

Prof. Edouard Husson  
[edouardhusson@yahoo.fr](mailto:edouardhusson@yahoo.fr)  
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## **Synod for the Amazon (1): when the Catholic Church comes out of Christianity**

Since its publication in mid-June 2019, the working document for the participants of the "Synod of Bishops for the Amazon", entitled "New Paths for the Church and for Integral Ecology", has been the subject of many comments. Mostly opponents, who have strongly criticized him, such as Cardinal Brandmüller or Cardinal Burke; on the other hand, the authors of the text are extremely discreet: it is only recently that it became known that their team leader was Paulo Süss, an 81-year-old representative of the "theology of liberation" and what I am about to present will make it clearer why a kind of conspiracy of silence surrounded the preparation of the synod.

We have certainly heard from journalists here and there that this Roman meeting, which will take place from 6 to 27 October 2019, will make it possible - finally, they say - to begin to generalize the marriage of priests and the ordination of women. In this case, we are in the old refrain of the necessary modernization of the Catholic Church. And the group of activists who intend to carry out the objectives of the Synod certainly expects the meeting to produce these results. However, this is only part of what cannot be called a "hidden agenda" since everything is exposed before our eyes. The document goes far beyond the context of the usual discussions on the aggiornamento of the Church of Rome. We have clearly emerged from an interpretation, even a very broad one, of the Second Vatican Council and its aftermath.

You have to read this document in its entirety to realize that you have switched to something else. We are no longer in the "reform of Catholicism". To put it bluntly, we are no longer even in Christianity. The document proposes a new religion, a new messianism, "Amazonian", neo-Rousseauist and even, frankly, of pagan inspiration.

This creates a new situation. Apparently, a mutation has taken place in a part of the Catholic Church that produces something completely foreign, not only to the tradition of the Church but to Christianity itself: no Protestant faithful to his denomination can adhere to this text more than a Catholic or an Orthodox faithful to the faith of their baptism. In 1986, the Vatican, through Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Emeritus, had condemned Marxist liberation theology; obviously, the spirit of protest has not been eradicated, it has transformed. And it comes back, more virulent than ever. A generation later, it reappeared like a boomerang, creating a situation unprecedented in the history of the Church, with unpredictable consequences.

### **The synod's working document is no longer Christian**

As I began reading, I thought I would have to confront a theologically complex text, where we would have to distinguish nuances. Since the two-part synod on the family, which took place in 2015-2016, are we not witnessing a challenge, by cardinals and theologians, to several passages from "Amoris Laetitia", the text of the Supreme Pontiff who draws the conclusions of

the two sessions? Four cardinals, in particular, expressed dubia, or (theological) doubts and asked Pope Francis for clarification. In this case, we remained in the context of a discussion of the moral doctrine of the Church. However, nothing of the sort is possible with the Synod's Instrument of Work for the Amazon; because a characteristic of the text is obvious from the very first pages: it has absolutely nothing Christian about it!

Until a few years ago, debates within the Church focused on differences in views between "conservative" and "progressive". This is the case, for example, with debates on liturgy: in 2008, in response to a strong demand for a return to the Latin liturgy of the Council of Trent, Pope Benedict XVI authorized a reintroduction for the faithful who so wished, in parallel with the most widespread Roman Catholic liturgy today, that of Paul VI, which emerged from the Second Vatican Council. We are staying in a debate among Catholics. There are also differences between Catholics as to the degree of possible rapprochement with Orthodox or Protestants. It is a debate on Christian relations. But no Christian denomination, whether linked to Rome or not, can identify itself in the preparatory document of the Amazonian Synod.

Indeed, it lacks most of Christianity. Christ is not presented as the Redeemer, who came to bring the salvation of humanity through his voluntary sacrifice. The Passion and Resurrection, without which there is no Christianity, are marginal in the working document. Jesus, when mentioned in the text - and this is rarely and never organically with developments - is seen as the pretext for a conversion to "integral ecology". For Christians, Jesus is the "true Man united to the true God". However, it is difficult to discern the divinity of Jesus in the *Instrumentum Laboris*.

In this case, the reader goes from surprise to surprise. There is a permanent and total confusion between what Christianity calls the natural world (the creation, perishable) and the supernatural world (life in God, about which the Christian believes that Christ, through his preaching, his actions, his suffering on the Cross and his resurrection from the dead, has come to give us access). For example, in the Synod's working document, the notion of communion refers first of all to "communion with nature" and there is confusion with communion, in the Catholic or Orthodox sense, that of the consumption by the faithful of the body of Christ in the form of the bread consecrated by the priest on the altar; even a Protestant will not find what he is looking for: he shares with his brothers in Christ, the fundamental distinction between the created and the uncreated and the memorial of the Passion and Resurrection of the Lord, as he celebrates it in the Temple, certainly does not imply the "Real Presence" of Christ but it is a remembrance of a human fact, the Last Supper of Jesus with his apostles, and not the expression of a communion with the nature that precedes mankind in the history of the universe.

