

Colloquī

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A journal for restless minds

A Crisis Of Identity

A renewal of the mind to God's will

Deacon's Diner

Food for a restless mind

Colloquī is a Deacon's Corner weekly journal. Its mission and purpose: to encourage serious discussion, to promote reasoned debate, and to provide serious content for those who hope to find their own pathway to God.

Each week Colloquī will contain articles on theology, philosophy, faith, religion, Catholicism, and much more.

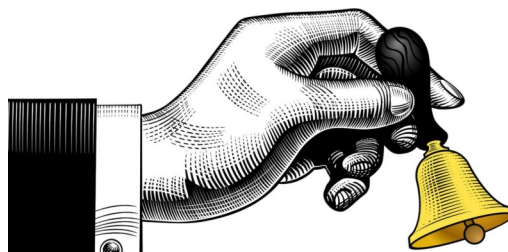
Be forewarned! Articles may and often will contain fuel for controversy, but always with the express intent to seek the Truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help us God.

A Crisis Of Identity

A renewal of the mind to God's will

Ask a stupid question and you are bound to get ... a stupid answer. Ask a smart question and you are just as likely, if not more so, to get ... a stupid answer. Ask more than one question and you get ... a broken record. Any more questions?

Whether one chooses to believe it, or not, there are businesses whose business is training business executives, politicians, and leaders of every ilk and kind on how to purposely avoid answering any question put to them. I know, because back in my corporate days, I along with other executives at a company with whom I was then employed, were required to attend such training.



Of course, they never put it quite so bluntly or directly, that would have been heresy of the worst form. No, we were *trained* on how to "stay on message" no matter what was asked. We were *taught* that no matter what the question, to first acknowledge the question, then thank the questioner, then repeat your talking points, your message, as if that was precisely what had been asked. After three days of practicing radio and television interviews, you got good, really good in

the artifice of deflection in order to "stay on message"; that is, you had become ... a broken record.

At first blush, under the guise of marketing communications (MarCom,) this approach may seem reasonable. Media interviews are a great way to get the word out to a large audience, and generally cost nothing more than time. Of course, there are risks to interviews, risks which can be ameliorated with training that MarCom *experts*

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are quite happy to provide—for a handsome fee, of course. The risks, they will tell you, are several and avoidable as long as you stick to their “professionals” playbook. Follow their rules and you will get your message out; ignore them and you may or may not convey what you intended; you may inadvertently convey the opposite.

On June 16, 1946, days short of 72 years ago, George Orwell, the English novelist and essayist, penned a guide to writing well. Notably, he began by observing the increasing decadence of civilization at the time.

Our civilization is decadent, and our language—so the argument runs—must inevitably share in the general collapse. It follows that any struggle against the abuse of language is a sentimental archaism, like preferring candles to electric light or hansom cabs to airplanes. Underneath this lies the half-conscious belief that language is a natural growth and not an instrument which we shape for our own purposes.

Now, it is clear that the decline of a language must ultimately have political and economic causes: it is not due simply to the bad influence of this or that individual writer. But an effect can become a cause, reinforcing the original cause and producing the same effect in an intensified form, and so on indefinitely. The point is that the process is reversible. Modern English, especially written English, is full of bad habits which spread by imitation and which can be avoided if one is willing to take the necessary trouble. If one gets rid of these habits one can think more clearly, and to think clearly is a necessary first step to-

ward political regeneration: so that the fight against bad English is not frivolous and is not the exclusive concern of professional writers.

He continues by providing four sample passages which, as he notes, were not chosen because they were especially bad but because they illustrated “various of the mental vices from which we now suffer.” He notes that each passage suffers its own faults, but two qualities are common to all of them. The passages in themselves are of little interest here but the two common qualities are of great interest.

The first is staleness of imagery; the other is lack of precision. The writer either has a meaning and cannot express it, or he inadvertently says something else, or he is almost indifferent as to whether his words mean anything or not. This mixture of vagueness and sheer incompetence is the most marked characteristic of modern English prose, and especially of any kind of political writing; as soon as certain topics are raised, the concrete melts into the abstract and no one seems able to think of turns of speech that are not hackneyed: prose consists less and less of *words* chosen for the sake of their meaning, and more and more of *phrases* tacked together like the sections of a prefabricated hen-house. I list below various of the tricks by means of which the work of prose-construction is habitually dodged:

- Dying metaphors: ...
- Operators, Or verbal false limbs: ...
- Pretentious diction: ...
- Meaningless words: ...

Of the last, I will further comment, the first three I will leave for the reader so interested to discover. Meaningless words

are peculiar to today’s political class, whether secular or religious and thus deserve to be further explained.

Orwell was, oddly enough, supportive of democratic socialism, though opposed to totalitarianism. His best known works are the allegorical novella *Animal Farm* (1945) and the dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). His support for democratic socialism seems at odds with much of what he wrote but perhaps it was his awareness of social injustice that caused him to lean to the left, though not nearly as far as present day progressives. In the guide he writes concerning *meaningless words*:

