

Synthesis of Querida Amazonia

1. The beloved Amazon region stands before the world in all its splendour, its drama and its mystery.
2. In this Exhortation, I wish to offer my own response to this process of dialogue and discernment.
3. I have preferred not to cite the Final Document of the Synod in this Exhortation, because I would encourage everyone to read it in full.
4. May God grant that the entire Church be enriched and challenged by the work of the synodal assembly. May the pastors, consecrated men and women and lay faithful of the Amazon region strive to apply it.
5. I am addressing the present Exhortation to the whole world. I am doing so to help awaken their affection and concern for that land which is also “ours”.
6. Everything that the Church has to offer must become incarnate in a distinctive way in each part of the world.
7. *I dream of an Amazon region that fights for the rights of the poor, the original peoples and the least of our brothers and sisters, where their voices can be heard and their dignity advanced.*

I dream of an Amazon region that can preserve its distinctive cultural riches, where the beauty of our humanity shines forth in so many varied ways.

I dream of an Amazon region that can jealously preserve its overwhelming natural beauty and the superabundant life teeming in its rivers and forests.

I dream of Christian communities capable of generous commitment, incarnate in the Amazon region, and giving the Church new faces with Amazonian features.

CHAPTER ONE A SOCIAL DREAM

8. Our dream is that of an Amazon region that can integrate and promote all its inhabitants, enabling them to enjoy “good living”.

9. The colonizing interests that have continued to expand – legally and illegally – the timber and mining industries (...) are provoking a cry that rises up to heaven.
10. The cry of the Amazon region does not rise up from the depths of the forests alone, but from the streets of its cities as well.
11. Let us at least listen to one of the voices that was heard: “We are being affected by the timber merchants, ranchers and other third parties (...) We are a region of stolen territories”.
12. I would add that many of these tragic situations were related to a false “mystique of the Amazon” (...) the Amazon region has been presented as an enormous empty space to be filled, a source of raw resources to be developed.
13. The original peoples often witnessed helplessly the destruction of the natural surroundings that enabled them (...) to preserve a way of life in a culture which gave them identity and meaning.
14. The businesses, national or international, which harm the Amazon and fail to respect the right of the original peoples to the land and its boundaries (...) should be called for what they are: *injustice and crime*.
15. It is not good for us to become inured to evil; it is not good when our social consciousness is dulled before “an exploitation that is leaving destruction and even death throughout our region (...) jeopardizing the lives of millions of people and especially the habitat of peasants and indigenous peoples”.
16. Nor has colonization ended; in many places, it has been changed (...) while losing none of its contempt for the life of the poor and the fragility of the environment.
17. We are reminded that it is possible to overcome the various colonizing mentalities and to build networks of solidarity and development.
18. It is encouraging to remember that (...) many missionaries came to bring the Gospel, leaving their homes and leading an austere and demanding life alongside those who were most defenseless.

19. Today the Church (...) is called to hear the plea of the Amazonian peoples and “to exercise with transparency her prophetic mission”.

20. Efforts to build a just society require a capacity for fraternity, a spirit of human fellowship (...) it is clear that the original peoples of the Amazon region have a strong sense of community.

21. Given situations like these, we ought to appreciate and accompany the efforts made by many of those groups to preserve their values and way of life.

22. The Gospel proposes the divine charity welling up in the heart of Christ and generating a pursuit of justice that is at once a hymn of fraternity and of solidarity.

23. In the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, I noted that “if everything is related, then the health of the society’s institutions has consequences for the environment”.

24. Where do the institutions of civil society in the Amazon region stand? The Synod’s *Instrumentum Laboris* (...) speaks of “a culture that poisons the state and its institutions, permeating all social strata (...) We are talking about a true moral scourge.

25. Proposals were made at the Synod to insist that “special attention be paid to the provenance of donations (...) as well as to investments made by ecclesiastical institutions or individual Christians”.

26. The Amazon region ought to be a place of social dialogue, especially between the various original peoples (...) Their words, their hopes and their fears should be the most authoritative voice at any table of dialogue on the Amazon region.

27. Dialogue must not only favor the preferential option on behalf of the poor, the marginalized and the excluded, but also respect them as having a leading role to play.

CHAPTER TWO A CULTURAL DREAM

28. The important thing is to promote the Amazon region, but this does not imply colonizing it culturally but instead helping it to bring out the best of itself.

