The opening press conference for the Pan-Amazon Synod, which officially begins on Sunday, took place today in Rome. Dr. Matteo Bruni, the relatively new director of the Holy See Press Office (appointed by Pope Francis in mid-July), was joined by Cardinals Lorenzo Baldisseri and Cláudio Hummes, O.F.M. as well as Bishop Fabio Fabene to introduce the general themes of the upcoming synod and field preliminary questions from journalists. Each prelate delivered some prepared remarks, all of which have since been published by the Holy See Press Office.

## Opening Remarks

Cardinal Baldiserri, general secretary of the Synod of Bishop, alluded back to the release of the synod's controversial *Instrumentum Laboris* on June 17 and described the working document as "the collation and organization by subject of the material produced during the Consultation Phase, in listening to all the members of the People of God interested in the theme. It is offered to the Synod Fathers as a point of reference for discussion during the work of the Synod Assembly."

Regarding the purpose of the Pan-Amazon Synod, Baldiserri referred back to the explanation given by Pope Francis when the latter first announced the event:

> "Its purpose is to 'identify new paths for the evangelization of this segment of the People of God, especially the indigenous peoples, often forgotten and without the prospect of a peaceful future, also due to the crisis of the Amazon rainforest, the lungs of paramount importance for our planet' (Francis, *Angelus*, 15 October 2017)."

Considering it necessary to explain why a meeting to discuss the Pan-Amazon region is being held in Rome (as opposed to the Amazon), Cardinal Baldiserri asserted that "each Synod always and in any case relates to the universal Church," further stressing, "All the prelates of the [Amazon] Region are convened [in Rome for the synod], thus highlighting collegiality, a peculiar characteristic of the synodal institution" – collegiality, of course, being a hotly debated issue since the Second Vatican Council.

The cardinal went on to summarize various membership stats for the forthcoming assembly, which is comprised of 184 Synod Fathers (voting participants) including "28 cardinals, 29 archbishops, 62 residential bishops, 7 auxiliaries, 27 vicars apostolic, 10 prelate bishops, and 21 non-bishop members, diocesan and religious." Other non-voting attendees include "6 fraternal delegates, representing other Churches and ecclesial communities present in the

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Amazon territory," "25 experts, appointed for their specific skills in various fields," and "55 auditors, including specialists and pastoral workers, the majority of whom come from the Pan-Amazon region, even from the remotest places." (See here for a report on the full list of participants.)

Baldiserri concluded his prepared remarks by highlighting "a number of initiatives" taken by "the General Secretariat" (his office) "with the aim of limiting pollution and promoting environmental sustainability, so as to contribute, as far as possible, to safeguarding the common home," including "limiting the use of plastic as much as possible" and utilizing electronic registration for participants to minimize paper consumption.

Sadly, throughout his nearly 1,500-word text, Cardinal Baldiserri mentioned Our Lord a grand total of three times.

## Earth-Bound Focus

Cardinal Cláudio Hummes, O.F.M., archbishop emeritus of São Paulo and president of the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM), did not fare much better in this regard. Granted, his intervention was much shorter (under 600 words), but he still only uttered the Holy Name of Jesus twice, both instances being found in the following paragraph:

> "It [the Pan-Amazon Synod] deals with the mission of the Church in Amazonia: to evangelize, that is, to proclaim Jesus Christ and His Kingdom and consequently to care for the 'common home'. Basically, it is a matter of caring for and defending life, both for all human beings, especially the indigenous people who live there, and for biodiversity. Jesus said: 'I came that they may have life and have it abundantly' (Jn 10:10)."

Our Lord certainly did come "that they may have life", but the life He died and rose again to give us is first and foremost the *supernatural* life of grace, a word (*supernatural*) not found even once throughout the synod's tediously long working document.

Based on his remarks, Cardinal Hummes' understanding of the synod is likewise very earth-bound:

> "The broad context of the Synod is the serious and urgent socio-environmental crisis to which *Laudato si'* [Francis' 2015 eco-encyclical] refers: a) the climate crisis, that is, global warming due to the greenhouse effect [another rigorously

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> debated issue]; b) the ecological crisis as a consequence of the degradation, contamination, depredation and devastation of the planet, especially in Amazonia; c) and the growing social crisis of blatant poverty and misery that affects most human beings and, in Amazonia, especially the indigenous, the riverine, small farmers and those who live on the outskirts of Amazonian cities and others."

Bishop Fabio Fabene, Cardinal Baldiserri's subordinate, spent his allotted time explaining the various phases of "the synodal journey," basing his remarks on *Episcopalis Communio*, the apostolic constitution "On the Synod of Bishops" issued by Pope Francis last September, roughly three weeks prior to the opening of the Youth Synod.