In certain kinds of writing, particularly in art criticism and literary criticism, it is normal to come across long passages which are almost completely lacking in meaning. Words like *romantic*, *plastic*, *values*, *human*, *dead*, *sentimental*, *natural*, *vitality*, as used in art criticism, are strictly meaningless, in the sense that they not only do not point to any discoverable object, but are hardly even expected to do so by the reader. When one critic writes, “The outstanding feature of Mr. X’s work is its living quality,” while another writes, “The immediately striking thing about Mr. X’s work is its peculiar deadness,” the reader accepts this as a simple difference of opinion. If words like *black* and *white* were involved, instead of the jargon words *dead* and *living*, he would see at once that language was being used in an improper way. Many political words are similarly abused. The word *fascism* has now no meaning except in so far as it signifies “something not desirable.” The words *democracy*, *socialism*, *freedom*, *patriotic*, *realistic*, *justice*,

have each of them several different meanings which cannot be reconciled with one another. In the case of a word like *democracy*, not only is there no agreed definition, but the attempt to make one is resisted from all sides. It is almost universally felt that when we call a country democratic we are praising it: Consequently the defenders of every kind of regime claim that it is a democracy, and fear that they might have to stop using the word if it were tied down to any one meaning. Words of this kind are often used in a consciously dishonest way. That is, the person who uses them has his own private definition, but allows his hearer to think he means something quite different. Statements like *Marshal Pétain was a true patriot. The Soviet Press is the freest in the world. The Catholic Church is opposed to persecution*, are almost always made with the intent to deceive. Others words used in variable meanings, in most cases more or less dishonestly, are: *class, totalitarian, science, progressive, reactionary, bourgeois, equality*.

Toward the end of this brief guide, Orwell writes, “The whole tendency of modern prose is away from concreteness.” I must simply add, “Amen.”

As I have tried to show, modern writing at its worst does not consist in picking out words for the sake of their meaning and inventing images in order to make the meaning clearer. **It consists in gumming together long strips of words which have already been set in order by someone else, and making the results presentable by sheer humbug.** The attraction of this way of writing is that it is easy. It is easier—even quicker, once you have the habit—to say *In my opinion it is a not unjustifiable assumption that* than to say *think*. When you are composing in a

hurry—when you are dictating to a stenographer, for instance, or making a public speech—it is natural to fall into a pretentious, Latinized style. Tags like *a consideration which we should do well to bear in mind* or *a conclusion to which all of us would readily assent* will save many a sentence from coming down with a bump. By using stale metaphors, similes and idioms, you save much mental effort, at the cost of leaving your meaning vague, not only for your reader but for yourself. This is the significance of mixed metaphors. The sole aim of a metaphor is to call up a visual image. When these images dash—as in *The Fascist octopus has sung its swan song, the jackboot is thrown into the melting pot*—it can be taken as certain that the writer is not seeing a mental image of the objects he is naming; in other words he is not really thinking. [Emphasis mine]

... People who write in this manner usually have a general emotional meaning—they dislike one thing and want to express solidarity with another—but they are not interested in the detail of what they are saying. A scrupulous writer, in every sentence that he writes, will ask himself at least four questions, thus: What am I trying to say? What words will express it? What image or idiom will make it clearer. Is this image fresh enough to have an effect? And he will probably ask himself two more: Could I put it more shortly? Have I said anything that is avoidably ugly? But you are not obliged to go to all this trouble. You can shirk it by simply throwing your mind open and letting the ready made phrases come crowding in. They will construct your sentences for you—even think your thoughts for you, to certain extent—and at need they will perform the important service of partially concealing your meaning even yourself. It is at this point that the special connection between politics and

the debasement of language becomes clear.¹

The logical conclusion to what Orwell had to say about the abuse of language seventy-two years ago is demonstratively evident in all of public discourse today; though not restricted to the public square for even the Vatican has succumbed to the *Vague* conceit. Because it is not as well known as American political discourse, let me first speak of the upcoming and so-called Amazon Synod currently set to convene later this year.

JD Flynn reports from Vatican City for the Catholic News Agency. In an article for the National Catholic Register, July 5, 2019, *Analysis: The Amazon Synod and the English Language*, he writes:

Three months from now, the bishops of the Amazonian region will meet for a regional synod that has already garnered international attention. The synod is controversial because it has become to some theologians and Churchmen a kind of “proving ground” for theological and canonical agendas that are not directly connected to the Amazon.

The recent history of Church synods suggests that the results of the meeting will likely not match the intensity of the rhetoric preceding it. But the rhetoric- and what it can teach us about the state of the Church - matters.

The needs of Catholics in the Amazonian region are abundant. The region is poor: indigenous persons face discrimination and cultural disintegration, deforestation and strip mining threaten ancient ways of life. Between far-flung villages and sometimes negligible

infrastructure, priests face the challenge of ministry across very broad territories. Catholics in some places have very little catechesis and few opportunities for Mass and confession, and they face temptations to abandon the faith. A meeting to discuss these realities, and to develop pastoral plans, could do real good.

But the meeting has garnered interest from some German theologians and ecclesiastics who seem to see it as an opportunity to reinvigorate support for an ecclesiology that takes a sort-of “federal” approach to Church doctrine and discipline, with tolerance for a considerable degree of regional variability on moral and disciplinary issues.

Such an approach, some have said, is the approach of “synodality.”

Pope Francis has said frequently there are limits to synodality, and even while debate smolders about his controversial footnotes in the 2015 exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, the pope has said on several recent occasions that neither doctrine nor significant disciplinary matters can or should be subject to regional preferences.

Last week, the pope reemphasized to the bishops of Germany that he will not abide an approach that prioritizes the judgment of a “national” Church over the teachings or norms of the universal Church.

But throughout his papacy, a cadre of mostly European clerics and intellectuals, taking up the sort of “federated” ecclesiological approach advanced by Cardinal Walter Kasper, have attempted to curry favor or support for their position from Pope Francis. It seems clear to most observers that the Amazon synod will be another front in that campaign.

