

## Women's issues at the Synod of Youth (Oct. 2018) and the Synod on the Amazon (Oct. 2019)

### Final Document of the Synod of Bishops on “Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment”

#### Men and women

13. We cannot neglect the difference between men and women with their specific gifts, perceptions and life experiences. This difference can give rise to forms of domination, exclusion and discrimination from which every society, including the Church, needs to be freed.

The Bible presents man and woman as partners equal in God’s sight (cf. *Gen 5:2*); all domination and discrimination based on sex is thus an offence against human dignity. The Bible also presents the difference between the sexes as a mystery constitutive of our humanity, one that cannot be reduced to stereotypes. The relation between man and woman is understood in terms of a vocation to live together in reciprocity and dialogue, in communion and fruitfulness (cf. *Gen 1:27-29; 2:21-25*) in every area of human experience: living as a couple, work, education and so forth. God has entrusted the earth to the covenant of man and woman.

#### The importance of maternity and paternity

33. Mothers and fathers have distinct roles but they are equally important as points of reference in forming children and passing on the faith to them. The maternal figure continues to have a role that young people consider essential for their growth, even if it is not sufficiently recognized in cultural, political and employment terms. Many fathers perform their own role with dedication, but we cannot conceal the fact that, in some contexts, the paternal figure is absent or transitory and, in others, oppressive or authoritarian. These ambiguities are also reflected in the exercise of spiritual paternity.

#### The questions of the young

39. The Church has a rich tradition on which to build and from which to put forward her teaching in this area: for example, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the theology of the body developed by Saint John Paul II, the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* by Benedict XVI, the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* by Pope Francis. But the young, including those who know this teaching and live by it, express a wish to hear from the Church a clear, humane and empathetic word. Frequently, though, sexual morality gives rise to incomprehension and distancing from the Church, inasmuch as she is perceived as a place of judgement and condemnation. In the face of social changes and new ways of living affectivity and the multiplicity of ethical perspectives, the young show themselves sensitive to the value of authenticity and dedication, but are often disoriented. **They express more particularly an explicit desire to discuss questions concerning the difference between masculine and feminine identity, the reciprocity between men and women, and homosexuality.**

#### Women in the Church

55. The young also clamour for greater recognition and greater valuing of women in society and in the Church. Many women play an essential part in Christian communities, but often it is hard to involve them in decision-making processes, even when these do not require specific ministerial responsibilities. The absence of the feminine voice and perspective impoverishes debate and the Church’s journey, depriving discernment of a precious contribution. The Synod recommends that

everyone be made more aware of the urgency of an inevitable change, not least on the basis of anthropological and theological reflection on the reciprocity between men and women.

### **Personal spiritual accompaniment**

97. Spiritual accompaniment is intended to help people integrate step by step the various dimensions of their lives so as to follow the Lord Jesus. In this process three elements can be identified: listening of life, encounter with Jesus and mysterious dialogue between God's freedom and that of the individual. Those who accompany should be welcoming and patient, they elicit pertinent questions and recognize the signs of the Spirit in the replies of the young.

In personal spiritual accompaniment one learns to recognize, interpret and choose from the perspective of faith, listening to the Spirit's promptings within every day life (cf. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 169-173). The charism of spiritual accompaniment is not necessarily linked to ordained ministry, nor was it in the past. **Never has there been so great a need as there is today for spiritual guides, fathers and mothers with profound experience of faith and humanity, over and above their intellectual preparation. In this area, the Synod devoutly hopes for a rediscovery of the immensely fruitful resource of consecrated life, especially its female form, and of well-formed laypersons, young and old.**

### **The young ask us to walk together**

119. The Church as a whole, when choosing through this Synod to concern herself with the young, took a very definite option: she considers this mission a pastoral priority of epoch-making significance, in which to invest time, energy and resources. From the start of the journey of preparation, **young people have expressed the desire to be involved and appreciated and to feel themselves as having a key role in the life and mission of the Church.** In this Synod we have experienced how co-responsibility lived with young Christians is a source of profound joy for bishops too. We recognize in this experience a fruit of the Spirit which continually renews the Church and calls her to practise synodality as a way of being and acting, promoting the participation of all the baptized and of people of good will, each according to his age, state of life and vocation. In this Synod, we have experienced how the collegiality that unites the bishops *cum Petro et sub Petro* in care for the people of God is called to express itself and enrich itself through **the practice of synodality at all levels.**

