

UISG WEBINAR

Querida Amazonia

Friday 13 March 2020 (2:00 pm – 4: 00 pm Rome Time)

What are the connections between conversion and dreams? We have four beautiful dreams: Social, Cultural, Ecological and Ecclesial. What are the challenges? What else needs to be developed to enhance the message?

On the backdrop of “a sense of claustrophobia and a feeling of uncertainty and fear”¹ caused by the Corona Virus, reflecting together on the dreams articulated by Pope Francis in *Querida Amazonia* is indeed an act of hope, tremendous courage and resolve to face the challenging situations with renewed and rejuvenated spirit. Thanks to Sheila Kinsey for creating a viable platform to share our views and reflections on matters that touch the core of our faith and the integral wellbeing of the entire humanity.

To understand the dreams, hopes and challenges posed by Pope Francis in *Querida Amazonia*, his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation to the People of God and to all Persons of Good Will, we have to go back right to the first days of his Pontificate. On 16 March 2013, during the audience to Representatives of the Communications Media, he recounted why he chose the name Francis. Quote, “During the election, I was seated next to [...] Cardinal Claudio Hummes: a good friend! [...] And when the votes reached two thirds, there was the usual applause, because the Pope had been elected. And he gave me a hug and a kiss, and said: “Don’t forget the poor!” And those words came to me: the poor, the poor. Then, right away, thinking of the poor, I thought of Francis of Assisi”².

In his homily during the Holy Mass for the beginning of the Petrine Ministry on 19 March 2013, Pope Francis explained the deeper significance of being a Protector. Quote, “It means protecting people, showing loving concern for each and every person, especially children, the elderly, those in need, who are often the last we think about. [We] must be inspired by the lowly, concrete and faithful service which marked Saint Joseph and [...] to protect all of God’s people and embrace with tender affection the whole of humanity, especially the poorest, the weakest, the least important [...]”³.

In his first Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis expressed his deep-down vision of a Church which keeps her doors open like “a mother with an open heart” and reaches out to those in periphery. Quote, “A Church which ‘goes forth’ is a

¹ BETHANY BELL, “Coronavirus: Confusion and Fear sweep through Italy amid Lockdown” in <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-51815911> (11/03/2020)

² FRANCIS, *Audience to Representatives of the Communications Media* (16 March 2013).

³ FRANCIS, *Homily during the Holy Mass for the beginning of the Petrine Ministry of the Bishop of Rome* (19 March 2013).

Church whose doors are open. Going out to others in order to reach the fringes of humanity does not mean rushing out aimlessly into the world.”⁴ Then came the groundbreaking Encyclical on Care for Our Common Home *Laudato si’* which depicted a clear vision of his concern for “both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.”⁵ Different narratives of Pope Francis clearly demonstrates his love and concern for the poor and marginalized, who are always the first victims of the ecological degradation. Like Moses, he seems to have heard God’s call to prioritize his life and mission for them; quote, “I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry of complaint against their slave drivers, so I know well what they are suffering” (Ex 3:7). Crime and injustice against them amounts to “a sin against ourselves and a sin against God”⁶; and that is why there is the need of conversion.

Pope Francis in his opening address to the Synod on Amazon had underlined four dimensions – pastoral, cultural, social and ecological, which are in some way reflected in the Final Document in the form of four diagnoses or conversions – pastoral, cultural, ecological and synodal⁷. Along the same lines, Pope Francis lays out his hopes and aspirations for the Amazonian peoples and Amazon regions in the form of four dreams – social dream, cultural dream, ecological dream, and pastoral dream. He prays that “the entire Church be enriched and challenged by the word of the synodal assembly,” that all sections of peoples of “the Amazon region strive to apply it”; and that every person of good will be inspired by it in some way.⁸

The first paragraphs of the Final Document of the Synod underlines that “the Amazon today is a wounded and deformed beauty, a place of suffering and violence. Attacks on nature have consequences for people’s lives”⁹; and Pope Francis begins *Querida Amazonia* edifying the beauty and richness of Amazon region to put forward his dreams and challenges to the People of God and to All Persons of Good Will. Quote, “The beloved Amazon region stands before the world in all its splendour, its drama and its mystery”¹⁰. In fact, *Querida Amazonia* is an invitation “to scrutinize the signs of the times and to interpret them in the light of the Gospel.”¹¹ It is a poem “which weeps for the crimes and injustices, and which marvels at the beauty of these forests and their inhabitants.”¹²

⁴ *Evangelii Gaudium*, n° 46.

⁵ *Laudato si’*, n° 49.