In fact, one synod issue that has generated a great deal of controversy—the possible ordination of married men to the priesthood—is likely best seen through the lens of that controversy.

There may be genuine interest among some Amazonian bishops in ordaining older, married men to the priesthood to accommodate pastoral realities. But much support for the “*virii probati*” proposal comes from those who perceive that decentralizing universal rules about clerical celibacy will be a precedent for the decentralization of other governance and doctrinal matters, especially those concerning how the Church engages with a secular sexual ethos.

In short, the issue of clerical celibacy in the Amazon could be mostly a stalking horse for the debate about decentralization.

On June 30, Vatican Media published a commentary on the upcoming synod by Mauricio Lopez Oropeza, a layman who oversees a Church-sponsored advocacy network for Catholics in the Amazon. He was recently president of the World Christian Life Community, a lay movement of Ignatian spirituality associated with the Jesuits.

Oropeza wrote that the upcoming meeting “is increasingly becoming a Synod which goes far beyond the territory upon which it is based,” adding that the synod “can, and should, contribute enlightenment in a universal overview.”

The rest of Oropeza’s commentary gives indication of what kind of contribution the pan-Amazonian synod might be intended to make to any such “enlightenment.”

Noting the issues defining the synod, Oropeza discussed a tension “between the Kairos of the ‘new paths for the Church’ and the *cronos* of the urgency to respond to the socio-environmental crisis through an ‘integral ecology.’”

“Will a Synod be able to interpret this ‘Kairos’ moment to embrace the revelation of God who demands a progressive but inevitable pastoral conversion and at the same time, able to make a prophetic and effective call for a conversion at a material level and in relationships, in the face of the enormous planetary socio-environmental crisis in a ‘*cronos*?’ One without the other will be insufficient, and incomplete,” Oropeza wrote.

Even those who have read a great deal of theology could be forgiven for not understanding what any of that means. Indeed, much of the commentary, published by the Vatican’s official media outlet, is stilted, jargon-laden, and difficult to understand. The official synod preparatory document, by most estimates, is much the same.

Here, Flynn refers to the previously cited guide by Orwell.

In 1946, George Orwell wrote that modern English prose, especially when produced by politicians or bureaucracies, “consists less and less of words chosen for the sake of their meaning, and more and more of phrases tacked together like the sections of a prefabricated henhouse.”

“The whole tendency of modern prose is away from concreteness,” Orwell wrote, adding that “modern writing at its worst does not consist in picking out words for the sake of their meaning and inventing images in order to make the meaning clearer. It consists in gumming together long strips of words which have already been set in order by someone else, and making the results presentable by sheer humbug.”

Modern ecclesial prose, especially when it is written by committee, fits some of that description.

Observers have long lamented the

tendency of contemporary Vatican documents to read more like text produced in Brussels committee rooms or Washington, DC think tanks than like the clear, prophetic, and direct language that might be expected from religious leaders. There are notable exceptions, but finding the point in Vatican prose can sometimes seem a Herculean labor.

Synodal documents are especially susceptible to the modern tendency toward vagueness and imprecision, because they are designed to accommodate, or at least give nod to, the particular agendas of all those who have spoken into their creation.

As a result, Vatican synods are often very long meetings, sometimes quite controversial during their proceedings, leading to final documents soon shelved. It is infrequent that a document produced by a synod becomes a major point of reference for the Church.

An earlier article written for NCR by Father Raymond J. de Souza, refers to the preparatory *instrumentum laboris* (working document), released June 17, from which the synod deliberations will proceed in October.²

Addressed to the theme “Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology,” the document raises questions about the validity of the Church’s mission in Amazonia.

Do the indigenous peoples of the Amazon need the Gospel? And if they do, is it the same Gospel that the Lord Jesus sent the apostles to preach *ad gentes* (to the nations)?

While the affirmative answer to those questions is given repeatedly by the Church’s magisterium, the *instrumentum laboris* (IL) obscures

that reality and borders on calling it into question. As a “working document,” it will leave the synod fathers in October with a substantial amount of work to do.

While initial media coverage has focused on a proposed discussion about ordaining married “elders” to deal with a shortage of priests, the IL proposes a discussion on something rather more profound. Would it be possible to ordain such men as priests only for the sacraments, but not, as it were, as pastors with governing authority?

The IL asks whether it is time to “reconsider the notion that the exercise of jurisdiction (power of government) must be linked in all areas (sacramental, judicial, administrative) and in a permanent way to the Sacrament of Holy Orders.”

That is a rather fundamental question, which touches upon who can serve as pastor of a local parish and who can serve as head of Vatican congregation. It is a complex matter of both ecclesiology and sacramental theology.

While the question itself is not without merit, it is quite implausible that it should be taken up by a synod focused on the needs of a region with fewer people than the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. That is a question for the whole Church.

Leaving aside married priests, the treatment of the Church’s mission is most startling. One way to read magisterial documents — and should the Holy Father approve, the final document of the synod could become a magisterial document on its own — under Pope Francis is to check the citations.

For example, in the nearly 400 footnotes in *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love) there was not one pointing to *Veritatis Splendor* (The Splendor of Truth), indicating that what was presented was not grounded in the most comprehensive presentation of the Church’s moral theology.

When the Catechism paragraph on the death penalty was changed last year, there were no citations of magisterial documents of any kind and only one reference to a single address given by Pope Francis, indicating again that the change was not deeply rooted in the Church’s Tradition.

