

## ***THE POST SYNOD, THE CRY OF MOTHER EARTH AND THE PROPHETIC SPIRIT IN THE AMAZON***

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The celebration of the Pan-Amazonian Synod was the breath of the Spirit that the Church of the Amazon needed to discern new paths in its missionary activity. It was truly a "kairos" that manifested itself as an overflow of the waters of the Amazon. Those Amazonian waters joined the flowing waters of the Tiber River in Rome, coming together to form new rivers and tributaries, which will carry abundant life to new destinations. The Spirit has manifested itself in Rome, the cradle of Western Christianity, through this Synod as "rivers of living water".<sup>2</sup>

The Church of the Amazon region, purified by these waters of the Spirit, takes up again with new strength and renewed hope, its fertilizing mission in the Amazon. The peoples of the Amazon have always considered the Church as their most faithful ally. Since the beginning of the evangelization of this part of the continent, the Church has never abandoned them, and even less will it do so at this crucial moment for the life of this region and of humanity as a whole. Pope Francis reminds us, the Church in the Amazon "is still present and critical to the area's future."<sup>3</sup>

In this evangelizing mission of the Church today, the care and defense of the Amazonian territory and of the indigenous peoples who inhabit it, has become a banner of struggle that wants to sustain the eco-pastoral activity of the Church in the Amazon. The cry of mother earth, the cry of the "pachamama"<sup>4</sup> has been heard at the Synod but continues to haunt us with its lament. The prophetic spirit of the Church in the Amazon must continue its course, accompanying the peoples of the Amazon in the defense of the forest and the most vulnerable.

### **The urgency in the defense of the land/forest**

I remember the day before Pope Francisco came to Puerto Maldonado, on January 18, 2018, where the indigenous peoples of Brazil, Bolivia and Peru met to prepare for his visit. There were more than two thousand in attendance and bishops representing all the Amazonian countries were there. The representatives of the different indigenous ethnic groups of these countries took the microphone to answer a question: What will you ask the Pope when you see him? In their answers they repeated again and again with emotion the word *land*. They denounced the abuses committed against the "pachamama" and against themselves, who cared for her, and would ask the Pope to help them. The next day Pope Francisco, in his speech to the Amazonian peoples, echoed this distressing call in Puerto Maldonado, and said that he was standing together with them to "reaffirm a heartfelt option for the defense of life, *defense of land* and defense of cultures."<sup>5</sup>

For the indigenous, land is life. If we defend their land, we defend their life.<sup>6</sup> We can say that the most difficult battle in evangelization for an integral ecology in the Amazon is to accompany the original peoples in their struggles for the *right to the delimitation, demarcation and titling* of their own lands. It has been demonstrated that they are the ones who best take care of the territory of the Amazon region.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, any attempt at evangelization will not be complete or authentic if it leaves aside that which is essential for them to have a dignified life.<sup>8</sup>

A historic milestone in the defense of indigenous lands of Brazil, a country that covers more than 60% of the total Pan-Amazonian territory, was the Federal Constitution of 1988. The bishop of Xingu, Dom Erwin Kräutler, described this Constitution as "Copernican" in terms of indigenous legislation. This constitution, unlike the previous ones, stopped considering the indigenous person as a minor and gave them a letter of citizenship like the rest of his compatriots. Sadly the promise to demarcate indigenous lands within five years of the promulgation of the Constitution stayed on paper

and was not fulfilled. To this day, the denial of this right constitutes "the cause of almost all conflicts affecting indigenous peoples"<sup>9</sup>.

### **The land in the context of a technocratic and globalized model**

This conflictive situation has been accentuated and has worsened in all the Pan-Amazonian territory. This takes place in the context of the last decades, of the transformation from a capitalist economy to a more technocratic and globalized economy, which has contributed to change the perspective on the treatment of land and agrarian reform.<sup>10</sup>

Before, it was a question of denunciations and claims for enormous extensions of lands that were not used in the large haciendas or *latifundios*. This unjust situation sought to be remedied by an agrarian reform with an alliance between the peasantry and the national industrial capital, to convert unproductive lands into productive ones and contribute to national economic development.

But this situation has changed and today the World Bank, transnational corporations and international finance capital are transforming large tracts of land from unproductive latifundia into agribusiness, large-scale monocultures and mining<sup>11</sup>.

This also happens in the Amazonian region. Thus, the problem is no longer the abandonment or misuse of the land, but the pretension to use it all, destroying an integrated ecological complex. It begins with the felling of the trees whose woods are more valued in the international market; then the remaining wood is exploited and finally comes the total elimination of vegetation for industrial agriculture or extensive livestock.<sup>12</sup>

In the old latifundista system, there were several owners or possessors of diverse haciendas with their own name. In the case of the Amazon, the owner always acts incognito because, remembering some indigenist novels, it is about "Mr. Government".

