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Brazilian Cardinal Leonardo Ulrich Steiner of Manaus poses for a photo outside St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Oct. 23. (CNS/Justin McLellan)



Justin McLellan

Vatican Correspondent

View Author Profile

jmclellan@ncronline.org
Follow on Twitter at @m/McLellan_Js



Catholic News Service

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People coming from cultures that promote consumerism over caring for the planet should look to Indigenous communities as models for developing an ecologically conscious mentality, the first cardinal from the Amazon region said.

"To save the Amazon is to save the whole planet," Cardinal Leonardo Ulrich Steiner of Manaus, Brazil, told Catholic News Service Oct. 23. "The Amazon really is a symbol, a symbol of the need to change our mentality, to be less consumeristic, to chase after money less."

Steiner, who was in Rome for the assembly of the Synod of Bishops, highlighted the severe drought currently impacting Indigenous communities in his diocese, which scientists say has been provoked by massive deforestation. He said that Indigenous communities have been cut off from essential supplies such as fuel since the large rivers that connect them have shrunk to trickling streams due to the drought.

"Why is the forest cut down? Because of money," he said. "This consumerist, mercantilist way of thinking has to change."

> 'To save the Amazon is to save the whole planet.'
> —Cardinal Leonardo Ulrich Steiner
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Unlike in other areas threatened by the effects of climate change, Steiner said, the Amazon retains the positive presence of Indigenous peoples, who care for the rainforest they live in.

For Indigenous populations, "home is not the place they sleep, it is the world they live in," Steiner said. "But the world needs to wake up to this, and I don't know if there is much time to wake up."

The cardinal praised Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation *Laudate Deum,* published Oct. 4, for challenging the consumer mentality and culture that perpetuates the effects of climate change.

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In the document, the pope directly calls out the United States for its disproportionately high level of emissions per individual, but "almost all of us are involved" in advancing a culture focused on consumption, Steiner told CNS.

"We are almost incapable of living without a certain standard of life," he said, whereas the Amazon's Indigenous populations "don't consume extraordinarily, they consume what they need to live and to live together."

On a societal scale, the cardinal said people are "losing the pleasure of living together."

"We're consuming everything today, we're consuming news, we're consuming food and drink, but we're even consuming relationships, in my opinion," he said.

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While Steiner said he spoke about the drought affecting the Amazon at the synod on synodality, he noted that many other delegates have raised issues about how environmental changes are affecting their communities, especially as related to migration or conflicts.

Speaking about the impact of the 2019 Synod of Bishops on the Amazon, the cardinal said that the pope's post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Querida Amazonia*

helped people understand that the "social, environmental, cultural and ecclesial realities" of the church need to all be considered in conjunction and not individually, whether in the Amazon or elsewhere.

The pope's letter showed that those elements of the church "need to walk together," the cardinal said. "In that sense, synodality was already happening even in the preparations for that synod, just as it is happening now."

This story appears in the **Synod on Synodality** feature series. View the full series.