Opinion
Vatican



by NCR Staff

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In case you missed it, Pope Francis on Feb. 12 released an apostolic exhortation titled *Querida Amazonia* ("Beloved Amazon") responding to last October's Synod of Bishops on the Amazon. In the highly anticipated document, the pope did not grant a request to allow for the priestly ordination of married men or mention the conversations around women deacons. NCR's editorial praised the document's embrace of an endangered segment of the globe and of its indigenous cultures. For more, visit the feature series. Letters to the editor have been edited for length and

clarity. To join the conversation, follow the steps listed below.

It seems that the Eucharist matters only when it does not. How can you have a church centered on the Eucharist but deny the same to persons desiring it? By failing to act on married priests in the Amazon, and perhaps elsewhere, Pope Francis has put clericalism ahead of his flock and has downgraded what should be the preeminent doctrine — the receiving of the Holy Eucharist.



If priests get a calling from God, and there are few priests, perhaps the Holy Spirit is telling the church to be more inclusive and that the calling should not be reserved for single men. The core mission of the church to spread the good news of the Lord is clearly secondary to concerns over the self-created cultural construct, and self-promoted doctrine, of a single male clergy.

In the end, it is a failure of mercy to respond to the spiritual needs of those that are now further marginalized by the church. Without true reform to respond to those spiritual needs, this apostolic exhortation is an anthropological treatise that could mostly have been written by an NGO. The barque of Peter is taking on yet more water and the opportunity for a bilge pump was thrown overboard by one who should most care.

But, hey what does a layperson know.

THOMAS HOVEL

McFarland, Wisconsin

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The announcement that Pope Francis has declined to act on the Amazon synod's request for married priests and women ministers should come as no surprise. It seems to me that Francis was aware the wrath of the right would rapidly descend upon him if he agreed to the Amazon bishops' request and Francis has no desire for a protracted battle or possible schism over this issue.

Let's be honest here. Whether in politics or sports or religion, the money and power reside mostly with those on the right. They are often not at all reluctant to use them to get what they want and will use whatever tactics are necessary, even against the pope. I believe Francis does not want to open Pandora's box so that he can salvage some semblance of unity in the church.

The old saying is so true: "Liberals give advice. Conservatives give money." Chalk up another one to the power and money crowd.

BILL KRISTOFCO

Parkville, Maryland

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I was deeply disappointed to learn that Pope Francis won't allow married priests in the Amazon and other priest deserts. His decision abandons thousands of the faithful. How different is this from the legend of Nero fiddling while Rome burned? With this decision, Francis truly is fiddling with the future viability of the Catholic Church.

JOAN ANDERSON

Nashville, Tennessee

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I share my frustration with Pope Francis' decisions to continue to forbid the ordaining of married, men in an area so desperately in need of them and his continued repetition that I and all other women are on this earth are to simply be complementary to men. Women are so much more than that and have so much more to offer this hurting church.

My first and continued reaction is to finally leave this church. I have no hope that it can respond to my needs and those of so many others. I pray that someday the church will recognize and use our God-given gifts instead of denigrating and being afraid of them. I won't live to see that day but I hope that others will.

KATE BARRY

Middlebury, Vermont

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Querida Amazonia is both a lyrical call to action and a pastoral missed opportunity. I am glad to see that Pope Francis writes eloquently on the threats to life in the Amazon region and the heroic witness of so many there. The prophets of our time need such support from the top. At the same time, the pope doesn't need to write lengthy dissertations about the crisis. Others in the field have done this very well.

What we Catholics at least expect of our pope is to act warmly and decisively in his role as encourager-in-chief in the church. The synod last October brought together the Amazon residents themselves as they sought to enhance their sacramental lives as church in a vast territory.

On sacraments, Francis has little to say beyond repeating the standard one-size-fits-all approach to pastoral life. From paragraph 86 on, his letter switches from urgent appeals for the people and resources under threat, to hard and fast juridical norms and priestly cult language.

The church in Amazonia, in all its manifestations, will need high officials on its side, and the pope has made it difficult to know whether the women and men in that region can count on him for unconditional support.

