Amazonian region means that all the urban and rural populations of scarce resources want a *Fe y Alegría* centre in their midst.

The mapping or initial evaluation of the *Fe y Alegría's* educational centers in Panamazonía was in relation to issues of common housekeeping, interculturality, and bilingualism. I will focus on primary and secondary schools and with students ranging in age from 11 to 17. The methodology used included surveys of students and teachers, as well as dialogue groups with parents and community leaders. The following are some of the challenges discovered.

Mestizo Majority Educational Centers

A first challenge is related to the **location** of the *Fe y Alegría* centers. After a few decades and large and continuous migration flows from other regions, several educational centers were suddenly and unwillingly located in the center of the city. As a result, the number of indigenous people in these educational institutions had decreased significantly or had even disappeared altogether. As a result, these educational centres became training places for families with greater resources.

Another challenge was the **absence of an intercultural curriculum**. In almost all of *Fe y Alegría's* educational centers, there was only a minority of indigenous students within a large mestizo student population. This mestizo population in the schools belonged to immigrant families from other non-Amazonian regions. In this intercultural relationship, from the point of view of education, indigenous students are at a disadvantage. There are no intercultural curricula or programs where the history, geography, culture, languages and knowledge of the original Amazonian peoples are integrated into the process of student formation.¹⁵ If the “Amazon issue” is absent or ignored in the

¹³ The popular education movement, “*Fe y Alegría*” is widespread throughout Latin America. It is also in Europe (Italy, Spain) and in Africa, in over 20 countries with more than 1,500 educational centers, where they try to provide quality education to the poor and marginalized in society. This educational experience was born in Venezuela in 1955, with Fr. José María Velaz sj.

¹⁴ And now settling also in the country of Guyana

¹⁵ The case of Bolivia, which has made progress in designing an intercultural curriculum, is very interesting; however, it is only a function of the Andean region, that makes up the majority of migration in the Amazon region.

educational centers of the Amazon, it is more difficult to eradicate the existing prejudices of the mestizo students against the students of the native peoples of this region. The cultural expressions of the Amazon region are in many cases reduced to folkloric exhibitions that take place during some dates of celebrations in schools.

Pope Francis said in his speech to the Amazonian populations in Puerto Maldonado: "Schooling and education for the native peoples must be a priority and commitment of the state: an integrated and inculturated commitment that recognizes, respects and integrates their ancestral wisdom as a treasure belonging to the whole nation."¹⁶ The programs or curricula of studies depend on the ministries of education of each government, but in several cases they have not been contextualized regionally or culturally. This is surprising considering that intercultural issues are not a recent phenomenon in educational policies. We can find an interesting and passionate bibliography on these subjects since the seventies of the last century. This would seem to demonstrate *the lack of political will* on the part of governments to be able to implement intercultural curricula or programmes in an integrated manner.

A third challenge is the **students' lack of identification with the territory**. In most mestizo schools, students have little or no identification with the Amazonian territory in which they live. There is a common, natural desire to continue their studies in the big cities. Nor is there a look at the Amazon territory (and its problems) seen as an integrated "biome" beyond borders between countries. They are not aware that, in the Amazon territory, what happens on the other side of the border also affects them. Although they are very aware and concerned about local problems (garbage, deforestation of the place where they live and scarcity of drinking water), other more global problems affecting the Amazon such as mining, human trafficking and drug trafficking are losing strength. Teaching about the natural environment is very pragmatic and functional, several schools have orchards and breeding grounds for domestic animals, but without an *integration* with the other subjects of study.

Another challenge is the **mentality of parents**. In the search for a model of intercultural bilingual education, it has been very important to listen to parents. We know that tradition, customs and language are best transmitted by the family itself. But when it comes to the formal education of their children, parents think ambiguously and in the face of their future needs and interests: they want their children to speak Spanish (or Portuguese in Brazil) well, because that more easily opens the doors to higher education or a decent job in the city. In this sense, the parents of these indigenous students want for their children a life with fewer difficulties, understood as the limitations of belonging to a society where the indigenous are still marginalized. For this reason, many times the parents themselves avoid speaking to their children in their native language and in this way, they think they are helping them in their education.

Indigenous educational centres

Fe y Alegría also works in few educational centers where all of the students are indigenous. Let us take for example the case of *Fe y Alegría* with the Awajun - Wampis ethnic groups in the north-east of Peru, in the department of Amazonas. Religious men and women were in charge of the accompaniment of these centers in primary and secondary education. They are centres located on indigenous community lands, where primary school teachers teach in the native language, and students speak in and out of class in their own language and feel fully identified with their natural environment, although they see the cities as always having greater possibilities for the future.