⁶ *Laudato si’*, n° 8.

⁷ Cf. Intervention by Lorenzo Baldisseri during Press Conference for the Presentation of *Querida Amazonia*.

⁸ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 4.

⁹ *The Amazon: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology*, n° 10.

¹⁰ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 1.

¹¹ *Gaudium et spes*, n° 4.

¹² Cf. Intervention by David Martinez de Aguirre Guinea during the Press Conference for the Presentation of *Querida Amazonia*.

1. Social Dream

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.

The social dream is the integration and the promotion of all the inhabitants of the Amazon region so that they are enabled to enjoy “good living”. The dream is explained in five-fold fundamental aspects of “good living” – to fight against injustice and crime, to feel outrage and to ask forgiveness for all the *injustices and crimes* committed against them, to let full-flowering of their sense of communion and community, to gauge the poisonous impact of the broken institutions, and to present the Amazonian region as a place of social dialogue for stimulating fellowship and joint struggle.

Bringing to the fore the instances of grave social injustice and exploitation suffered by Amazonian people, who were killed and enslaved by the colonizing power to seize and plunder natural resources that had helped them for centuries “to be nourished and kept healthy, to survive and to preserve a way of life in a culture which gave them identity and meaning.”¹³ Such instances of exploitation, theft, and violence are made legal and perpetrated with the complicity of the local governments, for which “they should be called for what they are: *injustice and crime*.”¹⁴

By calling for a feeling of outrage and indignation, Pope Francis guides the way to move past the *injustice and crime* of the past colonial forces, and now committed by local as well as international powers, “using the excuse of development.” Quote, “We need to feel outrage, as Moses did (cf. Ex 11:8), as Jesus did (cf. Mk 3:5), as God does in the face of injustice (cf. Am 2:4-8; 5:7-12; Ps 106:40).”¹⁵ A righteous anger could lead to conversion of heart and be a motivating force to “build networks of solidarity and development” and to promote a globalization in solidarity without marginalization.¹⁶ The social dream envisions the need of a strong sense of community and a sincere commitment to dialogue to overcome *injustices and crimes* and “to build a just society.”¹⁷

2. Cultural Dream

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.

The cultural dream envisages the recognition, respect and preservation of the distinctive cultural riches and diversity of the Amazon region. In the face of *globalization with marginalization* and the resultant cultural colonization, which endangers or

¹³ Cf. *Querida Amazonia*, n° 13.

¹⁴ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 14.

¹⁵ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 15.

¹⁶ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 17.

¹⁷ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 20.

threatens “cultural identity and unique richness”¹⁸ of Amazon region, the cultural dream hopes “to bring out the best of itself,”¹⁹ and to nourish, protect and to celebrate its richness and beauty. Quote, “In each land and its features, God manifests himself and reflects something of his inexhaustible beauty. Each distinct group, then, in a vital synthesis with its surroundings, develops its own form of wisdom. 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.”²⁰ Each culture and each worldview that receives the Gospel enriches the Church by showing a new aspect of Christ’s face.²¹

By presenting the image of the Amazonian polyhedron, Pope Francis exemplifies the beauty of unity in diversity, and recommends an intercultural encounter and education that preserve the beauty and uniqueness of indigenous cultures, and allow their fruitful development. While addressing the indigenous people of Amazon in Puerto Maldonado on 19 January 2018, he had emphasized, quote, “An intercultural dialogue in which you yourselves will be ‘the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting your land are proposed’ (LS 146). Recognition and dialogue will be the best way to transform relationships whose history is marked by exclusion and discrimination.”²²

The cultural dream identifies “a consumerist vision of human beings, encouraged by the mechanisms of today’s economy”²³ as one of the greatest challenges to the diverse cultures of the Amazon region, which impoverishes the perspectives of young people and cuts them off from their roots. Pope Francis urges them to take charge of their roots, because the strength to grow, flourish and bear fruit flows forth from the roots.²⁴ The cultural dream also proposes “intercultural relations where diversity does not mean threat, [...], but dialogue between different cultural visions, of celebration, of interrelationship and of revival of hope.”²⁵ In the face of continuous bombardment from the mass communication and the imposition of foreign measures of quality of life, the cultural dream recommends the promotion of “alternative forms of communication based on their languages and cultures” so that their rights are respected, their cultures are appreciated and quality of life is understood within their world of symbols and customs.²⁶

¹⁸ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 31.

¹⁹ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 28.

²⁰ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 32.

²¹ FRANCIS, *Meeting with Indigenous People of Amazonia in Puerto Maldonado* (19 January 2018).