122. It is in relationships – with Christ, with others, in the community – that faith is handed on. For the sake of mission, too, the Church is called to adopt a relational manner that places emphasis on listening, welcoming, dialogue and common discernment in a process that transforms the lives of those taking part. “A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening ‘is more than simply hearing’. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the ‘Spirit of truth’ (Jn 14:17), in order to know what he ‘says to the Churches’ (Rev 2:7)” (Francis, Address for the Commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015). In this way the Church presents herself as the “tent of meeting” in which the Ark of the Covenant is preserved (cf. Ex 25): a dynamic Church, in movement, which accompanies while journeying, strengthened by many charisms and ministries. Thus does God make himself present in this world.

### **A participatory and co-responsible Church**

123. A characteristic feature of this style of Church is the valuing of the charisms that the Spirit gives according to the vocation and role of each of her members, through a dynamic of co-responsibility. In order to initiate it, conversion of the heart becomes necessary, as well as a readiness for mutual listening, which builds an effective common mind. **Motivated by this spirit, we can proceed towards a participatory and co-responsible Church, capable of valuing the wealth of the variety of which it is composed, gratefully receiving the contributions of the lay faithful too, including young people and**

**women, female and male consecrated persons as well as groups, associations and movements.** No one should be put aside or put themselves aside. This is the way to avoid both clericalism, which excludes many from decision-making processes, and the clericalization of the laity, which imprisons them instead of launching them towards missionary commitment in the world.

The Synod asks that the active participation of the young become effective and ordinary in places of co-responsibility in the particular Churches and in the organs of the Episcopal Conferences and the universal Church. It also asks that the activity of the Office for the Young in the Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life be strengthened, not least through the constitution of an organ to represent the young at an international level.

### **Women in a synodal Church**

148. A Church that seeks to live a synodal style cannot fail to reflect on the condition and role of women within it, and consequently in society more generally. Young men and women ask this question forcefully. The fruits of such reflection need to be implemented through a courageous change of culture and through change in daily pastoral practice. A sphere of particular importance in this regard is the female presence in ecclesial bodies at all levels, including positions of responsibility, as well as female participation in ecclesial decision-making processes, respecting the role of the ordained minister. This is a duty of justice, which draws inspiration both from the way Jesus related to men and women of his day, and from the importance of the role of certain female figures in the Bible, in the history of salvation and in the life of the Church.

### **164. The Synod has formulated three proposals to encourage renewal.**

The first concerns joint formation of lay people, religious and priests. It is important to keep young men and women in formation in touch with the daily life of families and communities, **paying special attention to the presence of women and Christian couples**, such that formation is grounded in the reality of life and marked by relationships that can be integrated into the social and cultural context. The second proposal concerns including in the curriculum of preparation for ordained ministry or consecrated life specific courses on pastoral care of young people, through well-planned programmes and experiences of pastoral work and evangelization.

The third proposal asks that consideration be given – within the authentic discernment of people and situations according to the vision and spirit of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* – to the possibility of backing up the formation journey in terms of experience and in a community context. This is particularly the case in the final stage of that journey, which envisages candidates being introduced gradually to pastoral responsibility. The ways this is explained and put into practice can be indicated by the Bishops' Conference of each country, in accordance with their own versions of the *Ratio Fundamentalis*.

### **Post-synodal exhortation “*Christus Vivit*”**

42. For example, a Church that is overly fearful and tied to its structures can be invariably critical of efforts to defend the rights of women, and constantly point out the risks and the potential errors of those demands. Instead, a living Church can react by being attentive to the legitimate claims of those women who seek greater justice and equality. A living Church can look back on history and acknowledge a fair share of male authoritarianism, domination, various forms of enslavement, abuse and sexist violence. With this outlook, she can support the call to respect women's rights, and offer convinced support for greater reciprocity between males and females, while not agreeing with everything some feminist groups propose. Along these lines, the Synod sought to renew the Church's commitment “against all discrimination and violence on sexual grounds”.[17] That is the response of a Church that stays young and lets herself be challenged and spurred by the sensitivities of young people.