A first challenge in these centers is the **lack of native teachers**. The incorporation of new indigenous teachers who speak Awajún-Wampis in primary education is increasingly difficult, and this is a generalized problem for other native languages of other regions in Panamazonía, even more so knowing that there are ethnic groups that only make up small groups of people.

¹⁶ cf. Pope Francis, *Meeting With Indigenous People of Amazonia*, January 19, 2018; cf.. IL, n.98, b)1.

Another challenge is that **bilingual education in these schools ends in primary education**. Although indigenous students stay together during high school, the content and terminology used in the courses during this stage are more complex and require longer and more specialized training by native teachers.

These educational centres for indigenous students also operate in the **form of boarding schools**, and so another challenge arises. In other words, most Awajun-Wampis students come to school or college from very distant communities settled on different rivers and only reached after many hours or days of travel. Parents see their children only once or twice a year. Therefore, it is an education outside their communities of origin and with the absence of the family in the formation process.

Towards an Education in Integral Ecology in Panamazonia

We have seen the challenges of an intercultural, bilingual education and care of our Common Home, which are present in primary and secondary education in the educational centers of Fe y Alegría in Panamazonía. At the same time, we are convinced that a more adequate implementation of an integral ecology education in mestizo, indigenous or mixed schools will give birth to a new mentality in the students of the educational centers, and will have a healthy multiplier effect in the future of this region.

The gift of the Pan-Amazonian Synod for Education in the Amazon

Pope Francis has said that the Pan-Amazonian Synod is the “child” of *Laudate Si*. It is true, because this Synod wants to incarnate the care and concern for our Common Home, focusing on the Amazon, indispensable for the future of all humanity. Education plays an essential role in this care of the Common Home, as Pope Francis reaffirms: "In the Encyclical *Laudato Si* I invited everyone to collaborate in the care of our common home. To understand the urgency of the challenge before us, we must focus on education (...)".¹⁷

The Pan-Amazonian Synod wants to respond to this call of Pope Francis for the Church in the Amazon region, to play a key role as **bearer and witness of the message of Integral Ecology**, and to become an essential, integral and present part of the mission of Christian evangelization in this region. The land of the Amazon itself urgently demands from its inhabitants, both cities and smaller towns and villages, a new way of approaching it, of observing it, of feeling it and of loving it. This is to say, a new sensitivity that can be born and nourished through an education in integral ecology that takes into account both the personal good the common good.

We must aim for a change of mentality in the generations to come, for an ecological conversion that can transform the hearts of young people and adults, and the various spheres in which they move: in the social, political, economic, religious and environmental fields. Concretely and with a formal education, the Church can do a great deal of good by dedicating herself to accompanying the young generations in the various stages of education: initial, primary, middle and higher.

Fe y Alegría: A Reference Experience for Education in the Amazon

The experience of *Fe y Alegría* is an educational “bet” that must be taken as a point of reference in the Amazon. And I refer to "Faith and Joy" specifically because I do not know of any other similar experience *at the Pan-Amazonian level*. In addition, its educational model has been successful in other contexts similar to the Amazon, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo. Another dimension that makes it very reliable is the *ecclesial dimension*. Many religious congregations, secular institutes, lay people and lay people participate in this movement of popular education. It is a real, concrete and edifying example of what it means to work as a Church. In addition, Fe y Alegría creates a kind of *positive educational biosphere* that attracts teachers and students. It is concerned about their training and always aims, even in difficult circumstances, at

¹⁷ cf. Pope Francis. *Call for a World Education Alliance by May 14, 2020* (Video message, September 13, 2019)

quality education. The testimonies of the teachers concurs: "I like to work at Fe y Alegría", "I like the philosophy of Fe y Alegría", "I can tell the students who have studied at *Fe y Alegría*".

The Pan-Amazonian Synod encourages us to think that this type of positive and successful education experiences, such as *Fe y Alegría*, should be an important reference point in an **education project with a broader ecclesial dimension**. I received a WhatsApp from an indigenous girl: 'United we are more'. In Panamazonia there is no shortage of educational experiences concerned with ecology, interculturality, education and sensitivity to the environment. And sometimes we only meet them by chance or when we have received an invitation.

In Peru, for example, there are several educational experiences: that of "Fe y Alegría" coordinated by the Jesuits, that of the indigenous University of Nopoki in the vicariate of San Ramón, that of the Franciscans, that of the network of Dominican schools in the vicariate of Puerto Maldonado, and so on. There are also other governmental experiences, such as FORMABIAP (Training of Bilingual teachers of the Peruvian Amazon) and independent non-ecclesial experiences which bring their own part, contributing to this desire to work for intercultural, bilingual and environmental care education.