Bishop Fabene referred to "the preparatory phase", which culminated in the release of the working document and was "followed by a period of in-depth study of the *Instrumentum laboris* through a series of activities carried out in various places, including through the competent episcopal bodies." Such activities and events included "the Pre-Synodal Assemblies on the *Instrumentum laboris* in the various Episcopal Conferences, the REPAM Theological Symposium, held in Rome at the end of June [see here for a report], the meeting of the itinerant teams in Manaus, Brazil, and numerous virtual seminars and local meetings."

Now, says Fabene, we are about to begin "the celebratory phase, which is the true and proper Synod." With all due respect, Your Excellency, based on the *Instrumentum Laboris* and the opening press conference, there is nothing to celebrate.

## Questions of Consequence

Arguably the most significant portion of today's press conference came in the form of two questions posed by Diane Montagna of *LifeSiteNews* to Cardinals Baldiserri and Hummes.

> At Presser for Amazon Synod #SinodoAmazonico, @dianemontagna asks about the criticism of the Instrumentum Laboris, specifically Cardinal Brandmüller who said it contained "heresy and close to apostasy"; and the exceptions to celibacy and the German Bishops [Thread] pic.twitter.com/LAzeEGvhL1
>
> — Catholic Sat (@CatholicSat) October 3, 2019

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First, Montagna asked the two cardinals for a response to the assessment of Cardinal Walter Brandmüller and others that the synod's working document "contains heresy" and is "close to apostasy". Secondly, she broached the subject of priestly celibacy, the possibility of a change in discipline per the synod's working document (cf. IL 129a2), and what the Vatican's response will be if the German bishops decide to drop mandatory celibacy in their region as a result of this synod – a real possibility, according to certain statutes recently adopted by the German Bishops' Conference following their own "Synodal Assembly" (Sept. 23-26).

In response to the first question, Cardinal Baldiserri gave a profoundly convoluted (non)answer, avoiding the accusation of heresy altogether while emphasizing that the *Instrumentum Laboris* "is not a pontifical document," as if that somehow justifies its objectively heretical contents.

> Cardinal Baldisseri begins his response to question on the criticism of the Instrumentum Laboris of the Amazon Synod "I have read the criticism, I hope it is not fake news. If there is a puddle of water in Rome, and two cars stop the whole of Rome is stopped" #SinodoAmazonico pic.twitter.com/DPQNQJWvLL
>
> — Catholic Sat (@CatholicSat) October 3, 2019

Beyond side-stepping the real issue, Cardinal Baldiserri said he thinks that the preparatory phase of this synod constitutes "the first time that, truly, the bishops … they listen to people." Although he acknowledged the right of individuals to critique the working document by exercising "freedom of expression" – even stating that "criticism is good," as Pope Francis recently affirmed – Baldiserri ultimately asserted that "the final document" is the one that will matter.

Cardinal Hummes, for his part, concurred with Baldiserri, stating that the *Instrumentum Laboris* "is not *by* the synod, it is *for* the synod", characterizing the document as "the voice of the local Church" and "the voice of people's land". "The Church has decided to listen," he said.

> Cardinal Hummes comments on criticism of the Instrumentum Laboris of the Amazon Synod "The Instrumentum Laboris is not by the Synod, it is for the Synod. It is really the voice of the local church of Amazonia" #SinodoAmazonico

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> pic.twitter.com/eXahvKsLYe
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> — Catholic Sat (@CatholicSat) October 3, 2019

In reference to those who have "expressed criticism" about the working document, Cardinal Hummes implied that "at the end of the day" they will have to submit to whatever Pope Francis decides to approve – "cum Petro et sub Petro," he said – and hopes that "we're all going to be together" after the synod is over.

> Cardinal Hummes continues on the criticism of Instrumentum Laboris of the Amazon Synod "Pope Francis has always highlighted that we should truly listen. Those who are expressing criticism now, eventually after the Synod, everything will be cum Petro et sub Petro" #SinodoAmazonico pic.twitter.com/BtSRnXFZib
>
> — Catholic Sat (@CatholicSat) October 3, 2019

Regarding the second question about priestly celibacy and a potential change in discipline, Cardinal Baldiserri essentially said that just as individuals are free to discuss and express their opinions, so also are the German bishops free to do so.

## A Beacon of Hope in the Eternal City

For Catholics who understand and love the Faith of their fathers, the Pan-Amazon Synod represents an existential threat and must be vigorously opposed. Thankfully, just such a collection of faithful Catholics is currently in Rome to prayerfully, respectfully, yet firmly resist the heresy and outright apostasy being pushed by this synod.

On September 28, they manifested themselves at a major intersection in Rome near the historic Castel Sant'Angelo and facing St. Peter's Basilica.

Tomorrow, they will gather for a roundtable discussion – a strategic planning session of sorts – in hopes of "uniting the clans" of Catholic Tradition for the spiritual battle that lies ahead (free live-stream access is available).

Whether we are in Rome for the synod or following it from afar, may all faithful Catholics stand together, with prayer and fasting, and "fight the good fight of faith" (1 Tim. 6:12).

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