



A Moment of 'Sheer Joy'

The Synod on the Amazon region expressed the hopes and difficulties of the Church in the modern world. Jesuit **Gerry O'Hanlon**, theologian and author, revisits the synod a few months later.

'A moment of sheer joy' was how one writer described the Synod on the Amazon of last October. These were the words of Fr Brendan Hoban, an Irish priest and writer who has long worked and hoped for the implementation of Second Vatican Council reforms in the Roman Catholic Church. Fr Hoban feels the synod was a sign they were, at last, being implemented.

The Pope invited 180 bishops from the nine countries (Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guiana, Guyana, Peru, Venezuela and Suriname) of the Amazon region to Rome to work on pressing issues of Church and climate in the region, and vote for what they considered were necessary reforms. Although only the bishops could vote, they were accompanied by eighty lay auditors and it was estimated that over 87,000 Amazonian people had been previously consulted by those attending.

This type of synodality and consultation, coming from the bottom up and from the periphery, was precisely what was envisaged at the Second Vatican Council, and it has been growing in traction under Pope Francis in many countries around the globe.

Various issues were deliberated on and the decisions reached, including the ordination of married men to the

priesthood, a door being opened for their ordination in countries where people at present have Mass maybe only twice a year.

Ecology and care of the earth was the pressing concern, particularly as it affects the Amazon region. The rights of indigenous peoples were also discussed and the necessity of an inculturated liturgy was agreed suited to the culture of the people in its expression.

In the synod's discussion of the role of women in the Church, that the bishops wrote that there should be mandated ministries for men and women 'in an equitable manner' is most significant. There was dismay at the synod that the work of the commission on the ordination of women deacons seems to be stalled, and it was agreed that this work should be continued along with promoting other ways in which women could lead local church communities. The Pope has confirmed that he will re-establish the commission on the diaconate and invite new members.

The issue of the statue of Our Lady of the Amazon is also addressed. The wooden statue of a pregnant woman caused great offence to right-wing traditionalists who objected vociferously to it, describing it as a pagan and idolatrous image. It seems that



Illustration: Brendan McCarthy

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the extreme right reacted in such a manner (the statue was actually stolen from a church and thrown into the Tiber) because they are afraid of the synodal and much more collaborative direction the Church is taking, acting like the Pharisees who in the Gospels, laid traps to try and 'catch Jesus out' and undermine his work.

However, this type of resistance is to be expected especially from people who think that Church tradition is unchanging, like an artifact in a museum. That is not tradition but traditional-

ism, as the famous Church historian Jaroslav Pelikan said, 'Tradition is the living faith of the dead. Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living'.

Pope Francis on a few occasions reiterated that the problems and challenges facing the Amazon world face the whole world in different ways, in poverty, treatment of indigenous people, economic need and the future of ministry in the Church.

Like many, I believe that this synod is a source of hope for all the Church and of joy for myself personally. ❤️