Each educational project is also aware of its own limitations, especially in the education of river and indigenous populations. For example, it is difficult to complete an entire educational cycle, from the initial stage to the university. Thus, they offer studies in primary schools but they can no longer do so in secondary school or at a university or college. "Together we are more." It would be very helpful to create alliances between different educational projects, to create educational networks within each country and with other countries of the Amazon in order to face the challenge of education in integral ecology.¹⁸ In this sense, the possibility of an Amazonian episcopal structure could give a great impulse to education in this region.¹⁹

"Whom shall I send?" (Is. 6,8). The Mission of Consecrated Life²⁰ and Education in the Amazon

In the "Fe y Alegría" surveys of parents and local authorities in Amazonian countries, they considered the Church as the most reliable ally to establish and lead positive changes in the life and education of communities. These voices confirm the important role that the Church has always played in education in the Pan-Amazonian region.

However, the danger of *settling, or settling in*, is also to be found in the educational work of consecrated life. Several religious congregations have their prestigious educational centers in the center of the Amazon cities, including several Fe y Alegría educational centers. We mentioned before that these educational centers originally located in the peripheries, has gradually been seen over the years as located in a central zone. How is this new context evaluated in the face of the charism of Fe y Alegría, which was born as a *movement of popular education for the poorest*²¹? But in general, we find that in the Amazon region there is a *marked absence* of the Church in the formal education of the poorest families or of indigenous migrants settled in the peripheries of the cities. And *this absence is even greater* in the enclaves of the original peoples of the Amazon.

¹⁸ cf. Pope Francis: "In a moment of extreme fragmentation, of extreme opposition, it is necessary to unite efforts, to create an **educational alliance** to form mature persons, capable of living in society and for society". (September 13, 2019)

¹⁹ cf. IL n. 129, f) 3. Another article by the same author is: "*Pan-Amazonian Synod: Towards an Amazon Episcopal Conference?*"

²⁰ Institutes of consecrated life (religious or secular), societies of apostolic life, the order of virgins, hermit life and other new forms of consecrated life belong to the consecrated life of the Catholic Church.

²¹ The motto of *Fe y Alegría* is: "Where the asphalt ends, *Fe y Alegría* begins." "The complete quote of its founder is: '*Fe y Alegría* begins where the asphalt ends, where the cement ends, where the drinking water does not arrive. That is, wherever are the real forgotten of their own society'" José María Vélaz, SJ (1910 - 1985).

The whole Church is an *educating mother*²²," said Pope Francis, and religious congregations have made this face of an educating mother in the Amazon clear, limpid, loving and helpful way from the very beginning of evangelization. But we must ask ourselves now, in this time of grace for the Amazon, if faith and enthusiasm remain the same, if we are still willing to travel new roads and to navigate towards deeper waters, bringing that face of an educating mother of the Church to those who need it most.

The Pan-Amazonian Synod is a "kairos" in the Church and as such what it wants is to attract religious men and women with its radiant light and to guide us, like the poor shepherds, to the peripheries of our jungle, and to discover that light there in all its poverty, in the "manger" of the Amazon; and to see it there, in so many children and young people, in need of human warmth, companionship, evangelical wisdom and love. The "kairos" that God offers to the Amazon in this Synod is a strong appeal to consecrated life to renew itself in the same call²³ that made Moses a prophet, Samuel a sage, David a good ruler, John the Baptist a forerunner; the same call that made our founders saints, and that made Mary the mother of God.

If consecrated life does not incarnate the concrete face of the Church as the educating mother of the poorest, of the indigenous and of the most vulnerable in the Amazon, we lose **the most valuable wealth that the Church has in the Amazon**. Every important educational change begins here, in the desire to be close to the most valuable things in these forests, like the John and Mary's desire to remain next to Jesus nailed to the tree of the cross. From this first step, to be with, to remain with and to desire to be present with the most vulnerable peoples, everything else becomes "everything else" and arrives in its time.

Only in a second moment could we speak and dream of many positive things in the improvement of education in this region: reorganization of communities in religious congregations, experiments of teamwork among different congregations or secular institutes of consecrated or lay life, expansion of educational networks, pastoral care in teacher training centers, agreements with governments, etc. etc. etc. But this is all part of a second moment.

The most important thing, and what this "kairos" we now live seems to urge us to do, is to renew the sense of mission in consecrated life, understood as a greater closeness to the poorest and most vulnerable populations in our Amazon. We can't wait any longer. Later is too late.

²² cf. Pope Francis, *Address to the Congregation for Catholic Education*, February 13, 2014

²³ The word "vocation" comes from the Latin *vocationem*, which means, "call".