

QUERIDA AMAZONIA: THE ECHOES OF THE LONG-LASTING CRY OF AFRICA

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Abstract

Querida Amazonian is the Pope's post-Synodal Exhortation. It captures the reality of the Amazon region as one devastated by all forms of societal ills. With an overview of the document, this paper seeks to establish the links the region has with the African Continent as a whole. It argues that both have common traits despite their differences. As a result, it makes propositions that we have common humanity as what affects one necessarily affects all. Enough of the silence in the face of injustice! Should the recommendations of the document be allowed to thrive, a greater good would be attained. This, the paper hopes would be the mark of the new world founded on equity, justice and right. It is but the true love of nature, whose essence we share. This study adopts hermeneutic method.

Keywords: *Querida*, Amazon, Africa, Social.

Introduction

The last quarter of 2019, precisely from 6th-27th October saw the height of the media hype of the Amazon Synod hosted in Rome. A lot of discussions, deliberations, criticisms and many more were evident. For many, it appeared as the last phase of all that remains of the Catholic Church. It met both great resistance and acceptance from people all around the world. Without knowing what it entails, many criticized it. With the knowledge of what it was all about, there was stiffness to the supposed wave of change it portended. The fact that change is indeed a herculean task to make stirred us all to the face. At the base of this, were the real issues at stake: the unjust harness of both human and natural resources that promotes the interest of the powerful few.

It is good, however, to note that the said region “is a multinational and interconnected whole, a great biome shared by nine countries: Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Surinam, Venezuela and the territory of French

Guiana.”⁴³ What a great expanse with over 110 indigenous peoples and nationalities! How beautiful it is to bring them to the table! Are their plights much different from those of the African continent as a whole? How urgent was the Synod? Was it just for the Amazonian region? Where does this leave us? Any ways forward for our world today? To better understand all these, it is pertinent we turn to the document.

An overview of the document

Querida Amazonia translated as ‘Beloved Amazonia’ captures in simplistic terms, our love for the Amazon. It depicts our love for Mother Earth. Since you cannot speak of a place without a necessary reference to its inhabitants, it calls attention on the indigenous peoples of the Amazon. To make an abuse the earth is to do the same for the people. All acts of the unjust harness of the resources of the region to the advantage of a powerful few hamper the stable life of the people as a whole. It is an injustice to the poorest of the poor, whose means of livelihood depends on the meagre resources legally or illegally taken from them. This denial is the most unjust act for teeming people without a voice in the dialogue of economic distribution of the resources that define their identity. How can it then be legal if justice demands fairness to all peoples?

A long chain of connections exists for these long-standing unjustifiable acts. There is a direct attack of the social structures that maintain the stable life of the people. Human relationships are reduced to less dignifying status. This covers the social dimension. Their entire life is quickly being eroded by the new lifestyles at the extreme with theirs. In such an insensitive move, their natural lifestyles, rich and diverse in all its dimensions are lost to a ‘civilization’ championed by urbanization. A lack of respect for culture is a lack of respect for the people. Such a plan surely has an ecological effect. It involves aggressive pollution of the natural ecosystem. Waterways that symbolize the vital force of the area are contaminated on daily basis. As a result, living organisms are in extinction; each of which has an important role to play for our common universe. The silence and betrayal by ecclesiastical bodies do no good for the general well-being of the indigenous

⁴³ POPE FRANCIS, *Beloved Amazonia: The Apostolic Exhortation and Other Documents from the Pan-Amazon Synod*, Orbis Books, New York, 2020, 5. As it is the case with all Church documents, the paragraph and not page numbers shall be maintained all through this work. Hence, for brevity in citations, the work shall adopt an acronym (for *Querida Amazonia*) followed by the paragraph number for all subsequent notes: eg. QA 1.

peoples. Silence in the face of injustice is complacent with the evil in question. It is as good as injustice itself, even more grievous, as one might be moved to say.

