

Background Paper*Author: Paul Nicoll***2019 SYNOD OF BISHOPS FROM THE
AMAZON REGION AND PAPAL RESPONSE**

- More than 33 million people live in the Amazon region, including between 2.0-2.5 million indigenous persons. The region encompasses nine countries including Brazil, Venezuela, the French colony of Guiana, Suriname, Guyana, Columbia, Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador.
- The environment affects the world climate and it is deteriorating because of human activity. 17 per cent of the region has been deforested legally and illegally, and there is much legal and illegal mining, other illegal activity, violence and poverty.
- In the Amazon, relations between Catholics and Pentecostals, charismatics and evangelicals are not easy.
- The Pope visited the Amazon in January 2018 and decided to convene a Synod to address the Church's regional role.
- Before the Synod, the Church prepared a document to address ecological and indigenous issues, and 87,000 people from the region participated in discussions about it.
- The Synod took place in Rome during 21 days in October 2019. It consisted of approximately 200 regional bishops, together with priests, missionaries, lay persons and indigenous representatives.
- The Synod's final document was released in October 2019 and titled *New Paths for the Church and for An Integral Ecology*. <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2020-02/final-document-synod-amazon.html>
- The Synod's final document affirmed that "all participants displayed acute awareness of the dramatic state of destruction affecting the Amazon. The territory and its inhabitants are disappearing, especially the indigenous peoples. The Amazon rainforest is a "biological heart" for the increasingly threatened earth....the disappearance of the Amazon biome will have a catastrophic impact on the planet as a whole."
- The final document has six chapters, with four headed new paths of pastoral, cultural, ecological and synodal conversion. The report is written in a positive style, committing to a range of initiatives for the future of the church in the Amazon.
- Voting on recommendations was restricted to the bishops (so males only). There were 120 recommendations agreed. Agreement required more than two-thirds support and the great majority were very strongly supported. 128 bishops supported and 41 opposed married clergy. The % in favour was more than two-thirds, although the number not supporting it was the highest for any defeated recommendation.
- In response, the Pope's apostolic exhortation of February 2020 was prompt. It is not an encyclical but an invitation for the Church to change. Its structure is simpler than the Synod's report. The first three chapters critique current economic, political and social policies in the regions, with one chapter on the Church's governance and structural challenges.
- The Pope's document is rather poetic and lyrical and does not respond to specific individual recommendations. Overall it is supportive and encouraging of the Synod report, which he says should stand as a statement of the work of the Synod. https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20200202_querida-amazonia.html

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