74. "Even more numerous in the world are young people who suffer forms of marginalization and social exclusion for religious, ethnic or economic reasons. Let us not forget the difficult situation of adolescents and young people who become pregnant, the scourge of abortion, the spread of HIV, various forms of addiction (drugs, gambling, pornography and so forth), and the plight of street children without homes, families or economic resources".[30] In the case of women, these situations are doubly painful and difficult.

#### Desires, hurts and longings

81. Young people are aware that the body and sexuality have an essential importance for their lives and for their process of growth in identity. Yet in a world that constantly exalts sexuality, maintaining a healthy relationship with one's body and a serene affective life is not easy. For this and other reasons, sexual morality often tends to be a source of "incomprehension and alienation from the Church, inasmuch as she is viewed as a place of judgment and condemnation". Nonetheless, young people also express "an explicit desire to discuss questions concerning the difference between male and female identity, reciprocity between men and women, and homosexuality".[34]

245. here is also a special need to accompany young men and women showing leadership potential, so that they can receive training and the necessary qualifications. The young people who met before the Synod called for "programmes for the formation and continued development of young leaders. Some young women feel that there is a lack of leading female role models within the Church and they too wish to give their intellectual and professional gifts to the Church. We also believe that seminarians and religious should have an even greater ability to accompany young leaders".[133]

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71. We note that human intervention has lost its "friendly" character and assumed a voracious and predatory attitude that tends to squeeze reality until all available natural resources are exhausted. "The technocratic paradigm also tends to dominate economic and political life" (LS 109). This seriously damages life, and to counteract it we must seek alternative economic models, more sustainable, friendly to nature, and with solid spiritual support. For this reason, together with the Amazon peoples, we ask States to stop considering the Amazon as an inexhaustible warehouse (cf. Fr.PM). We would like them to develop investment policies that feature compliance with high social and environmental standards and the fundamental principle of the preservation of the Amazon as a condition for any intervention. This requires the participation of organized indigenous peoples and other Amazon communities as well as the different scientific institutions that are already proposing models that show the benefits of keeping the forest standing. The new paradigm of sustainable development must be socially inclusive, combining scientific and traditional knowledge **to empower traditional and indigenous communities, women in their majority**, and make these technologies serve the well-being and protection of the forests.

86. To walk together the Church requires a synodal conversion, synodality of the People of God under the guidance of the Spirit in the Amazon. With this horizon of communion and participation we seek new ecclesial paths, especially in the area of ministry and sacramental life of the Church with an Amazonian face. **Religious life, the laity and especially women, are the always and ever new protagonists who call us to this conversion.**

92. A Church with an Amazonian face needs its communities to be infused with a synodal spirit, supported by organizational structures in harmony with this dynamic, as authentic organisms of "communion". The forms for exercising synodality are varied; they should be decentralized at the various levels (diocesan, regional, national, universal); they should be respectful and attentive to local processes, without weakening the bond with the other sister Churches and with the universal Church. They establish harmony between communion and participation, between co-responsibility and the

ministries of all, paying special attention to the effective participation of the laity in discernment and decision making, favouring the participation of women.

95. Although mission in the world is the task of every baptized person, the Second Vatican Council emphasized the mission of the laity: "the expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one" (GS 39). It is urgent **for the Church in the Amazon to promote and confer ministries for men and women in an equitable manner**. The fabric of the local Church, in the Amazon as elsewhere, is guaranteed by small missionary Church communities that cultivate faith, listen to the Word and celebrate together close to the people's life. **It is the Church of baptized men and women that we must consolidate by promoting ministries and, above all, an awareness of baptismal dignity.**

#### c. The time for women's presence

99. The Church in the Amazon wants to "create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church" (EG 103). **"Let us not reduce the involvement of women in the Church, but instead promote their active role in the ecclesial community. If the Church, in her complete and real dimension, loses women, she risks becoming sterile"** (Francis, Meeting with the Brazilian Episcopate, Rio de Janeiro, 27.7.2013).