The document, therefore, built on four dreams: social, cultural, ecological and ecclesial; seeks reconsideration of the life of the indigenous peoples of the Amazon region. By these dreams, it seeks a rethinking of the various structures that have consciously or unconsciously contributed to the creation of this injustice. They capture the four cardinal nodes around which the whole discussions at the synod were hinged. This means that they were the four basic perspectives it sought to deepen to pave the way for a more fruitful encounter in the region. While it is addressed to the Amazon specifically, the concerns of the peoples there are the same as ours, notwithstanding our regional differences. It is our common world. The document cannot be limited to the Amazon region. It is addressed to the whole world “to help awaken their affection and concern for that land which is also ‘ours,’ and to invite them to value and acknowledge it as a sacred mystery.”⁴⁴

That call is fundamental given the kind of consumerist mentality of our world today. It is the type that reduces to nothing all that concerns the welfare of the poor people. These are at the receiving end of the excesses of the capitalistically rich and influential few. They simply pay for the rights of the poor; threatening their ancestral heritage with the sole hope of milking the region. This sought of organized and sophisticated network covers the afore-mentioned aspects of the region. Political gimmicks toe the part of the consumerists; whose sole intention is profit-making. The poor are thus helpless since the very institutions that ought to defend and protect them are playing to the gallery. There is no sense of trust any more. This goes for all the organizations therein. What does the document illuminate? Was it a mere ecclesiastical concern for a people? These we shall find in the dreams.

Basic tenets

Social Dream

The Papal Exhortation echoes the concerns of a people. This necessarily makes it a social concern since we cannot talk about a place without its inhabitants. Inhuman behaviours of the colonizing interests, in the name of civilization, keep robbing the people of their identity. This ousts them to the outskirts of the cities thereby granting absolute powers to the economic cum political powers that be to

⁴⁴ QA 5.

manipulate the events of the region to their advantage without regard to the indigenous people. Their acts endanger the lives of the people, destroy the environment and threaten to extinction the beautiful forests and natural habitats of the people. "Their lives, their concerns, their ways of struggles for survival were of no interest. They were considered more as obstacles needing to be eliminated than as human beings with the same dignity as others and possessed of their own acquired rights."⁴⁵

The apparent helplessness of the people in the face of this grave injustice where the rich get richer and the poor, poorer; is of great concern. This is a colonial mentality, though rebranded, that must not be allowed to fester anymore since the goal is simply the same.⁴⁶ It is evil and must be condemned with all that it portends. Such a condemnation reawakens our consciousness to it. Despite its long existence, we can overcome it by seeking genuine wholesome human development that caters for the needs of the poor. Such would enhance their education in a way befitting their status as humans with equal dignity. It would appreciate the fact that efforts "to build a just society require a capacity for fraternity, a spirit of human fellowship."⁴⁷ This sense of communal living has never been lacking among people. Their forceful migration to the urban cities hampers this sense of togetherness for individualistic goals of the powers that be. So there is the need for a dialogue, one of which the poor are the principal actors and us as 'guests'. "Dialogue must not only favour the preferential option on behalf of the poor, the marginalized and the excluded, but also respect them as having a leading role to play."⁴⁸

Cultural Dream

The indigenous peoples and the various nationalities therein live mostly around the shores of the rivers and lakes. This natural setting has been distorted by advance colonization which has unsettled them from their natural habitats. This natural setting has been distorted by 'advance colonization' which has unsettled them from their natural habitats. The quest here is not a re-colonization of the Amazon region. Far from that, it is a sincere quest for genuine education: "to cultivate without uprooting, to foster growth without weakening identity, to be

⁴⁵ QA 12.

⁴⁶ QA 16.

⁴⁷ QA 20.

⁴⁸ QA 27.

supportive without being invasive.”⁴⁹ Each of these diverse groups of peoples possesses a cultural identity: “their lifestyles and their worldviews are as varied as the land itself, since they have had to adapt themselves to geography and its possibilities.”⁵⁰ This uniqueness aligns with the environment. A consumerist notion of human beings only rubs them of this great treasure. As such, “there is a need to care lovingly for our roots,”⁵¹ since from them we are born and can, through them, rise to the events that confront us. This too, the people of Amazon must take charge of.