²² Francis, *Meeting with Indigenous People of Amazonia in Puerto Maldonado* (19 January 2018).

²³ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 33.

²⁴ Cf. *Querida Amazonia*, n° 33.

²⁵ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 38.

²⁶ Cf. *Querida Amazonia*, n° 40.

3. Ecological Dream

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

The ecological dream is founded upon heavily on *Laudato si'*, especially on the fundamental axiom "everything is connected."²⁷ It offers the hope of preserving the whole ecosystem through an integration of the ancestral wisdom with the contemporary technology, which "inspires care and respect for creation, with a clear consciousness of its limits, and prohibits its abuse." By reiterating the danger of consumerism which looks at the Amazon only as "a resource to be exploited"²⁸ or "as an object to be used and abused without scruple,"²⁹ the ecological dream invites us "to love it, not simply use it,"³⁰ to "awaken our God-given aesthetic and contemplative sense"³¹ to *contemplate* its beauty as God's free gift to humanity and as a part of God's self-revelation. We are firmly reminded that "to abuse nature is to abuse our ancestors, our brothers and sisters, creation and the Creator, and to mortgage the future."³²

The ecological dream is also *made of water*, which is brought into fore through a poetic hymn in praise of the life-giving water of the Amazon, the *queen*, which "determines every form of life."³³ The hymn is full of wonder, but it also recognizes the painful cry of the Amazon region used and abused by "the technocratic and consumerist paradigm that destroys nature and robs us of truly dignified existence."³⁴ It emphasizes "the urgent need to establish 'a legal framework which can set clear boundaries and ensure the protection of ecosystem'"³⁵ and disquiets our conscience against our self-destructive vices of "trying not to see them, trying not to acknowledge them, delaying the important decisions and pretending that nothing will happen."³⁶ Finally, the ecological dream invites the faithful to encounter "in the Amazon region a theological locus, a space where God himself reveals himself and summons his sons and daughters"³⁷ to appreciate the value of creation, concern for justice, option for the poor and to contribute to the protection and growth of the Amazon region.³⁸

²⁷ *Laudato si'*, nn. 16,70,91,92,117,120,137,138,240.

²⁸ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 42.

²⁹ *Laudato si'*, n° 107.

³⁰ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 55.

³¹ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 56.

³² *Querida Amazonia*, n° 42.

³³ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 43.

³⁴ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 46.

³⁵ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 52; *Laudato si'*, 53.

³⁶ *Laudato si'*, n° 59.

³⁷ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 57.

³⁸ Cf. *Querida Amazonia*, n° 59.

4. Ecclesial Dream

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

The ecclesial dream is elaborated in 50 paragraphs centred on the proclamation of the Gospel, various paths of inculturation, fostering communion and communities, appreciation of the strength and gift of women, and ecumenical and interreligious coexistence. Calling for an “impassionate proclamation”³⁹ of the Gospel, the ecclesial dream hopes to develop “a Church with an Amazonia face”⁴⁰ through various paths of inculturation. With the *impassionate proclamation* of the Gospel, the Church “constantly reshapes her identity through listening and dialogue with the people, the realities and the history of the land in which she finds herself.”⁴¹ The adaption and integration of the ancestral wisdom, socio-cultural values, customs and traditions are essential for the evangelization to be successful not only in the Amazon region, but also in the contemporary world, because “the concept of culture is valuable for grasping the various expressions of the Christian life present in God’s people. [...] Grace supposes culture, and God’s gift becomes flesh in the culture of those who receive it.”⁴²

As a starting point for inculturation, Pope Francis emphasizes the need of a “respectful and understanding love”⁴³ for the peoples, the affirmation of goodness of various aspects of a culture to create “a new synthesis with that particular culture”⁴⁴ which can enrich the whole Church. While discussing about the inculturation, Pope Francis makes it clear that “an indigenous symbol can be taken up in some way, without necessarily considering it as idolatry.”⁴⁵

With regard to the ministry, Pope Francis does not respond to one of the proposals of the Final Document “to ordain as priests suitable and respected men of the community with a legitimately constituted and stable family.”⁴⁶ In fact, the issue of *viri probati* had become so dominant and widespread in the Media that it almost threatened to swallow up the entire Synod. Last year on 16 May 2019, when the arguments and discussions on some issues of the upcoming Synod on Amazon was warming up, I was asked to coordinate and convene one-day Conference on *Amazon: Challenges and Prospects for Our Common Home*, in Pontifical Gregorian University. The Conference aimed at proposing some viable and concrete answers to some of the most fundamental and burning issues related to Pan-

³⁹ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 64.

⁴⁰ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 61.