On the mission of the Church today, the principal magisterial documents are *Ad Gentes*, the decree of the Second Vatican Council on the missions, and *Redemptoris Missio*, the 1991 encyclical by St. John Paul II on the permanent validity of the Church’s missionary mandate. Indeed, John Paul taught, the Church does not so much *have* a mission but *is* a mission. In the charter for his own pontificate, *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), Pope Francis himself emphasized that the Church is to be a communion of missionary disciples.

While the Pan-Amazon synod’s working document draws heavily upon *Evangelii Gaudium* and, above all, *Laudato Si* (Care for Our Common Home), Vatican II and John Paul are scantily cited, and then only in passing on points of lesser significance. That’s an indication that the working document is at odds with how the Church — including Pope Francis — has traditionally taught about the mission.

In the section on “ecological conversion,” “integral conversion” treats first the “communal” dimension of this conversion, with its “social and environmental links.” It is only after this socio-ecological conversion is emphasized that it is mentioned that it ought to take place in the “process of faith.”

The IL treats extensively ecological questions, resource extraction, water purity and accessibility, urbanization, migration, corruption, education and health. The mission of spreading and strengthening the

faith is not the primary focus, and it sometimes disappears from consideration altogether.

Indeed, while the efforts of the first missionaries are defended against the charge of colonial oppression, whether the Catholic faith is something good for the Amazon's indigenous peoples is treated at best in an ambiguous fashion.

The *IL* is a maximally judgmental document, compiling a long list of those who have abused the Amazon. Indeed, the *IL* links the duty to "announce" the Gospel and the duty to "denounce" malefactors, putting the proclamation of the faith and social criticism on the same plane.

Out of this picture, the peoples of the Amazon themselves seem curiously exempt from original sin. Aside from a passing remark about the "abuse of assets by the Amazon peoples themselves," there is very little sense that the cultures of the indigenous peoples require any purification by the Gospel.

Even on a natural level, the traditional practices of the Amazon get a favorable reading, noting that "indigenous rituals and ceremonies are essential for integral health because they integrate the different cycles of human life and nature." The terms "medicine man" or "shaman" do not appear in the *instrumentum laboris*, but they appear nonetheless as benevolent figures, not potential sources of destructive magic or superstition to be overcome by both reason (science) and faith.

The *IL* boasts that it has proceeded from the "bottom up," with extensive "listening" to the "voice of the Amazon," not only its peoples, but the land, trees and water themselves. Yet the dominant voice of the *IL* is not the 21st-century Amazon, but 17th-century Europe, with its idealized view of "noble savag-

es" that exist in an Eden-like state of harmony, uncorrupted by sin. And without sin, why would there be a need for redemption?

The *IL* goes so far as to speak of the Amazon region as a "theological locus" and "source of revelation," meaning that the land and its peoples themselves teach us about who God is. That could be an utter banality, meaning only that all creation bears the stamp of its Creator, with man above all in his image and likeness. That could be said about any place or people. Or it could be a type of pantheism, or paganism, at odds with the Gospel. The synod will have to clarify that, and much else.

The working document of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan Amazon Region invites participants to "discover the incarnate and active presence of God ... in the spirituality of original peoples ... in the different popular organizations which resist mega-projects."

Whatever that means, it does not begin with the revelation of the Father's love in Jesus Christ.

Perhaps it is William Kilpatrick, who paints the Amazonian rose its true colors; his words are far from gilded praise.

Every now and then, the utopians in our midst dust off Rousseau's Noble Savage thesis and try to convince us that life in the jungle beats life in the air-conditioned suburbs.

The general idea is that people who live close to the state of nature are spiritually superior to "civilized" people who have lost touch with the wisdom of nature. Rousseau's idea was tested during the French Revolution, and it did lead to a lot of savagery, though not the noble kind. Then it was revived by various Romantic poets such as Wordsworth who encouraged his readers

to "quit your books" and "let Nature be your teacher."

Irving Babbitt's 1919 book *Rousseau and Romanticism* should have been the death knell for the Noble Savage hypothesis, but the idea was hard to kill. It popped up again with anthropologist Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa*, a book which argued that Samoans were free of neurotic "hang-ups" because they enjoyed greater sexual freedom. Then, in the 1960s, due in part to the influence of Mead, came the Woodstock generation, hippie communes, and the Sexual Revolution. In a sense, the children of that era really were the children of Rousseau. Although he idealized the child in his book *Emile*, Rousseau had no use for real children, and sent all of his own off to orphanages as soon as they were born. As the Woodstock generation grew up and married, many discovered that children were an inconvenience when it came to the pursuit of sex and self-actualization. As divorce and out-of-wedlock births skyrocketed, increasing numbers of children were in effect "orphaned." In short, they were left to grow up on their own without much adult guidance. Marinated in neo-Rousseauian nostrums, the adults assumed that children would just naturally find the right path in life.

The Sexual Revolution never really went away, but in subsequent decades there was some recognition that "going native" was not conducive to a healthy society. Now, however, we seem to be poised on the brink of a new experiment in Rousseauian living. I was in Miami Beach recently, and a great many of the colorfully tattooed young and not so young crowding the streets and the boardwalks looked like they had come straight out of Haight-Ashbury circa 1970—except that the term "straight" doesn't quite do justice to the gender

fluidity that was on display. Moreover, many of the Miami natives strolling through the shopping areas were wearing considerably less clothing than an Amazonian strolling through the rain forest.