Oral traditions had been the veritable tools for the transmission of the cultural heritage of the people. While this method is fading away, of recent, some peoples now write their stories, espousing the richness of their customs. Every culture has its limits. “Factors like consumerism, individualism, discrimination, inequality, and any number of others represent the weaker side of supposedly more developed cultures.”⁵² Outside of this, ‘growing cultures’ marked by a strong sense of community seem closed to others outside of itself. Yet, “Identity and dialogue are not enemies.”⁵³ They are mutually inclusive in all fronts.

Even among the indigenous peoples, this too could be fostered. “The globalized economy” the document notes, “shamelessly damages human, social and cultural richness.”⁵⁴ At the root of this destruction are the family, languages and cultures of the indigenous people that need to be part “existing means of communication.” Hence, for every project of the region, the rights of the people and their rich culture must be respected if there must be a genuine wholesome development. So if “the ancestral cultures of the original peoples arose and developed in intimate contact with the natural environment, then it will be hard for them to remain unaffected once that environment is damaged.”⁵⁵

Ecological Dream

There is a close relationship between human beings and nature. This must be respected since they are inseparable. Any abuse on nature would be abuse on a

⁴⁹ QA 28.

⁵⁰ QA 32.

⁵¹ QA 33.

⁵² QA 36.

⁵³ QA 37.

⁵⁴ QA 39.

⁵⁵ QA 40.

people's lineage. So the "harm done to nature affects those peoples in a very direct and verifiable way."⁵⁶ One of the most obviously affected is water, the great Amazon River, which is the source of unity and harmony of the entire region. Now it seems to be close to its end. The beauty of all these have been captured by poets, so are the potentially redeeming prowess. What makes this interesting is the fact the world as a whole is interconnected; what affects a region affects the entire ecosystem. The redemption of a region serves the good of the other regions too. Every species of organisms contributes to the beauty of the whole. This has, however, been hampered by economic interests. But to avert this, there has to be "a greater sense of responsibility on the part of national governments"⁵⁷ and the wisdom of the ancients in the region.

Should profits be the goal, no human life or environment would count for something worth preserving. As such, the cry of the Amazon region "is a cry of slavery and abandonment pleading for freedom."⁵⁸ Our consciences must be alive to acknowledge the situation at hand and act most appropriately. Every species of creatures has a right to their places. The call is for us to *contemplate* and not analyze the Amazon region; *love* and not use it, *feel intimately a part of it* and not defend it; so it takes its place as a mother for us.⁵⁹ It is not meant to be a theoretical discourse. Ecological education is the best form of approach because it develops suitable new forms of habits for all people. This must be a kind that puts away all the forms of abuses so far encountered in the region. To this, the church desires to make its contributions too.

Ecclesial Dream

A journey alongside the people of the Amazon region demands an incarnation of the Gospel in the region. This we can achieve through the proclamation of the Gospel, the *kerygma*, which marks a distinctive feature of the Church. It avers the Church an opportunity to listen profoundly and so enter into "dialogue with the people" and this would enliven her already existing dilapidating reality. Through inculturation, we understand that only a faith that has become culture is fully lived. While this takes place, "the Church herself undergoes a process of reception that enriches her with the fruits of what the Spirit has already mysteriously sown

⁵⁶ QA 42.

⁵⁷ QA 50.

⁵⁸ QA 52.

⁵⁹ QA 55.

in that culture.”⁶⁰ To achieve this, evangelizers need not come with a fixated cultural spectrum that hinders the action of the Holy Spirit. In such openness, we find so many things to be loved and cherished in their lives. We can develop a genuine friendship with the region. Nature is a great manifestation of God’s presence.

In this inculturation of Christian spirituality would benefit the sacraments. They unite grace and nature. The Eucharist, which forms the heart of our liturgy, can take up many rich elements of the indigenous peoples from their rapport with nature. These sacraments should be made very accessible to the poorest of the people. While we inculturate spirituality, holiness and the Gospel itself, we must also inculturate the ways we structure and carry out ecclesial ministries. The non-delegated office of the priest, received in Holy Orders, is not to be seen as superior to others but ordered rather to the holiness of Christ’s members. While the laity can partake in other apostolate that concerns the life of the Church, “every effort should be made to ensure that the Amazonian peoples do not lack this food of new life and the sacrament of forgiveness.”⁶¹ A collaborative effort among Churches must be encouraged, particularly those bordering between nations in the region. This, the bishops ought to encourage and make obtainable at every level.

