

# Full text of Cardinal Mueller's analysis on the working document of the Amazon synod



Cardinal Gerhard Ludwig Mueller. Credit: Daniel Ibanez/CNA.

Vatican City, Jul 16, 2019 / 09:19 am (CNA).- Cardinal Gerhard Mueller, who was prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith from 2012 and 2017, presented an analysis with a series of objections and criticisms of the *Instrumentum Laboris*, or working document, of the Synod on the Amazon, to be held in Rome in October.

The following is the full text of Cardinal Mueller's analysis:

“For any other foundation no man can lay, but that which is laid; which is Christ Jesus.” (1 Cor 3:11)

### **On the Concept of Revelation as presented in the Instrumentum Laboris for the Amazon Synod**

— *Cardinal Gerhard Mueller*

#### **1. On the method of the Instrumentum Laboris (IL)**

Nobody would question the goodwill of all those involved in the preparation and implementation of the synod for the Church in the Amazon, nor their intention of doing everything possible to promote the Catholic Faith among the inhabitants of this vast region and its fascinating landscape.

The Amazon region is to serve for the Church and for the world “as a pars pro toto, as a paradigm, as a hope for the whole world.” (IL 37) The very wording of these terms of reference suggest the notion of an “integral” development of all of humankind at home on the one

Earth, for which the Church now declares herself responsible. This notion appears again and again in the text of the *Instrumentum Laboris* (IL). The document is divided into three parts: 1) *The Voice of the Amazon*; 2) *Integral Ecology: The Cry of the Earth and of the Poor*; 3) *A Prophetic Church in the Amazon: Challenges and Hope*. These three parts are put forward following a pattern also applied in Liberation theology: Seeing the situation – judging in light of the Gospels – acting to achieve better living conditions.

## **2. Ambivalently defined terms and goals**

As is so often the case when texts are produced as a team effort, by groups of people with a similar mindset contributing, there are many tiresome redundancies. If one were strictly to take out all the repetitions, the text could easily be cut down to half the length or less.

The main problem however is not quantitative, is not the excessive length. Rather, it is the fact that the key terms are not clearly defined and then excessively deployed: what is meant by a synodal path, by integral development, what is meant by a Samaritan, missionary, synodal, open Church? By a Church reaching out, the Church of the Poor, the Church of the Amazon, and other such terms? Is this Church something different from the People of God, or is she to be understood merely as the hierarchy of Pope and Bishops, or is she a part of it, or does she stand on the opposite side of the people? Is the term People of God to be understood sociologically or theologically? Or is she

not, rather, the community of faithful, who, together with their shepherds, are on the pilgrimage unto eternal life? Is it the bishops who should hear the cry of the people, or is it God Who, just as He once did it with Moses during Israel's slavery in Egypt, now tells the successors of the Apostles to lead the faithful out of sin and apart from the godlessness of secularist naturalism and immanentism unto his salvation in God's Word and in the Sacraments of the Church?

### **3. Upside-down Hermeneutics**

Has the Church of Christ been put by her Founder, as though she was some kind of putty, into the hands of bishops and popes, so they may now – illuminated by the Holy Spirit – rebuild her, into an updated instrument with secular goals, too?

The structure of the text presents a radical U-turn from the hermeneutics of Catholic theology. The relationship between Holy Scripture and Apostolic Tradition on the one hand, and the Church's Magisterium on the other, has been classically determined in such a way that Revelation is fully contained in Holy Scripture and Tradition, while it is the task of the Magisterium – united with the sense of the Faith of the whole People of God – to make authentic and infallible interpretations. Thus, Holy Scripture and Tradition are constitutive principles of knowledge for the Catholic Profession of Faith and its theological-academic reflection. The Magisterium, on the other hand, is merely active in an interpretative and regulative manner (Dei Verbum 8-10; 24).