PAUL SCHLACHTER

Miami, Florida

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When I heard the news that Pope Francis chose not to grant the Amazon synod's request for married priests, I was disappointed and still am upset. His words: "This urgent need (people go long periods of time without the Eucharist) leads me to urge all bishops, especially those in Latin America, not only to promote prayer for priestly vocations bit also to be more generous in encouraging those who display a missionary vocation to opt for the Amazon region."

Being of an age that remembers *Humanae Vitae*, I feel the same thing happening all over again. The lay committee that advised Pope Paul VI decided in favor of changing the church's stance toward artificial birth control and Paul decided against changing the church's stance. In this situation, Francis has talked about the importance of synods and when the synod voted to ordain married men, I felt this would happen. Then Francis decided not.

How can the church continue to say that the Eucharist is at the center of the life of Catholics and then not provide that experience for people in the Amazon?

It appears Francis backed off from making this change, bowing to the threats and wishes of more conservative colleagues. As I said, I am profoundly disappointed and upset at his decision.

MARK SCANNELL

Minneapolis, Minnesota

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NCR's editorial is a flawlessly fair assessment of a much anticipated document which, in the end, failed to express the Pentecostal Spirit our times sorely need.

Fresh hope and courage can re-invigorate the archaic institutionalism that impedes the prophetic tradition of Christianity.

LARRY AND CATHERINE HALVEY GOODWIN

Shepherdstown, West Virginia

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Reading the article "Pope shares with U.S. bishops his frustration with reaction to Amazon text" saddens me. Did the pope just come into the 20th century?

From what I read in that article, it appears the Eucharist is no longer the" source and summit" of Catholic life. The sacraments are no longer a vital concern. And it appears the pope believes the Holy Spirit only visits synods, bishops and hierarchy.

The media's focus on celibacy was on providing the "body and blood of Christ" to those people without priests and regular Mass. Was that a footnote of the Amazon synod? Is it not a clear concern of the Holy Spirit? We can't do more for the earth if we are not fed with the food that incarnates our faith. When do we feed hungry people? Later?

The question of married priests is not new, not even of this century. The Amazon synod didn't just raise this. Francis' fear of "clericalizing" women seems almost reasonable considering its devastation and erosion on the all-male clergy. Of course, the flip side may be women would end it.

"How can we deny that things are changing? How can we deny that we're hurting our future?" Things have already changed. Today is the future we talked about last century.

Wait until a more "opportune moment." If the church is declining now, if the shortage of priests is acute now, if the environment is eroding now, when is the opportune moment? When there is no church?

DAVE MURRAY

Cedarville, Michigan

Advertisement

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Jamie Manson's engaging column, "In 'Querida Amazonia,' Francis' sacramental imagination stops short of women" ends with the intriguing question: "Why does Pope Francis' sacramental imagination stop short of women"?

What the Holy Spirit is doing with Francis' sacramental imagination is not for us to know any more than one can assume what the Spirit is doing in the minds of the rest of the world's bishops regarding the cause for women deacons; but there are clues that Spirit is actively at work on this matter in ways that defy imagination. As for Francis, me thinks he smartly plays a waiting game surrendering meekly, as we all must, to a much higher power.

As Manson stated in her article, at the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon, the vote to reopen the discussion for women deacons was 137 yes to 30 no. Would a secret ballot on this issue at the next U.S. Conference of Bishops yield the same results? I'm beginning to think so. Why secret? Because, sad to say, most bishops do not want to imperil their episcopal status by speaking boldly about these matters and, due to their lack of courage and silence, enable the oppression of women in the church to continue; a type of silence, I might add, that also enabled the sexual abuse of children in times past.

Over in Frankfurt, Germany, such is not the case. German bishops and Catholic leaders from both conservative and progressive persuasions gathered and prompted the start of a two-year synod to discuss openly all the hot button issues that plague Catholics worldwide, including the subject of women deacons. We are told, "Conservative clerics were repeatedly outvoted 80 to 90 percent when they tried to change the rules governing the talks."

Wake up U.S. bishops! Could the Spirit winds of change be any clearer?

NANCY MCGUNAGLE

Kalispell, Montana

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It seems to be that Pope Francis' reluctance to ordain women deacons has to do with the fear that it would cause a schism in the church.

In reading comments on other articles, I see a real anger when it comes to this subject. Perhaps Francis fears this reactive anger and that in making such a decision he would place the church in danger.

LYNNE MILLER

Oakland, California

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