Women have played distinctive roles in the preservation of faith in the region. They exemplify the nature of the relationship between Christ the Spouse and His bride, the Church. No form of clericalism of women should be seen since that would be a mere reduction to functional roles. Women who for long have played essential roles should have access to public leadership roles. To resolve the problems noted so far, we must transcend the existing approaches proposed in other places. There is a need to appreciate the rich ecumenical and interreligious coexistence within the region. We go into such dialogues without losing our identity but with mutual respect and great regard to the sacred texts of other religions. None of the differences we have in practice should divide us. Such differences should rather spur us to an appreciation of our rich diversity. With a summary of all that unites us as Christians and an encouragement to bank on these to further our common course, the document comes to a close with a beautiful prayer of entrustment to Mary.

⁶⁰ QA 68.

⁶¹ QA 89.

Notable Problems of the region

The document addresses key problems in the Amazon. These problems are tightly interconnected and so intermingle in a complex symphony. The most evident one is injustice and crime. An understanding of this entails seeking an understanding of every colonial mentality. Everything is simply for business. Lands and people are traded, legally or illegally, for the promotion of the interests of the colonizing powers. Human lives and what they stand for really do not matter to them. All forms of colonialism are ticking bombs, explosive and manipulative attitudes that gratify themselves by their division of the people to grab their lands and exploit their resources. This is a crime against humanity no matter how legal it has been made to look. Human beings are not properties to be acquired and discarded at will.

Forests offer great refuge for the indigenous peoples. They serve as their natural habitats. The people are one with nature in the most remote sense of the word. What a beauty that is. With desertification and the acute desire to build cities and the so-called human civilized world, these natural habitats are intentionally being destroyed. This can only happen when such forests are traded and the intense poverty of the people harnessed for the grave interest of the great moguls. Acts like this drive the people further away from their homelands to the outskirts of the supposed new cities. If only that would end, but the quest for wealth and riches never end. So it is continuous exploitation and devastation of the region.

When people are forced to change their environments, they lose something of their identity. This is because there is a link between culture and one's place. To speak of cultural identity is to speak of the life of a people in a particular place. Driving them from their homelands means constantly losing a great chunk of their ancestry to take on new lifestyles determined by the colonial lords. It means changing their lifestyle and identity for newer ones. This is sheer robbery of their culture with all its rich positive inputs. It is an attack on the family, whose children now grow without an essential link to their ancestry. Situations like this only force people to deny what is theirs for what is planned for them at a very high cost. This is a modern form of slavery and has never being a relationship of equals.

Much of the life of the Amazon is built along the rivers and streams. Water gives meaning and form to the region. It enlivens and models all that the people do for their sustenance. In this view, not only human lives are under threats of extinction by the pollution of their means of livelihood and meaning. Other creatures suffer from this ravaging evil befalling the region. Bearing in mind that every living

organism has a role to play in a stable ecosystem, their destruction cum extinction only worsens the dangers these hold for the environment. This should be a common course if it must be averted.

Worst of all crimes in the region is the teeming silence of the various structures that have all it takes to seek justice for the people. Silence could be a veritable tool for greater growth but not in the face of injustice. In such a situation, it is complacent and tolerant of evil. Only an accomplice can be that silent, especially when thoughts, voices and actions are needed to save an urgent destructive event as this. Unfortunately, this has become the order of the day all over the world.

Africa in view

Amazon gives the resonance of Africa. It echoes the cries of a people dejected and worst plagued by the colonial lords. Nothing of the Amazon seems new to Africa. A continent rich in both human and natural resources is a place of interest to all. It arouses in business tycoons the insatiable surge for all that is available. These drastic acts only reawaken the voice of John Paul II: “those whose vocation it is to give cultural expression to their thinking no longer look to the truth, preferring quick success to the toil of the patient enquiry into what makes life worth living.”⁶² Greed and excess acquisition become the mark of the successful. Capitalistic tendencies all swell by the day and the natural communal goals of the people are lost to these unfortunate tendencies. Though they continue to undergo rebranding of names and approaches, colonial goals are the same: the subjugation of a people and the grabbing of their resources. These are done for an excessive individualistic few.