This brings me to the point of this essay. The most ironic thing about this new venture into the primitive is that some of the prime movers are the leaders of the Catholic Church. Take the upcoming Amazon Synod. The working document for the Synod does make some valid observations about the biological and climatological importance of the Amazonian region and about the exploitation of the Amazonian people. But when it comes to describing the peoples, the "Voice of the Amazon" sounds suspiciously like the voice of Rousseau—or better, the voice of Rousseau harmonized with the voice of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and elevated to the cosmic level. Thus:

◆ A fundamental aspect of the root of human sin is to detach oneself from nature... (99)

◆ A cosmic dimension of experience (*cosmovivencia*) palpitates within the families. (75)

◆ It is necessary to grasp what the Spirit of the Lord has taught these people throughout the centuries: faith in the God Father-Mother Creator; communion and harmony with the earth; solidarity with one's companions ... the living relationship with nature and "Mother Earth." (121)

In its celebration of the rain forest, the wise old elders, and the Amazonian "cosmo-vision," the document reads like a cross between *Green Mansions*, *The Divine Milieu*, and Carlos Castaneda's *The Teachings of Don Juan*. The document also calls to mind certain themes from *Mutiny on the Bounty*. This is because its authors seem to be counseling a mutiny against those traditional

Church practices and teachings that might impede the development of an Amazonian brand of Catholicism. If we're smart, they seem to say, we'll jump ship (i.e., the Barque of Peter) and go live with the welcoming natives on the tropic island (i.e., Amazonia).

When the document speaks of "inculturation," which it often does, it means that we should abandon our own culture and adopt that of the Amazonians. Why? Because they have much to teach us about spirituality, eco-theology, "lived reality," and communing with the trees, the animals, and "the spirits." Just as with the working document from last fall's Youth Synod, this one is all about listening. The earlier document said that the Church must listen to youth because youth are in touch with what's happening now. The current document says that the Church must listen to the wise elders of the tribes because they're in touch with the ancient wisdom of the ancestors. Do the two documents contradict each other? Don't be silly. That's linear thinking. As Walt Whitman, one of the earlier advocates of cosmic consciousness, wrote: "Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself; I am large, I contain multitudes." So just shut up and listen to your elders.

According to the document, another thing the Amazonians can teach us is *buen vivir*—"good living." In other words, they can show us how to live in poverty and be happy. This is a talent that will prove quite handy because if the socialist, anti-free market economics subscribed to by the document's authors are put into practice, poverty will spread like wildfire.

These are just a few of the supposed benefits that the Amazonians will confer upon the Church. But what does the Church have to offer to the indigenous people of the Amazon? Well, basically, nothing. Remember

that they live closer to Nature than we do, and in the Rousseauian thought-world that makes them more virtuous than us. The authors of the working document really do seem to subscribe to Rousseau's belief in natural goodness. In a commentary on the document, Fr. Raymond de Souza puts it this way:

The peoples of the Amazon themselves seem curiously exempt from original sin... And without sin, why would there be a need for redemption?

Or a need for conversion? If the spiritually advanced people of the Amazon are okay the way they are, then there's no need to convert them to Christianity. Indeed, one gets the impression that the Amazon Synod is not intended to convert indigenous people to the Church, but to convert the Church to the Indians' eco-friendly, pantheistic form of spirituality, with the result that Catholicism becomes a new Church with "an Amazonian face." Whether this will be a happy face remains to be seen.

It all sounds a little crazy, but if you've been paying attention, you will notice that all sorts of bizarre things are happening in the Church these days. Thankfully, we needn't get into all that here because the Amazonian experiment has enough bizarreness to fill volumes.

One of the odd ironies of this New Age spirituality is that it's being foisted on the Church by old men. Many of the key players in the Amazonian project are getting along in years, yet they are still enamored of ideas that became popular 60 years ago. It was a time when many young people thought that the "Age of Aquarius"—whatever that means—was about to dawn.

Bishop Erwin Krautler, a member of the preparatory committee of the Amazon Synod, is 80; Cardinal

Claudio Hummes, 85, is president of the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network; and Cardinal Walter Kasper, who is very much involved in the planning for the Synod, is 86.

Facing off against them is another elderly prelate, Cardinal Walter Brandmüller, who is 90. Brandmüller calls the working document for the Synod "heretical" and an "apostasy" from Divine Revelation, and he says it should be rejected. But how can a nonagenarian cardinal possibly understand the youthful, New Age-y vision of those octogenarian cardinals?

Cardinal Walter Brandmüller, President Emeritus of the Roman Curia, in A Critique of the "Instrumentum Laboris" for the Amazon Synod declared that the working document constitutes an attack on the foundations of the Faith, and in a way that has not heretofore been thought possible. Thus he states, it must be rejected with all decisiveness.

Introduction

It is truly astonishing that, contrary to former assemblies, the upcoming Synod of Bishops on the Amazon will deal exclusively with a region of the earth whose population is just half that of Mexico City, that is to say, 4 million. This also raises suspicions regarding the true intentions to be implemented in a hidden way at the October assembly. But one especially has to question the understanding of religion, Christianity and the Church that forms the basis of the recently published *Instrumentum Laboris*. This shall be examined here, with the help of individual elements from the text.

Why a synod on this region?

In principle, we must ask why a synod of bishops should deal with topics which, at best, (as is now the

case with three quarters of the *Instrumentum Laboris*) relate only marginally to the Gospels and the Church. Clearly, there is an encroaching interference here by a synod of bishops into the purely secular affairs of the Brazilian state and society. What do ecology, economy, and politics have to do with the mandate and mission of the Church?

More importantly: what professional expertise authorizes an ecclesial synod of bishops to express itself on such topics?

Should the synod of bishops indeed do this, it would be a crossing of boundaries and act of clerical presumption which state authorities would have to reject.