In the case of the IL, however, the very opposite is the case. The whole line of thought revolves, in self-referential and circular ways, around the latest documents of Pope Francis' Magisterium, furnished with a few references to John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Only little is quoted of Holy Scripture, and the Church Fathers barely at all, and then only in an illustrative manner, for the sake of supporting pre-formed convictions. Perhaps one wishes thereby to show a special loyalty to the Pope, or one thus believes oneself to be able to avoid the challenges of theological work when one constantly refers back to his well-known and often repeated keywords, which the authors call – in a pretty sloppy manner – “his mantra” (IL 25). This flattery is then being carried to its extreme when the authors also add – after declaring that “the active subjects of inculturation are the indigenous peoples themselves” (IL 122) – the following odd expression: “As Pope Francis has affirmed, ‘Grace supposes culture.’” As if he himself had discovered this axiom – which is of course a fundamental axiom of the Catholic Church herself. In the original, it is Grace which presupposes Nature, just as Faith presupposes Reason (see Thomas Aquinas, S. th. I q. 1 a.8).

Next to the confusing of the roles of Magisterium on the one side and of Holy Scripture on the other, the IL even goes so far as to claim that there are new sources of Revelation. IL 19 states: “Furthermore, we can say that the Amazon – or another indigenous or communal territory – is not only an *ubi* or a *where* (a geographical space), but also a *quid* or a *what*, a place of meaning for faith or the

experience of God in history. Thus, territory is a theological place where faith is lived, and also a particular source of God's revelation: epiphanic places where the reserve of life and wisdom for the planet is manifest, a life and wisdom that speaks of God." If here a certain territory is being declared to be a "particular source of God's Revelation," then one has to state that this is a false teaching, inasmuch as for 2,000 years, the Catholic Church has infallibly taught that Holy Scripture and Apostolic Tradition are the only sources of Revelation and that no further Revelation can be added in the course of history. As Dei Verbum states, "we now await no further new public revelation" (4). Holy Scripture and Tradition are the only sources of Revelation, as Dei Verbum (7) explains: "This sacred tradition, therefore, and Sacred Scripture of both the Old and New Testaments are like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally to see Him as He is, face to face." "Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church." (Dei Verbum 10).

Besides these striking statements and references, the organization Rete Ecclesiale Panamazzoneica (REPAM) – which has been tasked with the preparation of the IL and which was founded for that very reason in 2014 – as well as their authors of the so-called Theologia india [Indian Theology] mostly quote themselves.

It is a closed group of absolutely like-minded people, as can easily be gleaned from the list of participants at pre-

synodal meetings in Washington and Rome, and it includes a disproportionately large number of mostly German-speaking Europeans.

This group is immune to serious objections, because such objections could only be based on monolithic doctrinalism and dogmatism, or ritualism (IL 38; 110; 138), as well as on clericalism incapable of dialogue (IL 110), and on the rigid way of thinking of the pharisees and on the pride of reason of the scribes. To argue with such people would just be a loss of time and a wasted effort.

Not all of them have direct experience with South America, and are only invited because they toe the official line and determine the agenda at the synodal process of the German bishops' conference and the Central Committee of German Catholics currently underway (i.e. abolishing celibacy, [ordaining] women to the priesthood and promoting them to key positions of power so as to tackle clericalism and fundamentalism, conforming Catholic sexual morality to gender ideology and an appreciation for homosexual practices) that is simultaneously taking place.

I myself have been active in the pastoral and theological field in Peru and other countries for 15 consecutive years, always for two to three months on end. It was mainly in South American parishes and seminaries, and thus I do not now judge with a purely Eurocentric perspective, as some would like to tell me in a reproachful manner.

Every Catholic will agree with one important intention of the IL, namely that the peoples of the Amazon may not

remain the object of colonialism and neo-colonialism, the object of forces solely dedicated to profit and power at the expense of the happiness and dignity of other people. It is clear in Church, society, and state that the people who are living there – especially our Catholic brothers and sisters – are equal and free agents in their lives and work, their Faith and their morality, and this in our common responsibility before God. But how can this be achieved?