No country in Africa is without external influence. None of such governments is truly independent. They have been modelled to play the stooge to the colonial masters who constantly meddle in her affairs. Those, decide who comes to be and who goes off, all in a single interest of enriching the powerful countries of the world. How can there be a political will? Whatever is African is branded with derogatory names to enhance the quality of the same things in other richer countries of the world. This has only created some sense of eternal inferiority complex that eats daily into the fabric of the continent. With much neglect, we forget that each has something to offer as Makumba observes. “There is that which every culture brings from its house and bequeaths to the universal spirit to keep it

⁶² JOHN PAUL II, *Fides et Ratio*, Vatican, Vatican Press, 1998, 6.

relevant to the reality of life.”⁶³ Best brains with great potentials are quickly taken off the continent with mouth watery scholarships for studies abroad so that their ideas only serve for the good of their masked lords. Everything black is made to look second class and not worth desiring. This is the plight of the second largest continent in the world.

Under the guise of civilization, the rich African cultural heritage is geometrically going into extinction. Mbiti’s beautiful lines for *Ubuntu* philosophy of “I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am”⁶⁴; depicting our sense of individual and collective responsibility seems no longer envisioned. The communal life the people are known for is lost to the individualistic egomaniac of the powers that be. Everything is reduced to what money can buy. This is because the more divided a people are, the easier it is to plunder their resources by taking advantage of the so created discord. Africa has been under a divide and rule system where the will of the people is simply sold to the highest bidder. Political leaders simply service the interest of those who bring them to power. This is what has been branded as godfatherism in local perceptible terms. The godfather decides who ascends and descends the throne of political leadership. Only those who promise to be completely loyal get the slots, be they experienced and expertise or not. Loyalty to the treasury of the lord is the yardstick for qualification.

The African continent for ages has been the hob of serious crimes against humanity. Of it are said the most ravenous things heard of in the history of humanity. It is like the game of chase for the first world countries. Human trafficking never takes a break. It is now the norm. People are priced and bought as of goods and commodities. In the face of all, the modern-day fraternal slavery in the form of loans from China climaxes the issues at stake. To the extent all these favours the east and the west, no one speaks. First world countries intervene only when it serves their interests. So it is not out of place to say that *Querida Amazonia* echoes the long-lasting cry of Africa. In the long run, we, basically face the same problems in different ways. The same deadly silence in the face of injustice engulfs us all.

⁶³ M. M. MAKUMBA, *Introduction to African Philosophy*, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi, 2007, 30.

⁶⁴ J. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, East African Educational, Nairobi, 1970, 108.

Converging points

From the discourse so far, it is obvious that the key issues of the Amazon resonate in Africa. Crimes against humanity in their diverse forms are common to both regions. This connects with the injustice constantly meted on people who have been turned to be indebted to their foreign lords. Forceful grabbing of ancestry lands by either legal or illegal means has always been the highly played script. How can the law which is meant to protect the poor be used against them? This can only happen if they were not part of the deliberations on the prescriptions of the law in the first place. The law serves the interest of the rich and powerful. Bureaucracy only creates a world of unequal humans. It makes the poor merely vulnerable and in constant search of its mercy. Sequel to this, no justice can come their way unless what they seek does not interest the money magnates. That is how the world has been humanly structured and classified.

Ecological abuses are rampant in both regions. Places where mining activities are rampant, for example, suffer a great deal of neglect. While their natural resources are gobbled for the supposed national goal, they are made to live in penury. This is not far from the reality of the South-South region of Nigeria for a precise example. Aquatic lives have endangered species in those areas because of the constant oil spillages. This too, we have seen in the Amazon region. The great Amazon River which colours and gives deeper meaning to the region is abused. Its deeper mystery for the people is caricatured as it is the case with most African countries where industries wreak havoc on the rivers that serve as means of livelihood for a teeming many; whose sole means of survival depends so much on them. While quoting the poem by Juan Carlos Galeano, Pope Francis beautiful lays this to unveil the significance of river:

Those who thought that the river was only a piece of rope,
a plaything, were mistaken.