In some countries there has been a positive government attitude to the recognition of indigenous community lands within a legal framework. However, this position is increasingly weakened. Now, more than ever, there are many pressures from powerful national and international groups that want to have a direct impact on the Amazon, in the shortest possible time and looking for the largest extension of land to exploit. Therefore, it seeks to annul or modify the laws that protect indigenous lands, in order to usurp their forested lands and give way to abuse in the exploitation of the natural resources of this region.

The validity of these laws is in grave danger in the face of the large number of applications from mining companies waiting for the necessary permission to seize some slice of this immense green cake that is the Amazon. In 2016 alone there were 17,509 mining processes (research and land use applications) involving Indigenous Lands (4,181) and Conservation Units<sup>13</sup> (14,076) in this region in Brazil. Mining on indigenous lands is not permitted in Brazil, but the regulation of these lands depends on the government and this can become a tragedy for indigenous peoples.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Cancer of Corruption<sup>15</sup>**

The struggle for land demarcation in the Amazon is also linked to the problem of corruption. Corruption in Latin America has caused a big sore in the fabric of states and governments, difficult to cure. It is a deep cancerous tumor that also affects the Amazon countries, increasing the weakness and fragility of the care of nature with this moral scourge. The *Lava Jato*<sup>16</sup> case and other cases tell us about the fierce competition of transnational companies that blatantly include in their projects a budget of money and royalties to corrupt intermediaries in the acquisition of road construction projects or resource extraction in all countries. This macro-level corruption has become so widespread that it has become a major risk for the entire Amazon region.

Also the extraction of natural resources in the technocratic model is accompanied by sabotage of the moral resources of the Amazonian populations. The cancer of corruption seeks to corrode or break the ethical and moral norms of people's behavior, in this case those that make up indigenous populations. Indeed, corruption stimulates dialogues between companies and indigenous populations, where the lack of transparency and injustice affects local populations, with the coexistence of their

own authorities. The strategy of "divide and conquer" in negotiations with the community is very common through bribes, promises and privileges that benefit only the authority and its family. In this sense, the companies, with the help of these community leaders, seek to appease the demands or protests of the entire community by offering very little in exchange for what they want from the indigenous communities, such as the construction of a school, a medical post or a sports field, etc.

### **Prophecy and Martyrdom in the Amazon: Defense of Land and Human Rights**

In the biblical tradition the prophet was not primarily a visionary of the future. The prophet was rooted in the present and daily reality of the people of Israel. The prophet was sent by God when the king, the caretaker of the weakest, the poor, the widow and the orphan, failed in his mission. He spoke in the name of God before the king and did so with truth, with courage and denouncing everything that contradicted the kingdom of God, especially the injustice committed against the most defenseless in society.

This prophetic action has always been alive and active in the Church of the Amazon territory. From the beginning of the evangelization of this territory there were martyrs not only because of the conversion to the faith of the natives but also for defending them from the colonizers. From the beginning they "taught us that the defense of the original peoples of this Continent is intrinsically linked to faith in Jesus Christ and his Good News."<sup>17</sup> The question that martyrs always ask us is what and how much we are willing to lose for the cause of the Kingdom of God. They have given up their own lives.

#### *Prophecy and Martyrdom in the Amazon of the 20th Century*

In the 20th century, religious martyrs were martyrs for the defence of the territory of the indigenous people and as defenders of the human rights of the poorest.

*Dorothy Mae Stang S.N.D* (1931-2005), Doti, as she was called, helped the migrants expelled from their northeastern lands who came to the Amazon, with a Sustainable Development Project, in Boa Esperança, Anapú, State of Pará, Brazil. It was a successful model of cacao production and therefore very dangerous in the eyes of the region's economic elite, landowners, loggers and land traffickers. She was shot six times at point-blank range at the age of 74.

*Vicente Cañas, SJ, "Kiwxi"* (1939-1987) lived with the "isolated" Enawene-Nawe people in Mato Grosso, Brazil. He identified with this culture by learning its language, participating in its rituals, agricultural work and handicrafts.<sup>18</sup> Kiwki, as one of the tribe, fought to defend the sacred land of the Enawene Nawe ethnicity coveted by the adjoining haciendas. He was murdered at the age of 48.