29. The Amazon region is host to many peoples and nationalities, and over 110 indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation (...) They should not be viewed as “uncivilized” savages. They are simply heirs to different cultures.

30. Today, growing desertification once more drives many of them into the outskirts and sidewalks of the cities, at times in dire poverty.

31. Each of the peoples that has survived in the Amazon region possesses its own cultural identity and unique richness in our multicultural universe.

32. Those of us who observe this from without should avoid unfair generalizations, simplistic arguments and conclusions drawn only on the basis of our own mindsets and experiences.

33. I urge the young people of the Amazon region, especially the indigenous peoples, to “take charge of your roots, because from the roots comes the strength that will make you grow”.

34. It is important “to let older people tell their long stories” and for young people to take the time to drink deeply from that source.

35. I am pleased to see that people who have lost contact with their roots are trying to recover their damaged memory.

36. The ethnic groups that, in interaction with nature, developed a cultural treasure marked by a strong sense of community, readily notice our darker aspects, which we do not recognize in the midst of our alleged progress.

37. Starting from our roots, let us sit around the common table, a place of conversation and of shared hopes. In this way our differences, which could seem like a banner or a wall, can become a bridge.

38. In the Amazon region, even between the different original peoples, it is possible to develop “intercultural relations where diversity does not mean threat”.

39. “Faced with a colonizing invasion of means of mass communication”, there is a need to promote for the original peoples “alternative forms of communication based on their own languages and cultures”.

40. If the ancestral cultures of the original peoples arose and developed in intimate contact with the natural environment, then it will be hard for them to remain unaffected once that environment is damaged.

CHAPTER THREE AN ECOLOGICAL DREAM

41. The Lord, who is the first to care for us, teaches us to care for our brothers and sisters and the environment which he daily gives us. This is the first ecology that that we need.

42. If the care of people and the care of ecosystems are inseparable, this becomes especially important in places where “the forest is not a resource to be exploited; it is a being, or various beings, with which we have to relate”.

43. In the Amazon region, water is queen; the rivers and streams are like veins, and water determines every form of life.

44. The shimmering water of the great Amazon River collects and enlivens all its surroundings.

45. While it is true that in these lands there are many “Amazon regions”, the principal axis is the great river, the offspring of many rivers.

46. Popular poets, enamoured of its immense beauty, have tried to express the feelings this river evokes and the life that it bestows (...) Yet they also lament the dangers that menace it.

47. The inescapable truth is that, as things stand, this way of treating the Amazon territory spells the end for so much life, for so much beauty, even though people would like to keep thinking that nothing is happening.

48. The equilibrium of our planet also depends on the health of the Amazon (...) The interest of a few powerful industries should not be considered more important than the good of the Amazon region and of humanity as a whole.

49. The water that abounds in the Amazon region is an essential good for human survival, yet the sources of pollution are increasing.

50. Indeed, in addition to the economic interests of local business persons and politicians, there also exist “huge global economic interests”. The answer is not to be found, then, in “internationalizing” the Amazon region, but rather in a greater sense of responsibility on the part of national governments.

51. To protect the Amazon region, it is good to combine ancestral wisdom with contemporary technical knowledge, always working for a sustainable management of the land while also preserving the lifestyle and value systems of those who live there.

52. For us, “the cry of the Amazon region to the Creator is similar to the cry of God’s people in Egypt (cf. *Ex* 3:7). It is a cry of slavery and abandonment pleading for freedom”.

53. Frequently we let our consciences be deadened, since “distractions constantly dull our realization of just how limited and finite our world really is”.

54. In addition, I would also observe that each distinct species has a value in itself.

55. From the original peoples, we can learn to *contemplate* the Amazon region and not simply analyze it, and thus appreciate this precious mystery that transcends us. We can *love* it, not simply use it, with the result that love can awaken a deep and sincere interest.

56. Let us awaken our God-given aesthetic and contemplative sense that so often we let languish (...) This interior conversion will enable us to weep for the Amazon region and to join in its cry to the Lord.

57. God our Father, who created each being in the universe with infinite love, calls us to be his means for hearing the cry of the Amazon region (...) we believers encounter in the Amazon region a theological locus, a space where God himself reveals himself and summons his sons and daughters.

58. The best ecology always has an educational dimension (...) A sound and sustainable ecology, one capable of bringing about change, will not develop unless people are changed, unless they are encouraged to opt for another style of life, one less greedy and more serene, more respectful and less anxious, more fraternal.