There is, still in the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Synod, no distinction between Creation and its Creator. The text is in fact pagan, pantheistic - God is confused with nature: the Holy Spirit, when the working document speaks of it, is not, in the Christian sense, the Eternal Incarnated God continuing his creation until he conforms man to Christ to make him a participant in divine life; when the text speaks of life, it is confused with biodiversity; it is never about supernatural life. Amazonian wisdom is communion with nature and with a God who is not distinct from nature. There is no distinction between the spirit of Amazonian cultures and the divine spirit.

### **Amazing denial of Israel's election**

The Synod's Working Document abolishes the election of Israel. It replaces the people loved and chosen by God with a somewhat mysterious entity: Amazonia, often referred to as the "Amazonian peoples" or as the peoples, identity and cultures of this region, as indigenous - as migrants too, sometimes. Even if what it is about is often imprecise, there is no doubt that the uniqueness of Israel and the specificity of Biblical Revelation are abolished. The prophets Isaiah or Ezekiel are well cited, but, like the Redeemer, it is never a question of establishing an organic link with the body of the text. Neither the Virgin, Mother of the Savior, quoted in extremis, nor Our Savior himself : they do not belong to the substance of the text. Above all, it is repeated many times that Amazonian wisdom is the source from which we must now draw. The text plays with the idea that Amazonia would be a new Eden and a new Promised Land at the same time. He posits the Amazonian reality as the new source of wisdom from which the cause of integral ecology, itself a substitute for the Gospel, must draw.

It is still quite perplexing to see how easily ecumenical dialogue and the renewed focus on the election of Israel and thus on relations with our Jewish brothers, two pillars of the Second Vatican Council, are forgotten in this preparatory document. Forgotten the immense work of the Popes since Vatican II to dialogue with Christians of other faiths; forgotten also, and visibly without any hesitation, the unique character of the Hebrew people, of Israel, the fact that, as John's Gospel says: "Salvation comes from the Jews". Indeed, can we imagine a dialogue with our Protestant brothers without putting Scripture - the First Testament as well as the New - at the centre? Can we imagine continuing the dialogue, intensified in *Nostra Aetate* and then during the pontificate of John Paul II, with our Jewish brothers and sisters, if we substitute another election for that of Israel? Abraham, Jacob, David and the prophets of Hebrew monotheism no longer have their place in the *Instrumentum Laboris*. The Bible is being abolished in favour of Amazonian wisdom and example.

And this brings us back to one of the central questions of the text. The various Christian confessions share with Judaism an absolute rejection of all idolatry: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your soul, with all your heart and with all your strength" and "You shall have no God but him" says the Scripture shared by Judaism and Christianity. The whole Bible is built on a movement of separation from nature, with the worship of Mother Earth: one must leave the idolatry of natural forces, leave one's environment, even one's family, to go towards God and a new life based on the absolute distinction between the created and the uncreated being. However, the Synod's working document constantly wishes the opposite. He reverses, he wants to cancel the path followed by Abraham, that of a break with paganism and idols. Christianity, Judaism, are religions that affirm the fatherhood of a transcendent God, distinct from nature. The Synod's Working Document constantly brings us back to the cult of Mother Earth, to pre-abrahamic religions.

## **Synod in the Amazon (2): the march on Rome of liberation theologians**

### **A text of extreme intellectual indigence**

It is not only naturalistic pantheism; it is not only the negation of Israel's election that signs a non-Christian text. It is also its extreme intellectual emptiness. Christianity was born into one of the most literate cultures of antiquity in the most literate area of the Mediterranean Basin, where four languages were spoken: Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and Latin. The religion of Christ then spread around the Mediterranean Basin with great speed, because many elites joined it: this is why the resistance of Roman power and the persecution of Christians were so marked during the first three centuries of our era. Contrary to what was told to us by a German exegesis of the 19th century that was fairly anti-Jewish, if not anti-Semitic (and peddled by Renan in France), the Roman emperors were quickly terrified not by a band of sectarian enlightened people but by the massive shift of the ancient elites towards a religion that combined their expectations.