*Alejandro Labaca OFM, Cap.* (1920-1987) lived with the indigenous Huaorani people in Ecuador for ten years before becoming bishop vicar apostolic of Aguarico. The Tagaeri indigenous group in voluntary isolation was part of the Huarani ethnicity and was threatened by the expansion of oil exploitation in the Ecuadorian Amazon. He was sent along with Inés Arango, CTM to be intermediaries between the Ecuadorian government and the Tagaeri ethnic group. Concerned about the fate of this ethnic group, he had said: "If we don't go, they'll kill them." At the meeting they themselves were soon massacred by the Tagaeri spears. Bishop Labaca had written: "Today those who work for minorities must have the vocation of martyrs" (*Crónica Huaorani, p. 198*).

To these martyrs for the defense of the Amazonian territory are added many others, the "unknown martyrs" whose number has grown alarmingly in recent decades.<sup>19</sup> It is difficult not to mention "Chico" Mendes (1944-1988) murdered in Xapurí, state of Acre, Brazil. He was a defender of the environment, and rebelled against cutting down trees in forested areas sustainably exploited by "seringueiros," like him, rubber workers. He made famous the strategy of peaceful struggle of the "empate" (impediment, blockade), by means of which groups of 50 to 100 people intertwined hands, forming human shields to prevent tractors or excavators from felling the trees.

## **Prophecy shapes the Amazon face of the Church**

*“Would that all the people of the LORD were prophets! Would that the LORD might bestow his spirit on them all!”(Nm 11,29.)*

The grave and delicate situation that the Amazon is going through gives us an opportunity to evaluate ourselves as a Church on the prophetic role that our Christian life assumes in this region. Although the moral leadership of our pastors is important, it is much more a collective initiative, taking the responsibility of the laity as a point of reference, to react to the abuses in this region. We have to understand the gravity of the matter and above all take seriously that the Church is all of us, not as a cliché, but for what this really means, that is, to take responsibility for the world around us as "a priestly, *prophetic* and royal people."<sup>20</sup>

### *The Social Doctrine of the Church*

At times it would seem that there is a lack of social and political commitment on the part of the laity accompanied by their pastors. And one of the causes seems to be the lack of formation of the baptized faithful in the social doctrine of the Church.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, many times we have remained in a catechesis that has favored only the doctrinal dimension, with a personal morality centered on the individual level. But we know that our faith is not detached from the problems that humanity is going through.

Everything is interconnected. Love of God and neighbor connects everything. “Charity”, says Pope Francis, “is the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members or within small groups) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones)”.<sup>22</sup> Therefore we cannot be indifferent to what is happening to this region of the Amazon, to its forests and to the native peoples who inhabit them.

In the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*<sup>23</sup> we find criteria that help us to live our faith in society. In this sense there are different topics worth mentioning: human rights, the principle of the common good, together with the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity, the family as the protagonist of social life, dignity and the right to work, political authority, the system of democracy, the safeguarding of the environment, the promotion of peace, the commitment of the lay faithful, and so on.

The social doctrine of the Church as part of the "tradition" of the Church offers us criteria for living our faith with a more social, collective and now ecological sensitivity, more in tune with the challenges of the times in which we live. The ecclesial tradition is a living tradition that is constantly being enriched. Thus, the encyclical *Laudato Si* has contributed much to the social doctrine of the Church by integrating the dimension of "integral ecology" into its evangelizing work.<sup>24</sup>

In the Amazon, lay men and women have much to contribute from the social, economic, political and other fields of knowledge, so that the Church in this region can become a prophetic Church. “Christ (...) fulfills his prophetic function not only through the hierarchy (...) but also through the laity”<sup>25</sup> and they should defend, from their own professional competencies, the rights of the region, of the environment and of the populations that inhabit it.<sup>26</sup>

## **Dialogue and prophecy**

We find ourselves in a propitious time for the Church to exercise her prophetic spirit. We live in a more related, more globalized world, where we know that what is done in one part of the planet has repercussions in another. There is a greater ecological sensitivity that has taken root in the younger generations. Movements to protect the climate, the environment, animals and nature have been settling, multiplying and continue their course with greater force to prevent us from an ecological suicide at a global level.