59. “Our concern cannot be limited merely to the threat of extreme weather events, but must also extend to the catastrophic consequences of social unrest”.

60. The Church, with her broad spiritual experience, her renewed appreciation of the value of creation, her concern for justice (...) also desires to contribute to the protection and growth of the Amazon region.

CHAPTER 4 AN ECCLESIAL DREAM

61. The Church is called to journey alongside the people of the Amazon region (...) But for this incarnation of the Church and the Gospel to be possible, the great missionary proclamation must continue to resound.

62. As Christians, we cannot set aside the call to faith that we have received from the Gospel. In our desire to struggle side by side with everyone, we are not ashamed of Jesus Christ.

63. An authentic option for the poor and the abandoned (...) also involves inviting them to a friendship with the Lord that can elevate and dignify them. How sad it would be if they were to receive from us a body of teachings or a moral code, but not the great message of salvation.

64. They have a right to hear the Gospel, and above all that first proclamation, the *kerygma* (...) That message, expressed in a variety of ways, must constantly resound in the Amazon region. Without that impassioned proclamation, every ecclesial structure would become just another NGO.

65. Any project for growth in the Christian life needs to be centred continually on this message (...) Indeed, the *kerygma* and fraternal charity constitute the great synthesis of the whole content of the Gospel, to be proclaimed unceasingly in the Amazon region.

66. As she perseveres in the preaching of the *kerygma*, the Church also needs to grow in the Amazon region. In doing so, she constantly reshapes her identity through listening and dialogue with the people, the realities and the history of the lands in which she finds herself.

67. Saint John Paul II taught that in proposing the Gospel message, “the Church does not intend to deny the autonomy of culture (...) Addressing indigenous peoples of America, he reminded them that “a faith that does not become culture is a faith not fully accepted, not fully reflected upon, not faithfully lived”.

68. Here I would reiterate what I stated about inculturation in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, based on the conviction that “grace supposes culture, and God’s gift becomes flesh in the culture of those who receive it”.

69. There is a risk that evangelizers who come to a particular area may think that they must not only communicate the Gospel but also the culture in which they grew up, failing to realize that it is not essential “to impose a specific cultural form (...)”. What is needed is courageous openness to the novelty of the Spirit, who is always able to create something new with the inexhaustible riches of Jesus Christ.

70. For the Church to achieve a renewed inculturation of the Gospel in the Amazon region, she needs to listen to its ancestral wisdom.

71. The aboriginal peoples give us the example of a joyful sobriety and in this sense, “they have much to teach us”. They know how to be content with little; they enjoy God’s little gifts without accumulating great possessions; they do not destroy things needlessly; they care for ecosystems (...) All these things should be valued and taken up in the process of evangelization.

72. Those who live in cities need to appreciate this wisdom and to allow themselves to be “re-educated” in the face of frenzied consumerism and urban isolation. The Church herself can be a means of assisting this cultural retrieval through a precious synthesis with the preaching of the Gospel.

73. Certainly, we should esteem the indigenous mysticism that sees the interconnection and interdependence of the whole of creation (...) At the same time, though, we are called to turn this relationship with God present in the cosmos into an increasingly personal relationship with a “Thou” who sustains our lives and wants to give them a meaning, a “Thou” who knows us and loves us.

74. A relationship with Jesus Christ, true God and true man, liberator and redeemer, is not inimical to the markedly cosmic worldview that characterizes the indigenous peoples, since he is also the Risen Lord who permeates all things.

75. Given the situation of poverty and neglect experienced by so many inhabitants of the Amazon region, inculturation will necessarily have a markedly social cast (...) It follows that a suitable training of pastoral workers in the Church’s social doctrine is most important.

76. At the same time, the inculturation of the Gospel in the Amazon region must better integrate the social and the spiritual, so that the poor do not have to look outside the Church for a spirituality that responds to their deepest yearnings.

77. This will give rise to witnesses of holiness with an Amazonian face, not imitations of models imported from other places (...) Let us imagine a holiness with Amazonian features, called to challenge the universal Church.

78. A process of inculturation involving not only individuals but also peoples demands a respectful and understanding love for those peoples (...) Let us not be quick to describe as superstition or paganism certain religious practices that arise spontaneously from the life of peoples.