On natural religions and inculturation

Furthermore, throughout the *Instrumentum Laboris* one finds a very positive assessment of natural religions, including indigenous healing practices etc., even mythic-religious practices and cult forms. In the context of the call for harmony with nature, for example, there is even talk about "dialogue with the spirits" (n. 75).

It is not only the Rousseauian or Enlightenment ideal of the "noble savage" that is being contrasted with the decadent European. The line of thought continues right up to the turn of the 20th century, ending in a pantheistic idolatry of nature. Hermann Claudius (1913) created the hymn of the Socialist Worker's Movement, "When we walk side by side...." One verse reads: "Birches green and seeds of green, with a pleading gesture old Mother Earth extends her full hands, that man may become her own..."

It is remarkable that this verse was later copied into the songbook of the Hitler Youth, presumably because it corresponded to the National-Socialist myth of blood and soil. The ideological proximity with

the *Instrumentum* is remarkable. The anti-rational rejection of "Western" culture (that stresses the importance of reason) is characteristic of the *Instrumentum Laboris*, which speaks in no. 44 of "Mother Earth" and of the "cry of the earth and of the peoples" (no. 101) respectively.

Accordingly, the territory—the forests of the Amazon region—even becomes a *locus theologicus*, a special source of Divine Revelation. These are "epiphanic places" where "the reserve of life and wisdom for the planet is manifest, a life and wisdom that speaks of God" (n. 19). The anti-rational rejection of the "western" culture, which stresses the importance of reason, is characteristic of the *Instrumentum Laboris*. Meanwhile, the subsequent regression from Logos to Mythos is raised to the criterion of what the *Instrumentum Laboris* calls the inculturation of the Church. The result is a natural religion in Christian masquerade.

The concept of inculturation is perverted in the document, for it proposes the opposite of what the International Theological Commission presented in 1988, and what had already been taught in the Second Vatican Council's Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes*.

On the abolition of priestly celibacy and the introduction of a female priesthood

It is impossible to conceal that the "synod" intends, above all, to help implement two most cherished projects that heretofore have never been implemented: namely, the abolition of priestly celibacy and the introduction of a female priesthood—beginning with female deacons. In any event, it is about "identifying the type of official ministry that can be conferred on women ... in the Church (129 a 3)." In a similar manner, "room is now

opening up to create new ministries appropriate to this historical moment. It is the right moment to listen to the voice of the Amazon..." (n. 43).

But the fact is omitted here that, in the end, John Paul II also stated with highest magisterial authority that it is not in the power of the Church to administer the Sacrament of Holy Orders to women. Indeed, in two thousand years, the Church has never administered the Sacrament of Holy Orders to a woman. The demand which stands in direct opposition to this fact shows that the word "Church" is now being used purely as a sociological term on the part of the authors of the *Instrumentum Laboris*, thus implicitly denying the sacramental-hierarchical character of the Church.

On the denial of the sacramental-hierarchical character of the Church

In a similar manner—though expressed in passing—no. 127 represents a direct attack on the hierarchical-sacramental constitution of the Church, when it is suggested that it would be opportune "to reconsider the notion that the exercise of jurisdiction (power of government) must be linked in all areas (sacramental, judicial, administrative) and in a permanent way to the Sacrament of Holy Orders." (no. 127) From such an erroneous view arises (in no. 129) the call for the creation of new offices which correspond to the needs of the Amazonian peoples.

However, liturgy, i.e. worship, is the field where the ideology of a falsely understood inculturation finds its expression in an especially spectacular manner. Here, certain forms from natural religions are to be positively adopted. The *Instrumentum Laboris* does not hold back from demanding that the "poor and simple people" may express "their

(!) faith through images, symbols, traditions, rites and other sacraments" (!) (no. 126 e).

This certainly does not correspond to the precepts of the Constitution "*Sacrosanctum Concilium*," nor to those in the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes*. It also manifests a purely horizontal understanding of liturgy.

Conclusion

Summa summarum: The *Instrumentum Laboris* burdens the synod of bishops and ultimately the Pope with a serious break with the *depositum fidei*. Such a break consequently implies the self-destruction of the Church or the change of the *Corpus Christi mysticum* into a secular NGO with an ecological-social-psychological mandate.

After these observations, questions naturally arise: above all, in relation to the sacramental-hierarchical structure of the Church, is there a decisive break with the apostolic tradition constitutive of the Church, or do the authors rather have a notion of the development of doctrine which is presented theologically in order to justify the aforementioned rupture?

Indeed, this seems to be the case. We are witnessing a new form of the classical Modernism of the early twentieth century. At the time, from a decidedly evolutionist approach, the view was presented that, in accord with the continually higher development of man, higher levels of human consciousness and culture also result, whereby what had been false yesterday can turn out to be true today. Religion and religious consciousness, with its forms in doctrine and cult – and also, of course, in morality – are also subject to this revolutionary dynamic.

This, however, would presuppose a concept of dogmatic development that is sharply opposed to the genuine Catholic understanding. The latter understands the development

of dogma and the Church not as change, but as an organic development of the subject which remains identical to itself.

That is what the two Vatican Councils teach us in their Constitutions "*Dei Filius*", "*Lumen Gentium*", and "*Dei Verbum*."

It is to be emphatically stated that the *Instrumentum Laboris* contradicts the binding teaching of the Church on decisive points, and is therefore to be qualified as heretical.

Inasmuch as the fact of Divine Revelation is here even being questioned or misunderstood, one must also speak of apostasy.