100. The Magisterium of the Church since the Second Vatican Council has highlighted the central place that women occupy within the Church: "The hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of women is being achieved in its fullness, the hour in which woman acquires in the world an influence, an effect and a power never reached until now. That is why, at this moment when the human race is under-going so deep a mutation, women impregnated with the spirit of the Gospel can do so much to aid mankind in not falling" (Closing of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council: Address of Pope Paul VI to Women, 8.12.1965; AAS 58, 1966, 13-14).

101. The ancestral wisdom of the aboriginal peoples affirms that mother earth has a feminine face. The work of women in both the indigenous and western worlds is multifaceted: they instruct children and transmit faith and the Gospel, they inspire and support human development. **The voice of women should therefore be heard, they should be consulted and participate in decision-making and, in this way, contribute with their sensitivity to Church synodality.** We value the role of women, recognizing their fundamental role in the formation and continuity of cultures, in spirituality, in communities and families. Their leadership must be more fully assumed in the heart of the Church, recognized and promoted by strengthening their participation in the pastoral councils of parishes and dioceses, and also in positions of governance.

102. Seeing the concrete suffering of women who are victims of physical, moral and religious violence, including femicide, the Church commits to defend their rights and recognises them as protagonists and guardians of creation and of our common home. **We recognize the ministry that Jesus reserved for women. It is necessary to promote the formation of women in biblical theology, systematic theology and canon law, valuing their presence in organizations and leadership within the Church environment and beyond. We want to strengthen family ties, especially for migrant women. We assure women's place in leadership and formation.** We ask that the *Motu Proprio* of St. Paul VI, *Ministeria quaedam* (1972) be revised, so that women who have been properly trained and prepared can receive the ministries of Lector and Acolyte, among others to be developed. **In the new contexts of evangelization and pastoral ministry in the Amazon, where the majority of Catholic communities are led by women, we ask that an instituted ministry of "women community leadership" be created and recognized as part of meeting the changing demands of evangelization and care for communities.**

103. In the many consultations carried out in the Amazon, the fundamental role of religious and lay women in the Church of the Amazon and its communities was recognized and emphasized, given the wealth of services they provide. In a large number of these consultations, the permanent diaconate for women was requested. This made it an important theme during the Synod. The Study Commission on the Diaconate of Women which Pope Francis created in 2016 has already arrived as a Commission at partial findings regarding the reality of the diaconate of women in the early centuries of the Church and its implications for today. We would therefore like to share our experiences and reflections with the Commission and we await its results.

### **Post-synodal exhortation “Querida Amazonia”**

#### *The strength and gift of women*

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 who, undoubtedly called and prompted by the Holy Spirit, baptized, catechized, prayed and acted as missionaries. For centuries, women have kept the Church alive in those places through their remarkable devotion and deep faith. 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, diminish the great value of what they have already accomplished, and subtly make their indispensable contribution less effective.

101. Jesus Christ appears as the Spouse of the community that celebrates the Eucharist through the figure of a man who presides as a sign of the one Priest. This dialogue between the Spouse and his Bride, which arises in adoration and sanctifies the community, should not trap us in partial conceptions of power in the Church. The Lord chose to reveal his power and his love through two human faces: the face of his divine Son made man and the face of a creature, a woman, Mary. 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, and how many communities in the Amazon would have collapsed, had women not been there to sustain them, keep them together and care for them. This shows the kind of power that is typically theirs.

102. We must keep encouraging those simple and straightforward gifts that enabled women in the Amazon region to play so active a role in society, even though communities now face many new and unprecedented threats. 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 who in fact have a central part to play in Amazonian communities 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. This would also allow women to have a real and effective impact on the organization, the most important decisions and the direction of communities, while continuing to do so in a way that reflects their womanhood.