79. It is possible to take up an indigenous symbol in some way, without necessarily considering it as idolatry. A myth charged with spiritual meaning can be used to advantage and not always considered a pagan error. Some religious festivals have a sacred meaning and are occasions for gathering and fraternity, albeit in need of a gradual process of purification or maturation.

80. The greatest danger would be to prevent them from encountering Christ by presenting him as an enemy of joy.

81. The inculturation of Christian spirituality in the cultures of the original peoples can benefit in a particular way from the sacraments, since they unite the divine and the cosmic, grace and creation.

82. The Second Vatican Council called for this effort to inculturate the liturgy among indigenous peoples; over fifty years have passed and we still have far to go along these lines.

83. On Sunday, "Christian spirituality incorporates the value of relaxation and festivity (...) Aboriginal peoples are familiar with this gratuity and this healthy contemplative leisure. Our celebrations should help them experience this in the Sunday liturgy and encounter the light of God's word and the Eucharist, which illumines our daily existence.

84. The sacraments reveal and communicate the God who is close and who comes with mercy to heal and strengthen his children. Consequently, they should be accessible, especially for the poor, and must never be refused for financial reasons. Nor is there room, in the presence of the poor and forgotten of the Amazon region, for a discipline that excludes and turns people away, for in that way they end up being discarded by a Church that has become a toll-house.

85. The pastoral presence of the Church in the Amazon region is uneven, due in part to the vast expanse of the territory, its many remote places, its broad cultural

diversity, its grave social problems, and the preference of some peoples to live in isolation. We cannot remain unconcerned; a specific and courageous response is required of the Church.

86. Efforts need to be made to configure ministry in such a way that it is at the service of a more frequent celebration of the Eucharist, even in the remotest and most isolated communities. At Aparecida, all were asked to heed the lament of the many Amazonian communities.

87. It is important to determine what is most specific to a priest, what cannot be delegated. The answer lies in the sacrament of Holy Orders, which configures him to Christ the priest. The first conclusion, then, is that the exclusive character received in Holy Orders qualifies the priest alone to preside at the Eucharist. That is his particular, principal and non-delegable function.

88. The priest is a sign of that head and wellspring of grace above all when he celebrates the Eucharist, the source and summit of the entire Christian life. That is his great power, a power that can only be received in the sacrament of Holy Orders.

89. In the specific circumstances of the Amazon region, particularly in its forests and more remote places, a way must be found to ensure this priestly ministry. The laity (...) needs the celebration of the Eucharist because it “makes the Church” (...) If we are truly convinced that this is the case, then every effort should be made to ensure that the Amazonian peoples do not lack this food of new life and the sacrament of forgiveness.

90. This urgent need leads me to urge all bishops, especially those in Latin America (...) to be more generous in encouraging those who display a missionary vocation to opt for the Amazon region. At the same time, it is appropriate that the structure and content of both initial and ongoing priestly formation be thoroughly revised.

91. The Eucharist is also the great sacrament that signifies and realizes the Church’s *unity* (...) The one who presides at the Eucharist must foster communion, which is not just any unity, but one that welcomes the abundant variety of gifts and charisms that the Spirit pours out upon the community.

92. Priests are necessary, but this does not mean that permanent deacons (of whom there should be many more in the Amazon region), religious women and lay persons cannot regularly assume important responsibilities for the growth of communities.

93. We need to promote an encounter with God's word and growth in holiness through various kinds of lay service that call for a process of education – biblical, doctrinal, spiritual and practical – and a variety of programmes of ongoing formation.

94. A Church of Amazonian features requires the stable presence of mature and lay leaders endowed with authority (...) The challenges in the Amazon region demand of the Church a special effort to be present at every level, and this can only be possible through the vigorous, broad and active involvement of the laity.

95. The consecrated life (...) has a special place in this diverse and harmonious configuration of the Church in the Amazon region. But it needs a new impetus to inculturation, one that would combine creativity, missionary boldness, sensitivity and the strength typical of community life.

96. Base communities, when able to combine the defence of social rights with missionary proclamation and spirituality, have been authentic experiences of synodality in the Church's journey of evangelization in the Amazon region.

97. I encourage the growth of the collaborative efforts being made through the Pan Amazonian Ecclesial Network and other associations.

98. I would note that we cannot always plan projects with stable communities in mind, because the Amazonian region sees a great deal of internal mobility (...) Consequently, thought should be given to itinerant missionary teams.