This is all the more justified in light of the fact that the *Instrumentum Laboris* uses a purely immanentist notion of religion and regards religion as the result and expression of man's spiritual self-experience. The use of Christian words and concepts cannot obscure the fact that, regardless of their original meaning, they are being used merely as empty words.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Amazon Synod constitutes an attack on the foundations of the Faith, in a way that has heretofore not been thought possible. It must therefore be firmly and decidedly rejected.⁴

The importance of the Cardinal's critique must neither be underestimated nor ignored. For a well-respected, senior member of the Catholic hierarchy and Prince of the Church to brand a document as heresy and apostasy cannot to be dismissed as the mere roar of a toothless lion. That such heresy and apostasy could be suggested by bishops is frightening, leaving the laity befuddled, wondering what they are supposed to believe.

Returning to his essay, William Kilpatrick suggests a likely possibility. First noting the mind-bending effects such tortured documents have on one's ability to think rationally, he suggests the results may be a dilution, so much so that Christianity may no longer even be recognizable.

One of the hazards of reading highly unusual documents is that one begins to think unusual thoughts. Somehow this standoff between the octogenarians and the nonagenarian reminded me of a scene from *The Boys from Brazil*. Toward the end of the film, a bloody fight erupts between a sexagenarian (Gregory Peck as Dr. Mengele) and a septuagenarian (Sir Laurence Olivier as the Nazi hunter). Well, that's only a slight connection to the elderly bishops. But then, as often happens when one stays up late writing, I began to notice other connections. *The Boys from Brazil* is about a Nazi doctor who has come to Brazil after the war with a plan to implant surrogate mothers with zygotes carrying samples of Hitler's DNA in the hope of creating Hitler clones who will re-establish the Reich.

It's a crazy plot, but so is the plan to recast the Church in the image of the Amazon jungle. The synod could be a timely remake of the story. Let's title it *The Boyish Bishops from Brazil*. If you're a conspiracy theorist, you will see the connection right away. One curiosity of the Amazon synod is that a suspiciously large percentage of the participants are bishops from German-speaking countries. Could it be that a group of aging German bishops, still boyish in their own minds, have hatched a plot to carry the spiritual DNA of Teilhard de Chardin, Cardinal Godfried Danneels, Cardinal Carlo Martini, and other New Age prelates to the Amazon

with the hope that in the warm moist jungle climate their ideas will germinate and spread throughout the planet, eventually causing all of us to evolve into the Cosmic Christ? The Cosmic Christ, mind you, is not anything like the Christ of the Gospels, but more of a pantheistic spirit that inhabits you and me and the trees and the river and the grass.

But I digress. In fact, I see that I am wandering. But isn't that the point of it all, i.e., to be able to wander freely and fluidly from one lived experience to the next and to enter the great stream of consciousness and be re-baptized in the waters of the Amazon? Such free association is fully justified by the document itself, which tells us that "we must *relearn* how to weave the links that connect all the dimensions of life" (102). Besides, Fr. George Rutler frequently employs the free association method, so it must be okay. Could he have learned this technique from an elderly shaman in the rain forest? It seems unlikely, but in Amazonland anything is possible. For example, the document keeps insisting that the liturgical and doctrinal innovations it proposes are in perfect continuity with Church tradition.

Hmm. Maybe. For example, one of the high-level synod participants seems the very embodiment of the "old" Church's authoritarian approach. Bishop Franz-Josef Overbeck of Essen, Germany, said the synod will lead the Church to a "point of no return." And after that "nothing will be the same as it was." Reichsbishop Uberrnensch, er, Overbeck, is also reputed to have said: "We have ways of making you comply."

As we all know by now, God wills a diversity of religions. And the neo-Rousseauian bishops seem happy to comply by ordering up a whole menu of diversities: one form of Christianity for the Amazon Basin with an Amazonian face; another,

we presume, for the Australian outback with an aboriginal face; and still another, no doubt, for the South Seas with a Polynesian face. As for the Church in Europe and North America, it needs to put on a happy face—most likely some fluid blend of the Amazonian, aboriginal, and Polynesian face.

The trouble is that all this mixing up of Christianity with other traditions and spiritualities is bound to result in a dilution of Christianity. When you filter the Christian faith through 50 trillion gallons of Amazon rain water and then submerge it in a giant vat of bubbling psychosocio-eco babble, you end up with a faith that is no longer recognizable.

In the process, Christ loses his unique identity as the one way to the Father. Instead, he is forced to take his place alongside other religion founders such as Buddha and Muhammad, and with other assorted deities such as Brahma, Vishnu, and Quetzalcoatl.

The declaration *Dominus Jesus* declared that "Jesus Christ has a significance and a value for the human race and its history, which is unique and singular, proper to him alone, exclusive, universal, and absolute." The Gospel message, in short, excludes all competing practices and spiritualities. And it is universal—i.e., accessible to all.

However, for some reason, the New Age bishops seem to think that the farmers, fishermen, and herders of the Amazon couldn't possibly understand the message that was addressed to farmers, fishermen, and herders in first-century Judea without first having it translated into a language that only German theologians understand. On the other hand, they are quite sure that the Amazonians, perhaps guided by some Yoda-like elder, will quickly grasp the fine points of Teilhard de Chardin's mystical musings about

“Christogenesis,” “cosmogenesis,” “ultrahominization,” the “biosphere” the “noosphere,” and the “Omega point.”