The first centuries of Christianity allowed an extraordinary cultural flowering, in particular, thanks to the encounter of the Gospel with the Greco-Roman intellectual and cultural corpus. While Eastern Christianity benefited from the Byzantine boom, which lasted eleven centuries, the Western Christian world preciously preserved the treasures of Latinity after the fall of the Roman Empire. And it was in Europe and then throughout the West, with all due respect to the authors of the *Instrumentum laboris*, that the greatest political, economic and technological change in human history took place. Has another group of cultures ever equalled the philosophical outpouring that leads from Saint Augustine (in the 5th century AD) to Blessed John Duns Scotus (in the 14th century), through Saint Anselm (11th century), Saint Bonaventure (12th century) and Saint Thomas Aquinas (13th century)? The good government thought up by Aristotle and Cicero, but also art, culture and education, became, thanks to Christianity, progressively accessible to all, men and women of all social conditions, and no longer only, as in the ancient world, to a minority of male citizens.

Since its origins - and contrary to the cliché spread by the Enlightenment - Christianity has been allied with the best in the human mind. And it is a reality that goes far beyond the successive cultural and artistic revivals that Europe experienced between the 9th and 16th centuries. In the 19th century, when German philosophy, from Kant to Schopenhauer, persisted in cutting back on the prerogatives of reason, the First Vatican Council solemnly reaffirmed the power of the human intellect. In the 20th century, the Church was in all the struggles against totalitarianism, to preserve human freedom and dignity. Today, as in the past, a Christian text is recognized by the fact it wants to raise humanity above itself, to give hope, to convince mankind that no situation is ever totally hopeless – provided the weak human being turns himself again to God. There is no doubt that the Synod's Working Document, a real attack on intelligence, does not shed light on anything; on the contrary, it is based on a dark pessimism about civilization. It is full of bureaucratic jargon and distressing clichés. The level of its geographical, sociological, anthropological descriptions would not be appropriate for a textbook. It advocates a profound intellectual and civilizational regression: while the world must face - and would need to be guided spiritually - in the digital age, in the world of artificial intelligence, the *Instrumentum Laboris* gives us as a model an "imaginary paradise" predating all the cultures that have shaped

and still shape human relations on a global scale today. While we need guidance in the face of the rapid progress of biotechnology, the Working Document would like to immerse the faithful of the Catholic Church in a look that infantilizes the world. At a time when French Catholics are waiting for support on subjects such as artificial procreation, they are being offered obscurantist phraseology on the "cry of the earth".

### **The Revenge of Liberation Theologians**

About thirty years ago, there was a current in Latin America strongly inspired by Marxism called liberation theology. The confusion between the Gospel and the Revolution had been the subject of a firm condemnation by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Apparently, the theologians and clergy concerned had submitted. The career path of the most famous of them, Leonardo Boff, is however more than instructive: forced to undergo a withdrawal from Marxism, he started to work on ecologism. In 2013, a few weeks after Cardinal Bergoglio's election to the throne of Saint Peter, Leonardo Boff gave an interview to the German magazine *Der Spiegel* in which he described his interest in ecology but also announced that the Pope would "revolutionize" the Church. Leonardo Boff is one of the authors of the Encyclical of Pope Francis, dedicated to ecology and called *Laudato Si*. As we mentioned, it was another liberation theologian, Father Paulo Suess, who coordinated the drafting of the Working Document. It is supported by Latin American cardinals or bishops close to the Pope: Claudio Hummes (Cardinal Archbishop Emeritus of Sao Paulo), Pedro Barreto (Cardinal Archbishop of Huancayo), Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga (Cardinal Archbishop of Tegucigalpa), Carlos Aguiar Retes (Archbishop of Mexico) and by German cardinals, bishops and theologians. Leonardo Boff had been cautious after the Roman convictions of the 1980s. Paulo Suess does not have these cautions: in various interviews granted since the election of Pope Francis, he openly claims all the points we have raised so far: it is no longer a question, for a Catholic, he explains, of baptizing an Amazonian Indian; the only principle that counts is that of the life of Amazonians: this is why they need the land and a strengthening of their identity. And the Church must dialogue with them and even learn from them. Suess also explains that "we can discover God's Revelation among these indigenous peoples", denying Israel's election. But apparently it does not matter to him, since those whom he calls "the indigenous" are now "the revolutionary agents of Latin America" who will make it possible to build a "new society", against this "system of death" that is capitalism, identical as everyone knows, under all latitudes.