The river is a thin vein on the face of the earth...

The river is a cord enclosing animals and trees.

If pulled too tight, the river could burst.

It could burst and spatter our faces with water and blood.⁶⁵

One who is without basic needs can only learn to submit. The method seems the same all over: impoverish them and they will run to you as their saviour. There is a deceptive sense of liberation that is sold to the most vulnerable of the people. It consists of creating a tensed situation to make them seek the same oppressor as a liberator. This has continuously worked for the imperialists. It better flourishes in a poverty-stricken environment loaded with lots of insecurity. In both cases, the same situation can be inferred. One who without a place to lay his head would do anything proposed as a solution even when it could lead to taking the lives of others. The same goes for one robbed of his ancestral home and landed property. For such a person, nothing is lost in forcefully taking what belongs to others. It would have been a case of robbing from Peter to meet Paul's needs: survival of the fittest...

Basic social amenities are either not there or not made affordable to the poor. This is a lot of the defenceless of society. Even where these are available, the prices are beyond the reach of the struggling. It becomes a condition of two worlds where the rich pay without knowing they do and the poor giving off all to bills. Abanuka sees these divides as the greatest evil of European colonialism. He writes that "One of the major negative effects of European colonialism is the introduction of a division in the African consciousness."⁶⁶ This we can truly say of all colonial systems irrespective of regions. We cannot set such divides and not expect an imbalance cum inequality in human affairs. Above all, the silence of the structures responsible for ensuring equilibrium deepens. It is more killing than the evil acts of the imperial lords. This is because the poor run to them expecting succour but finding a complete betrayal of confidence in what they had thought to be all that remains of the rotten system. What lost of hope that is!

⁶⁵ QA 47.

⁶⁶ B. ABANUKA, *A History of African Philosophy*, Snaap Press, Enugu, 2013, 139.

Possible differences

From the foregone, we have seen that the Amazon region shares many common features with Africa. Dehumanizing treatments that promote inequality and felony are rampant and the same in both cases. This underscores our rich human heritage as something essentially the same notwithstanding the accidents of place or region, bureaucratic classifications and the likes. Ecclesial structures also had roles to play in both the good and the on-going bad situations of the regions. Though they have divine attributes, they are interpreted by humans after all. By this, it is understandable that the human short-sightedness for the immediate here and now could give way to ravenousness.

The differences we might find are not substantial ones, but accidental. This is because there is more to what unites us than to what divides us. The Amazon region is made up of nine countries as we had so noted earlier. All these united by a common bio-network. While these nationalities are different and strive to maintain their uniqueness, the substantial human conditions are the same. This too we can say of Africa, though a continent and so larger with a number of the Amazonia immersed in it. From the arrival of the different 'conquering' and 'land grabbing' masters from different countries, it seemed to have been bought. A whole continent divided among a few greedy countries who intrude in all her affairs while respecting their boundaries and frontiers therein. This suggests an even graver condition to which the world remains silent on, properly because virtually every country directly or indirectly benefits from the injustice openly celebrated there.

Nature for both regions is grandeur to behold. It is a mystery and reveals a lot about the divine, who works in diverse ways. Missionaries, with their stereotypes, never understood this stupendous richness. Even when we do acknowledge some of it today, we do so with myopic tendencies and sense of superiority. The document seems to recount the lack of vocations in the Amazon region. It calls for the encouragement of wilful workers and collaborators in the region. This we can hardly compare with Africa, which has become a centre for vocations, and now sends many all over the world. We must promote this too, since missionaries, despite their misconstrued notion in the past, now have a clearer vision of what is at stake. Ecclesiastical structures better get to people at the grassroots. So missionaries from the Amazon region in Europe and America can make a great difference if they truly desire the good of their people. This too we can say for Africa. Charity indeed must begin at home.

