

One Amazon, Many Voices

Examining topics to be addressed at the Synod on the Amazon

Issue 3

Extractive Industries

Ecology, community life, and spirituality are intimately woven together in the Amazon. This interrelationship is at the heart of the Amazonian-Andean ethos, *buen vivir* (good living). All three of these aspects of indigenous life in the Amazon face threats from extractive industries (which remove raw materials from the earth), large scale development projects such as hydroelectric dams, road construction, mines, legal and illegal logging, commodification of water and forests, and even conservation projects such as programs to prevent deforestation.

The exploitation of Earth and indigenous communities living on land with natural resource wealth is not new. It goes back as far as colonization.

extractive industries as a top concern. The threats include environmental contamination, forced displacement and migration, sexual exploitation, human and drug trafficking, and resource revenue corruption – all ways extractive industries often impoverish communities that once lived abundantly on the blessed gifts of the forests.

Indigenous leaders who dare to speak out are often criminalized and sometimes assassinated. The report “Enemies of the State?” by the organization Global Witness found that, in 2018, on average, three environmental or land defenders were murdered each week. Two Amazonian countries — Colombia and Brazil — are named among the top four most dangerous

“We can’t grow without the forests, we don’t live, we are going to disappear with nature and she gives life to everything.”

– Tudá, an indigenous woman of the pueblo Kanamary in Brazil

Pope Francis has apologized for the role the Church has played in oppressing native peoples and opening the door to extractive industries in the Americas. The Synod’s working document, “The Amazon: New Paths for the Church and for Integral Ecology” recognizes this historical sin and offers a new role for the Church in the Amazon region – a role of accompaniment, intercultural relationships, and active listening to defend life and all creation. Some bishops, priests, sisters, and laity, including Maryknoll missionaries, already embody this spirit of mission. Some have even paid with their own lives.

REPAM (Pan-Amazon Ecclesial Network) conducted a thorough consultation process with people of the Amazon in religious life, indigenous communities and other forest-dependent communities for the Synod. Respondents named threats to their territory from

countries in the world to be a defender. The Philippines is number one.

The working document for the Synod also brings attention to the plight of communities living in voluntary isolation, of which it estimates there are 110-130. As governments have weakened protections, these hidden indigenous peoples – especially the women – have been left vulnerable to violence from drug traffickers and workers associated with industry.

The Synod calls us to defend life by opposing a throwaway culture, the idolatry of money, exploitation and oppression — a culture of death. To defend life is to defend nature’s gifts, the culture of local people, and their right to be heard. This is the new call to mission — a path toward integration with the abundance of life.

Reflect

How do you experience interconnectedness with non-human life?

In what ways can you witness to a culture of life?

Pray

Prayer of Confession

Leader: Giver of Life, in the midst of a plundered earth we groan with creation:

All: Have mercy on us.

Leader: Giver of Life, in the midst of poisoned waters we groan with creation:

All: Have mercy on us.

Leader: Giver of Life, in the midst of polluted air we groan with creation:

All: Have mercy on us.

Leader: Giver of Life, in the midst of mountains of waste we groan with creation: People: Have mercy on us.

All: Have mercy on us.

Leader: Giver of Life, in the midst of the world at war, and because of the Church's sinful participation in the Doctrine of Discovery and Manifest Destiny, we groan with creation;

All: Have mercy on us.

Leader: Giver of Life, we who are made in the image of God have gone astray. Attitudes of conquest and greed harm us all. Creation groans with us.

All: Have mercy on us.

Prayer of Assurance

Thank you, Lord, for all that you have given us. Thank you for the beauty of the universe that you created: the trees, the sky, the mountains, the rain. All things hold beauty in themselves and all are related and touch each universe of the earth. You created the rhythm and pattern of the universe in a harmony of movement, sight, and sound. Help us to appreciate your creation and to live with our eyes, ears, and hearts open to your message. Amen.

From "Environmental Justice with Indigenous Peoples" a prayer and liturgy resource by Creation Justice Ministries. <http://bit.ly/320r4Ud>

Ecumenical Commission for Human Rights

The Ecuador-based Ecumenical Commission for Human Rights (CEDHU), co-founded and directed by Maryknoll Sister Elsie Monge, conducts investigations and advocacy on behalf of communities and the environment threatened by extractive industries.

CEDHU is working hard to assist the Shuar peoples of an Amazonian community in Ecuador in a high-profile dispute with a Chinese-financed copper mine. The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns welcomed representatives of the Shuar community to Washington in 2017 and introduced them to groups that have since advocated on their behalf before the U.N. The construction of the Mirador mine began in July and the campaign to protect the Shuar community continues.



Luis Sánchez Zhiminaycela of the Shuar indigenous community in Ecuador speaks at a hearing before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in Washington, D.C. in 2017. Image courtesy of REPAM.

What is the Synod for the Amazon

The Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon region is scheduled to meet in Rome from October 6–27. Pope Francis announced in 2017 that it would work “to identify new paths for the evangelization of God's people in that region,” specifically the indigenous peoples who are experiencing the destruction and exploitation of their natural environment and live “often forgotten and without the prospect of a serene future.” The Amazon, roughly the size of the 48 contiguous United States, with a population of 2.8 million divided among approximately 400 tribes, includes parts of Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guiana, Guyana, Peru, Venezuela, and Surinam, all countries where most of the population is Roman Catholic. <http://www.sinodoamazonico.va>