99. In the Amazon region, there are communities that have long preserved and handed on the faith even though no priest has come their way, even for decades. This could happen because of the presence of strong and generous women (...) Some of them, speaking at the Synod, moved us profoundly by their testimony.

100. This summons us to broaden our vision, lest we restrict our understanding of the Church to her functional structures. Such a reductionism would lead us to believe that women would be granted a greater status and participation in the Church only if they were admitted to Holy Orders. But that approach would in fact narrow our vision; it would lead us to clericalize women.

101. Women make their contribution to the Church in a way that is properly theirs, by making present the tender strength of Mary, the Mother. As a result, we do not limit ourselves to a functional approach, but enter instead into the inmost structure of the Church. In this way, we will fundamentally realize why, without women, the Church breaks down.

102. The present situation requires us to encourage the emergence of other forms of service and charisms that are proper to women and responsive to the specific needs of the peoples of the Amazon region at this moment in history.

103. In a synodal Church, those women (...) should have access to positions, including ecclesial services, that do not entail Holy Orders and that can better signify the role that is theirs. Here it should be noted that these services entail stability, public recognition and a commission from the bishop.

104. Conflict is overcome at a higher level, where each group can join the other in a new reality, while remaining faithful to itself. Everything is resolved “on a higher plane and preserves what is valid and useful on both sides”.

105. In this historical moment, the Amazon region challenges us to transcend limited perspectives and “pragmatic” solutions mired in partial approaches, in order to seek paths of inculturation that are broader and bolder.

106. In an Amazonian region characterized by many religions, we believers need to find occasions to speak to one another and to act together for the common good and the promotion of the poor (...) If we believe that the Holy Spirit can work amid differences, then we will try to let ourselves be enriched by that insight.

107. At the same time that we believe firmly in Jesus as the sole Redeemer of the world, we cultivate a deep devotion to his Mother. Even though we know that this is not the case with all Christian confessions, we feel it our duty to share with the Amazon region the treasure of that warm, maternal love which we ourselves have received.

108. None of this needs to create enmity between us. In a true spirit of dialogue, we grow in our ability to grasp the significance of what others say and do (...) In this way, it becomes possible to be frank and open about our beliefs, while continuing to discuss, to seek points of contact, and above all, to work and struggle together for the good of the Amazon region.

109. All of us, as Christians, are united by faith in God, the Father who gives us life and loves us so greatly. We are united by faith in Jesus Christ, the one Saviour (...) We are united by the conviction that not everything ends with this life, but that we are called to the heavenly banquet, where God will wipe away every tear and take up all that we did for those who suffer.

110. All this unites us. How can we not struggle together? How can we not pray and work together, side by side, to defend the poor of the Amazon region, to show the sacred countenance of the Lord, and to care for his work of creation?

CONCLUSION
MOTHER OF THE AMAZON REGION

111. The Mother whom Christ gave us is also the one Mother of all, who reveals herself in the Amazon region in distinct ways. (...) Faced with the marvel of the Amazon region, which we discovered ever more fully during the preparation and celebration of the Synod, I consider it best to conclude this Exhortation by turning to her:

Mother of life,
in your maternal womb Jesus took flesh,
the Lord of all that exists.
Risen, he transfigured you by his light
and made you the Queen of all creation.
For that reason, we ask you, Mary, to reign
in the beating heart of Amazonia.

Show yourself the Mother of all creatures,
in the beauty of the flowers, the rivers,
the great river that courses through it
and all the life pulsing in its forests.
Tenderly care for this explosion of beauty.

Ask Jesus to pour out all his love
on the men and women who dwell there,
that they may know how to appreciate and care for it.

Bring your Son to birth in their hearts,
so that he can shine forth in the Amazon region,
in its peoples and in its cultures,
by the light of his word,
by his consoling love,
by his message of fraternity and justice.

And at every Eucharist,
may all this awe and wonder be lifted up
to the glory of the Father.

Mother, look upon the poor of the Amazon region,
for their home is being destroyed by petty interests.
How much pain and misery,
how much neglect and abuse there is
in this blessed land
overflowing with life!

Touch the hearts of the powerful,
for, even though we sense that the hour is late,
you call us to save
what is still alive.

Mother whose heart is pierced,

who yourself suffer in your mistreated sons and daughters,
and in the wounds inflicted on nature,
reign in the Amazon,
together with your Son.
Reign so that no one else can claim lordship
over the handiwork of God.

We trust in you, Mother of life.
Do not abandon us
in this dark hour.
Amen.