In places, the document borders on unintentional self-parody. Here are a couple of samples:

Thus a Church called to be even more synodal begins by listening to the peoples and to the earth by coming into contact with the abundant reality of an Amazon full of life and wisdom but also of contrasts. It continues with the cry that is provoked by destructive deforestation and extractivist activities and that demands an integral ecological conversion. (5)

Such an understanding of life is characterized by the connectivity and harmony of relationships between water, territory, and nature, community life and culture, God and the various spiritual forces. (13)

Reading through this pseudo-profundity, especially the part about “various spiritual forces,” I was reminded of the banquet scene near the end of C.S. Lewis’s *That Hideous Strength*. The members of the N.I.C.E. Institute have gathered to congratulate themselves on their program to remake human nature along more scientific lines. But they have made the mistake of enlisting dark spiritual forces in their endeavor, and eventually they find that they are no longer in control.

As the directors of the Institute rise to speak in turn, their talk is turned into gibberish. Thus, the Deputy Director thinks he is making sense, but the audience hears him saying:

Tidies and fuglemen—I sheel foar that we all—er—most steeply rebut the defensible, though, I trust, lavatory Aspasia which gleams to have selected our redeemed inspector this deceiving. It would—ah—be shark, very shark, from anyone’s debenture...

The stream of babble nicely exposes the essential nuttiness behind the high-sounding proposals of the N.I.C.E. project. Eventually, one hopes, the Amazon project will be seen in the same light—as a “very shark” enterprise.

For those who thoroughly enjoy reading babbling gobbledygook, I have included the link to the *Instrumentum Laboris* in the footnotes (2).

The controversies swirling around the Amazonian Synod are but the latest among many which are of great concern to faithful Catholics. It is vitally important to stay informed.

It seems that I have already gone far enough, perhaps far deeper down the rabbit hole than prudence would suggest, that few will have cared to have traveled this far. In the interest of time and sanity, I will therefore forego for the moment the conversation on the mendacity of the body politic; there being more than sufficient evidence to fill as many pages. I will leave that for next week.

1. The New Republic, “George Orwell’s Brilliant Guide to Writing Well,” June 16, 1946. <https://newrepublic.com/article/73258/george-orwells-politics-and-english-language-guide-writing>.
2. <http://www.sinodoamazonico.va/content/sinodoamazonico/en/documents/pan-amazon-synod--the-working-document-for-the-synod-of-bishops.html>
3. William Kilpatrick, “The Amazon Synod Goes Native,” Crisis Magazine: A Voice for the Faithful Catholic Laity, July 3, 2019. William Kilpatrick taught for many years at Boston College. He is the author of several books about cultural and religious issues, including *Why Johnny Can’t Tell Right From Wrong*; and *Christianity, Islam and Atheism: The Struggle for the Soul of the West and The Politically Incorrect Guide to Jihad*. His articles have appeared in numerous publications, including *Catholic World Report*, *National Catholic Register*, *Aleteia*, *Saint Austin Review*, *Investor’s Business Daily*, and *First Things*.
4. Maike Hickson, Life Site News, June 27, 2019, <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/cardinal-critiques-amazon-synod-working-doc-as-heretical...apostasy-urges-bishops-to-reject-it>.

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Food for a restless mind

For those restless minds that hunger and thirst for more. Each week this space will offer a menu of interesting and provocative titles, written by Catholic authors, in addition to those referenced in the articles, for you to feed your restless mind.

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Michael Patrick Barber

Ignatius Press
2019, 189 pages.

Faith and Politics

Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI)

Ignatius Press
2018, 269 pages.

Catholicism & Modernity

James Hitchcock

The Seabury Press
1979, 250 pages.

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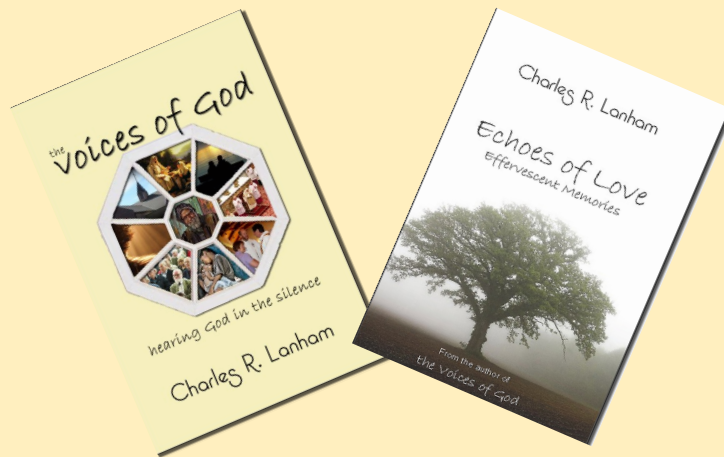
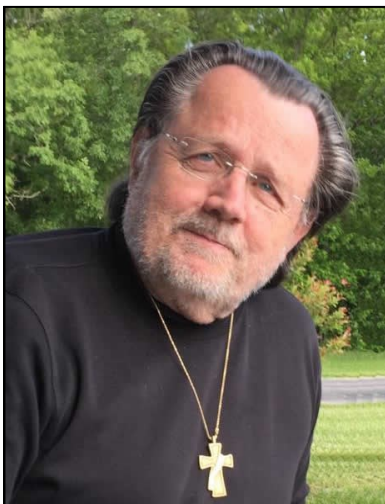
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Deacon Chuck Lanham is an author, columnist, speaker, and a servant of God.

He is the author of **The Voices of God: Hearing God in the Silence**, **Echoes of Love: Effervescent Memories** and is currently writing his third book **Without God: Finding God in a Godless World**.

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Deacon Chuck can be contacted thru email at

deacon.chuck@deacons corner.org

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4742 Cougar Creek Trail

Reno, Nevada 89519