All these movements and alliances have had a first beginning in the exercise of the *Dialogue*. Dialogue appears "as the tool through which the human community takes charge of shared problems (and also) in dealing with the problems of the Common Home".<sup>27</sup>

The need for public dialogue leads to the *exercise of politics*. (...) as the art of the possible, in which the common good is sought, trying to safeguard particular goods without nullifying them, but subordinating them to the more universal good.<sup>28</sup>

In this sense, the State "plays a fundamental role, which cannot be delegated, in the search for the integral development of all," although we know that it is always in danger of being captured by the "extractive elites" that seek to privately monopolize public goods.<sup>29</sup>

#### *Exercise of Dialogue in the Amazon: The Right to Prior Consultation*

There are international agreements signed with several States and Amazonian countries, such as of the *International Labour Organization - Convention 169* concerning indigenous and tribal peoples. This convention supports the right of indigenous peoples to be consulted on their territories and to "participate effectively in the decisions that affect them."<sup>30</sup> Moreover, according to this right, consultation with the community must be done in accordance with their own traditions and must take into account the traditional decision-making methods of the people or community.<sup>31</sup>

The *Right of Prior Consultation* is a mechanism that helps to address the problem posed by Pope Francis: "how to reconcile the right to development, both social and cultural, with the protection of the particular characteristics of indigenous peoples and their territories."<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately, in many cases there is no political will to conduct this dialogue honestly and in pursuit of the common good. Often, the biggest problem of this intercultural dialogue or negotiation is that the foreign company, with a western mentality and willing to explore and exploit the territory of the indigenous peoples, trusts more in their own power and they think they are superior. Sometimes they don't even try to understand their interlocutor. They hear him but don't listen to him and use their legal tricks and corruption to get away with it.

#### *Outrage and Prophecy*

The primary purpose of dialogue is not the search for one's own interests but the search for the common good for all. For Pope Francis, "Dialogue is not negotiation. To negotiate is to try to take one's own "slice" of the common pie... (To dialogue is) to seek the common good for all."<sup>33</sup>

Dialogue in society, political dialogue, in the various formats in which it occurs as agreements or conventions between individuals, communities or institutions is not easy. There is a lot of resistance to authentic dialogue and it would be very naïve of us to say that everyone is willing to dialogue. And this is notorious when large economic interests are at stake and when the power relations between those who dialogue or negotiate are very unequal. In the Amazon, it would seem that the dialogues around indigenous land rights do not end well and are marked by unfair negotiation. As Cardinal Hummes states: "Sometimes there is no condition for dialogue because the other party does not want to dialogue. In this case it is necessary to *get indignant*. We can't stop being outraged. And there is also the prophecy."<sup>34</sup>

Indignation is the germ of prophecy. It arises when cordial, honest and transparent dialogue between the parties to reach a mutual agreement, in this case between companies and indigenous communities, has failed. A relationship has been established between the most powerful and the weakest based on the interests, resources and strategies of the former to achieve only their objectives. The Church bets on dialogue but if it is sabotaged by corruption and injustice, it is natural that the indignation of the heart wants to express itself in a prophetic protest and denunciation.

In the social, political and ecological commitment that our current faith demands, we cannot be Church in the Amazon region without questioning the prophetic dimension of our life. We must manifest or express our outrage in the face of injustice and abuse and act more effectively in response to the cries of the poor, the indigenous and the earth.

### *Prophecy in the Synodal Way of the Church in the Amazon*

The Pan-Amazonian Synod has been, and still is, as its name indicates, a process of "walking together," and this time, beginning new paths for evangelization and integral ecology in the Amazon territory. And this journey together we must do by accompanying, accompanying and allowing ourselves to be accompanied in the prophetic spirit of our Christian vocation.

It was first of all the bishops, the pastors in charge of the ecclesiastical circumscriptions of the Amazon, who, with a spirit of discernment, responded in the Pan-Amazonian Synod with a prophetic document to the indignation of the Amazonian peoples.

At the same time, the bishops invite us to maintain the prophetic spirit in the Amazon region in solidarity and collectively. In this sense, the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM) has been and continues to be a prophetic instance of accompaniment; the work it has carried out in the organization of the pre-synodal territorial Assemblies demonstrates this. These assemblies did not stop at indignation and denunciation, pointing the finger and reclaiming, but they have also discerned and pointed to new paths,<sup>35</sup> which the Synod has confirmed.

In this Synod we asked much and the Spirit gave us more than enough. The results indicate this. But it would be naïve to think that things are going to change in the Amazon only with good results. We do not want a Copernican turn in the evangelization of the Church of the Amazon that remains on paper. The Church in the Amazon will indeed be "a Church with an Amazonian face, a Church with a native face"<sup>36</sup> if it is also, at the same time, a prophetic Church.

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<sup>2</sup> cf. Jn 7:37-39.

<sup>3</sup> cf. Pope Francis, *Address to the Brazilian Episcopate*, Rio de Janeiro, July 27, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> "Mother Earth" or "Pachamama" in Quechua language.