Our unity as a people

Our humanity is our major point of union. In it, we find our place in nature as co-creatures with other creatures. We share the same life, breath the same air, journey (together) in hope; suffer the same predicaments, etc. The substantial gifts of life beyond any price are at our disposal equally. Only the accidentals that come from our insatiable desires and rapacious tendencies divide us. "Nature," Nkemnkia argues, "is one of the first manifestations of life. Every day we are aware that nature presents itself as a vital force continuously renewed and whose meaning cannot be completely explained by human beings."⁶⁷ It has favoured us all with the gift of adaptation. Every harsh condition is surmountable it seems to tell us. We run through the different seasons of the year in pairs of hopes and fears, joys and sorrows. All mixed feelings come and go while we gain what remains as our experiences.

From the root of our humanity rises the splendour of our diversity. It is sort of unity in diversity. This should serve as strength and not a weakness. The diversity of race, language, gender, religious affiliations, ethnicity, age, colour and the likes; are accidentals that should serve for a greater appreciation of our common humanity. They should be at the service of our common good. Those are nature's gifts in varying degrees that need each other to maintain equilibrium. The beauty of life hinges on our appreciating all these and living them in their fullness. No genuine unity fosters division. The contrary is also true: no division allows for unity. Achebe had a wider understanding of this within the African spectrum:

A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their own homes. When we gather together in the moonlight at the village ground, it is not because of the moon. Every man can see it in his compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so. Therefore, let us continue with the team spirit and enjoy the power of togetherness. Let's smile not because we don't have problems but because we are stronger than the problems.⁶⁸

The beauty of this thought lies in the end. It opens our eyes to our common problems. We are vulnerable to the same natural disasters, plagues, pandemics, etc. The on-going COVID-19 saga still lingers on. It exposes the fact that at the fundamental level, we are all the same. This is at the essential existential level and

⁶⁷ M. N. NKEMNKIA, *African Vitalogy: A Step Forward in African Thinking*, Paulines Pub Africa, Nairobi, 1999, 187.

⁶⁸ C. ACHEBE, *Things fall Apart*, Heinemann, Britain, 1949, 155.

we must return to it if we must understand the status quo. Our excessive exploitations of nature's gifts everywhere come with divergent consequences. We suffer them as a people. They do not respect personage nor affect us exclusively; they do inclusively. All account to our unity as a people. In the face of all these, we are but one.

What affects one affects all

There is no gainsaying that nature links us all. It is no doubt that we share the same humanity. We becloud ourselves when we think exclusively of others in every situation. This mostly comes because we get ideological without paying attention to the concretely existential realities around us. We think of the world as we do in games where the winner takes all. The game of life does not so work. It is a living experience and not some inanimate stuff. Our thoughts must be inclusive at all times. Every animate phenomenon changes and grows with time. It changes as its environment changes; it adjusts to survive harsher conditions. All these play a part in its passage through life. This is not also far from our human nature. It strives through the thick and thin to survive, and then live above its threats.

The truth that eludes us most of the time is this same nature of ours. Classifications of race, gender, ethnicity, locations, social status, etc; only make this more complex for us to pin. They give us a pseudo view of who we are. These are the things we must rise above if we must see ourselves for what we truly are. They are problems and must be so identified if we must rise above them. This should be the starting point for an authentic change. Over-emphasis on a material perception of whom we are further keeping us apart. It tears our humanity apart and opens us to the scavenging prowess of our greed and avarice. We become prey to ourselves in our world. What a tragedy that is.

All these go to show that we are more united than we think. In this form of unity, whatever affects one affects all. If one suffers, all suffer; whether we have that realization immediately or later. If what affects one affects all, then we have no reasons to stand aloof, doing nothing. Kanu highlights this in the context of his discourse on kinship in African societies. The sin of one affects all in one way or the other. He opines:

With regard to morality, there is a strong connection between moral rules and the type of communal kinship relationships that exist among African societies. A crime

committed by a person, say stealing, has implications not only for the thief but also for the kinship relationship; for what is stolen is first of all considered to be a thing of the member of the kinship, perhaps of one related to the thief in one way or the other.⁶⁹

This clearly shows that indifference only makes us victims. We have no reasons to be silent in the face of suffering, injustice, crime, destruction of the ecosystem and the likes. All these would find their ways back to us. Time is what makes the difference in all these. One, who suffers now, does so because of the same time. The same goes for those who will later; the common denominator is the same: time.