⁴¹ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 66.

⁴² *Evangelii Gaudium*, n° 115.

⁴³ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 78.

⁴⁴ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 68.

⁴⁵ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 79.

⁴⁶ *The Amazon: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology*, n° 111.

Amazon Region through common reflections, sharing and discussions. The Church authorities, Professors, Social Activists, and experts on indigenous life, history, culture, tradition and spirituality were invited to share their views, experiences and perspectives to safeguard Pan-Amazon region for the integral human well-being. Among the eminent Church authorities present as resource persons were Cardinal Cláudio Hummes OFM, President of REPAM (Pan-Amazon Ecclesial Network), Cardinal Pedro Ricardo Barreto Jimeno SJ, Vice President of REPAM, and other key figures of the Synod. With its gaze firmly fixed on the upcoming Synod on Amazon, the Conference tried to respond some of the pertinent questions, doubts and fears prevalent in the minds of the non-Amazonian people. However, as expected most of the questions raised by media were concentrated on the married priesthood of *virii probati* and on the diaconate ordination of women. In *Querida Amazonia*, Pope Francis appreciates the mission carried out by the deacons, religious women and layperson for assuming regularly “important responsibilities for the growth of communities”⁴⁷ and for keeping “the Church alive in those places through their remarkable devotion and deep faith.”⁴⁸ In a way, the ecclesial dream envisages a more participatory and synodal Church, where the laity plays an important role in decision making process and in the ecclesial administrative matters.

Dreams: Challenges to an Integral Conversion

In 1979, Swedish Pop Group ABBA had released an album with a song “I have a dream”, which expressed the desire to cope with anything and to take the future even if one fails. The four dreams of Pope Francis enunciated in *Querida Amazonia* are perennial fount of challenges to introspect our own way of life and living, whether we strive to maintain an interconnected-interdependent harmonious living with our fellow human beings and the entire creation or we are hard-hearted by the contemporary trend of individualism and consumerism without any proper and just care for *Our Common Home*. We destroy the socio-cultural, ecological and ecclesial dreams by our passivity and inaction in front of injustices, crimes and exploitation of our fellow human beings, other life forms and the natural resources. We behave like the Three Monkeys of Mahatma Gandhi representing the lack of our positive and creative attitudes – close our eyes, ears and mouth in front of *injustices and crimes*. It would be apt here to remember the words of Martin Luther King, “The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people but the silence over that by the good people.”

Coming from the *Oraon* indigenous community from Jharkhand (India), I feel very at home with the dreams and challenges articulated by Pope Francis in *Querida Amazonia*.

⁴⁷ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 92.

⁴⁸ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 99.

Right from the childhood, I have lived a life which is deeply interconnected with nature, and guided by a spirituality based on five Js – *Jan-Jal-Jungle-Jameen-Janwar*, that is, humans, water, forest, land, and household. The happiness in the earthly life consists in the abundance of cattle, crop and progeny; whereas the ultimate happiness lies in the final reunion with the Ancestors. Nature is the epiphany of the divine, in and through which God reveals himself and his will for the integral well-being of each individual and the entire human community. However, the constant threat of being displaced from our ancestral land by the multinational forces in the name of development shatters our socio-cultural and ecological dreams and intensifies our struggle to maintain *good living* by letting the full-flowering of human dignity, justice, equality, and equity.

The socio-cultural, ecological and ecclesial dreams call for our conversion and challenge us to adapt “a communitarian approach to existence, the ability to find joy and fulfilment in an austere and simple life, and a responsible care of nature that preserves resources for future generations.”⁴⁹ The challenge before us is “to cultivate without uprooting, to foster growth without weakening identity, to be supportive without being invasive.”⁵⁰ The challenge lies in the dream of *cultivating and caring* (Gen 2:15) for Amazon without destroying it, in the dream of integrating the ancient indigenous wisdom and cultures with new technologies, and in the dream of making them active participants in search of their well-being. Finally, we are challenged to build a future worthy of the dreams articulated by Pope Francis in *Querida Amazonia*, a future where “both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor”⁵¹ are heard, a future where their idea of *good living* is respected, accepted and actualized “for themselves and for those who will come after them.”⁵² Indeed, “a great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal.”⁵³ *Querida Amazonia* encourages us to dream for a better future and raise our voices against injustices, crimes and exploitations intended and carried out by the unjust structures.

⁴⁹ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 77.

⁵⁰ *Querida Amazonia*, n° 28.

⁵¹ *Laudato si'*, n° 49.

⁵² *Querida Amazonia*, n° 26.

⁵³ *Laudato si'*, n° 202.