<sup>5</sup> cf. Pope Francis, *Meeting with Indigenous People of Amazonia*, Puerto Maldonado, January 19, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. "(...) The defense of the earth has no other purpose than the defense of life."

<sup>7</sup> cf. *The Amazon: new paths for the Church and for integral ecology. Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 29.

<sup>8</sup> cf. International Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples' Rights on their ancestral lands and natural resources*, arts. 94-95.

<sup>9</sup> cf. Felício Pontes JR., *Povos da Floresta. Cultura, Resistência e Esperança*, Paulinas, São Paulo, 2017, *Prefacio*, pp. 14 – 18, p. 17 (translation from Portuguese).

<sup>10</sup> cf. Plínio Arruda Sampaio, in: "La Reforma Agraria en América Latina: una revolución frustrada", *dph*, March 2011. In the Amazonian countries, agrarian reform, that is, the redistribution of land excessively concentrated in the hands of large landowners, took place in a significant way during the 20th century in Bolivia and Peru; and superficially in Brazil, Venezuela, Ecuador and Colombia. These reforms were sponsored by the United States within the framework of the so-called "Alliance for Progress."

<sup>11</sup> cf. Peter Rosset, "Re-thinking agrarian reform, land and territory in La Via Campesina", *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 40:4, 2013, pp.721-775.

<sup>12</sup> cf. El País, June 11, 2019. Francesc Badia i Dalmases, "Ednei: Here is indigenous land Maró."

<sup>13</sup> It refers to natural protected areas in Brazil, within the National System of Nature Conservation Units (SNUC) instituted in 2000.

<sup>14</sup> cf. Guenter Francisco Loebens, "Ecologia política ed economica/1," p.231 (translation from Portuguese) in: *Verso il Sínoo Speciale per l'Amazzonia. Dimensione Regionale e Universale*, Lorenzo Baldisseri (ed.) Librería Editrice, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> cf. *Instrumentum Laboris*, Chapter VI (nn. 80-83.)

<sup>16</sup> The Operation "Car Wash", which began in March 2014 by Brazil's Federal Police and is still ongoing, is considered the largest corruption investigation in Brazil's history.

<sup>17</sup> cf. *Final Document of the Synod on Amazonia*, n. 75.

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- <sup>18</sup> cf. Aloir Pacini, S.J. and Fernando López, S.J., "Kiwxi: the flowery tomb... The prophetic memory of Brother Vicente Cañas, S.J.", CPAL (website), April 6, 2017.
- <sup>19</sup> cf. *Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 145.
- <sup>20</sup> cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nn. 783 - 786. Librería Editrice Vaticana, 1992.
- <sup>21</sup> cf. *Instrumentum Laboris*, n. 129, b).
- <sup>22</sup> cf. Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium*, n.205.
- <sup>23</sup> cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Librería Editrice Vaticana, 2005.
- <sup>24</sup> cf. *Final Document of the Pan-Amazonian Synod*, n.79.
- <sup>25</sup> cf. *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Librería Editrice Vaticana, 2005, n. 904.
- <sup>26</sup> cf. *Ibid*, n. 907.
- <sup>27</sup> cf. Francisco Javier Álvarez de los Mozos, SI, "La ecología integral en la Amazonía a la luz de la Laudato Si" p. 169. *Verso il Síodo Speciale per l'Amazzonia. Dimensione Regionale e Universale*, Lorenzo Baldisseri (ed.) Librería Editrice, 2019.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 170.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>30</sup> cf. *ILO Convention No. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples*. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. International Labour Organization. Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, p.8. (Six of the nine countries that make up the Amazon participate in this Convention: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela. Guyana, Suriname and French Guyana are not parties to this Convention.)
- <sup>31</sup> cf. Galvis Patiño, Mari Clara; Ramírez Rincón, Ángela María, *Digesto de jurisprudencia latinoamericana sobre los derechos de los pueblos indígenas a la participación, la consulta previa y la propiedad comunitaria*, Fundación para el Debido Proceso, Washington, 2013, p. 75.
- <sup>32</sup> cf. Pope Francis, *Address to the participants of the III Global Meeting of the Indigenous Peoples' Forum of the International Fund For Agricultural Development (IFAD)*, February 15, 2017.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 169.
- <sup>34</sup> cf. Card. Claudio Hummes. "Comunicazione, p. 299 (translation from Portuguese), *Verso il Síodo Speciale per l'Amazzonia. Dimensione Regionale e Universale*, Lorenzo Baldisseri (ed.) Librería Editrice, 2019.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>36</sup> cf. Pope Francis, *Meeting with Indigenous People of Amazonia*, Puerto Maldonado, January 19, 2018.