This is why an anthropological discourse is interesting any day and time. We are responsible for the universe. The knowledge of it is ours. Its strength, ours! The more we get to know ourselves, the deeper we get in our knowledge of what nature holds. It is such a mystery to behold, respect and learn. The more united we are with it, the more we transcend its palpable treasures to its unseen richness. There is more to nature than meets the eye. Good enough, we are but part of it. No form of dissociation from it as some lords and manipulators of its wealth would benefit us in the long run. All we might get are simply short-term selfish gains.

The way forward

Querida Amazonia is an eye-opener to us all. It places before us a lot of challenges and advances a position that goes contrary to the initial media expectations. The hype was so high that we did not pay attention to the voices of those who live in the region. They wailed and cried at the synod, but we were caught up in doctrinal arguments to listen to them. We forgot that doctrines are meant to be lived and not simply held. The quest to maintain them blinded us to the call for justice, a real existential call that requires a proactive response. We must learn for this synod to get to know the situation of people before making judgments about their cries. Their cry was not in vain; for nothing. There is a reason. The African proverb captures it aptly: “a toad does not run in vain in the daytime; it’s either something is after it or it is after something.” It is good we learn to listen more; there is always something new to learn from every situation.

⁶⁹ I. A. KANU, *Kinship in African Philosophy and the Issue of Development*, In *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education* 1 (2014) 9, 3, <https://www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijhsse/v1-i9/1.pdf>.

There was no need whatsoever for mixing up so many things. The agitations were utterly unnecessary. All we needed to do was to treat the case based on its merits. Nothing is as noble as this. This paves the way for the kind respect demanded for a just society. In his greeting at the beginning of the Synod, Pope Francis noted this as something that arises out our premeditated ideas and fixated mindsets. It makes us to simply reduce every circumstance to our immediate experience. This is probably the reason for the unnecessary tensions created. He writes:

Ideological colonization is very widespread. And without any entrepreneurial apprehension, we consider offering them packaged programs in order to “discipline” the Amazonian peoples, to discipline their history, their culture; or this concern to “domesticate” the indigenous peoples.⁷⁰

This challenges us to avoid all forms of colonial discriminations that becloud the vision of things as they are. It is manipulative of the human person. We must refrain from seeing others as instruments to be used to advance our selfish goals. The desire for power has always been our greatest weakness right from creation. It accounts for the many divisions we have had and sustained through the ages. As a result, we simply exert our wills over those of others. We must do away with the long-existing human classifications. Those have done us no good whatsoever. They have merely kept us apart and short-sighted. We must rise above them.

To do so, we must constantly promote sincere dialogue. While it is obvious that many dialogues have taken place, much sincerity is demanded justice to take its course. The poorest of the poor are the most disadvantaged in this discourse table as we had earlier noted. They must be given their proper place. Pope Francis continues in his greetings on how we ought to comport ourselves if we must make any headway. “Reflect, dialogue, listen with humility,” he insists, “knowing that I do not know everything... It is important to foster the attitude of respect, the fraternal atmosphere, the air of intimacy. It does not mean referring everything, as it comes.”⁷¹ This requires a wholesome approach that would take a long time. It requires proper education and reorientation. Provided it gets the best results, it is worth thriving. That should be our goal for more inclusive and transcending humanity that goes beyond itself.

⁷⁰ POPE FRANCIS, *Greetings of His Holiness Pope Francis*, Vatican Basilica, 7 October 2019.

⁷¹ POPE FRANCIS, *Greetings of His Holiness Pope Francis*, Vatican Basilica, 7 October 2019.

Conclusion

Thus far, we have seen the urgency that *Querida Amazonia* leaves us with. The issues raised therein are not strange to the African continent. Little wonder it echoes the long lasting cry of Africa. More importantly, it echoes the cry of humanity. It is our call. We must make a change. There has to be a way out of this quagmire. No one else caused it, we did. No one will stop it, that's our responsibility too. To be up to it is to desire the good of our world. We are all united after all. What affects one, affects all. This is the form of education we need to promote. No one is more human than others. The same goes for the contrary: no one is less human than another. To know this is to be on the mark before the whistle goes.