Everything happens as if the void left by the condemnation of liberation theology had been occupied by a no less secularized thought, far from abandoning, moreover, the old Marxism. The Synod's Working Document contains a whole phraseology borrowed from liberation theology: the grassroots communities, the cry of the earth and the poor, etc. Far from returning to Christianity, as called for in the Roman condemnations of the 1980s, the former liberation theologians seem to have embraced the movement of the time. Ecologism, the phraseology of the "common house" and the "mother earth" has become the main subject. And the great difference with what happened in the 1980s is that, this time, in the Holy See, the supporters of the new theology of Mother Earth are invited to come and install their non-Christian thought at the very heart of the Catholic Church. When the prodromes of this new theology of Mother Earth appeared at the 2007 Latin American Bishops' Conference in Aparecida, then Pope Benedict XVI blocked these formulations. Now, the former Cardinal Archbishop of Buenos Aires who became Pope, who had played an essential role during the meeting, has lifted the prohibitions that were weighing on her. A network has been created, the Pan-Amazonian

Church Network (REPAM), which at the heart of the Latin American Bishops' Conference brings together the nine countries on whose territory the Amazonian forest is located. This network has been particularly active since its creation in 2014.

It is no longer possible to escape the question of Pope Francis' commitment behind the current movement: as editor of the Aparecida text in 2007, Cardinal Bergoglio has not ceased, since he became Pope, to encourage the "Amazonian" movement within the Latin American Church. In July 2013, when he visited Brazil and in January 2014 and 2018, when he travelled to Peru, he spoke of the "Amazonian face" of the Church. In December 2013, he encouraged, in a letter, a meeting of "basic ecclesial communities", militant cells of Marxist-inspired - and now converted to ecology - dating back to the era of liberation theology. Between 2014 and 2016, he discreetly followed the work of the REPAM network. Convinced by his first results, the Pope convened the Synod for the Amazon in 2017, two years in advance. Francis himself chose the participants for the preparatory work of the Synod and then for the Synod.

### **Engaging the Catholic Church from a non-Christian document?**

We are therefore faced with a situation that is unprecedented from the point of view of the Catholic Church: the Pope and a regional network of bishops and theologians - helped in part by German bishops and theologians - are proposing the discussion of a text that is not Christian. Something like this has never happened in the history of the Church.

The advantage of the existence of the Synod's Working Document is that it clearly announces the color. When it came to the discussions following the synod dedicated to the future of the family, we stayed in the context of discussions among Catholic theologians. The encyclical *Laudato Si*, Francis' first ecological contribution, preserved Christian appearances, despite a pessimism that was not very Catholic for those who read carefully. The Synod Working Document is something else. This is not first of all the n-th discussion on the marriage of priests or the ordination of women - although it is well understood that in the context of the crisis caused by paedophilia cases, German bishops and others would like to pass these points, stuffed in the middle of a green package. It is no longer a question of highlighting, as Benedict XVI did in his 2007 encyclical letter "Spes salvi", the profound respect for Creation that comes from an authentically Christian perspective. It is something else: a body of non-Christian thought has suddenly been introduced into the heart of the Catholic world. It's as if a curtain had torn. The debate is no longer about differences between Catholics or even between Christian denominations. On the one hand, there is a paganising working document that denies the election of Israel and is openly post-Marxist; and on the other, Scripture and Tradition, two thousand years of the Church's life rooted in the history of Revelation. The choice to be made is perfectly clear. A Catholic, a Christian, should not even discuss this text, which has nothing to do with their faith. They must refuse it.

This choice is clear but simple, too: if one cannot be Catholic and accept the Synod's Working Document, one must immediately reject the very possibility of holding any episcopal assembly whatsoever on such a basis. From the point of view of the history of the Church, this synod has no legitimacy, no value. You don't even have to participate to contradict the text. We do not dare to imagine the difficulties that a Church would face if it were to develop a discussion, whatever it may be, based on a non-Christian text. That is why, it must be said at the outset: no decision or recommendation formulated by the assembly to be held in the Vatican from 6 to 27 October 2019 will be binding on the clergy and the faithful – would Francis ever accept some

of them. We see well what is likely to happen from the moment when some will evoke the pontifical authority and the Magisterium of an ever more synodal Church! This will lead to great confusion. This is why it is better to decide in the heart of the matter beforehand: it is no longer even a question of "pontifical infallibility". The latter concerns the Pope's teaching on "faith and morals". But we are no longer in this context; we have turned to what Cardinal Daniélou feared at the end of the 1960s: a terrible "collapse of faith among clerics"! When a text is presented in Rome, whose authors no longer believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, there is only one thing to say, without animosity: *amicus Franciscus sed magis amica veritas* (Francis is our friend but the truth is an even greater friend).