#### **4. The Point of Departure is God's Revelation in Christ Jesus**

Without doubt, the proclamation of the Gospel is a dialogue which corresponds to the Word (=Logos) of God addressed to us - as well as our response to it by the free gift of obedience to the Faith (cf. Dei Verbum 5). Because this mission comes from Christ the God-Man and because He passed His Mission on from the Father onto His Apostles, the seeming tensions between a dogmatic approach “from above” versus a pedagogical-pastoral approach “from below” are rendered pointless, unless one were to reject the “divine-human-principle of pastoral ministry” (Franz Xaver Arnold).

However it is man to whom Jesus addresses the universal missionary mandate (Matthew 28:19), “the universal and sole mediator of salvation between God and all mankind” (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim 2:4 seq.), and man can reflect, by way of reason, upon the meaning of life, from birth to death, a life shaken by the existential crises of human existence, and he sets in life and death his hope in God, the origin and goal of all being.

A cosmivision with its myths and the ritual magic of Mother “Nature,” or its sacrifices to “gods” and spirits which scare the wits out of us, or lure us on with false promises, cannot be an adequate approach for the coming of the Triune God in His Word and His Holy Spirit. Much less can the approach be a scientific-positivistic worldview of a liberal bourgeoisie which accepts from Christianity only a comfortable remnant of moral values and civil-religious rituals.

In all seriousness, in the formation of future pastors and theologians, shall the knowledge of classical and modern philosophy, of the Church Fathers, of modern theology, of the Councils now be replaced with the Amazonian cosmivision and the wisdom of the ancestors with their myths and rituals?

Should the expression “cosmivision” merely mean that all created things are interdependent, it would be a mere commonplace. Due to the substantial unity of body and soul, man stands at the intersection of the fabric of spirit and matter. But the contemplation of the cosmos is only the occasion for the glorification of God and His wonderful work in nature and history. The cosmos, however, is not to be adored like God, but only the Creator Himself. We do not fall on our knees before the enormous power of nature and before “all kingdoms of the world and their splendor” (Matthew 4:8), but only before God, “for it is written, the Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and Him only shalt thou serve.” (Matthew 4:10) It is thus that Jesus rejected the diabolical seducer in the desert.

## **5. The Difference between Incarnation of the Word and Inculturation itself as a Way of Evangelization**

The “Theologia indigena and the eco-theology” (IL 98) is a brainchild of social romantics. Theology is the understanding (intellectus fidei) of God’s Revelation in His Word in the Faith-Profession of the Church, and not the continuously new mixture of world feelings and world views or religious-moral constellations of the cosmic feeling of all-in-one, the mixing of the feeling of one’s own self with the world (hen kai pan). Our natural world is the creation of a Personal God. Faith in the Christian sense is thus recognition of God in His Eternal Word which became Flesh; it is illumination in the Holy Spirit, so that we recognize God in Christ. With the Faith, the supernatural virtues of hope and charity are communicated to us. That is how we understand ourselves as children of God, who, through Christ, say to God in the Holy Spirit Abba, Father (Rom 8:15). We put our whole trust in Him, and He makes us His sons, who are free of the fear of the elementary forces of the world and of the demonic appearances, gods and spirits, which maliciously await us in the unpredictability of the material forces of the world.

The Incarnation is a unique event in history which God has freely determined in His universal will of salvation. It is not an inculturation, and the inculturation of the Church is not an incarnation (IL 7;19;29;108). It was not Irenaeus of Lyon, in his 5th book of Adversus haereses (IL 113), but Gregory of Nazianzus who formulated the

principle: “quod non est assumptum non est sanatum – that, which has not been assumed, is not redeemed either.” (Ep. 101, 32) What is meant here was the completeness of human nature against Apollinaris of Laodicea (315-390) who thought that the Logos in the Incarnation only assumed a nature, without a human soul. That is why the following sentence is completely abstruse “Cultural diversity calls for a more robust incarnation in order to embrace different ways of life and cultures.” (IL 113)

The Incarnation is not the principle of secondary cultural adaptation, but concretely and primarily also the principle of salvation in the “Church as Sacrament of salvation of the world in Christ” (Lumen Gentium 1:48), in the Church's Profession of Faith, in her Seven Sacraments, and in the episcopacy with the Pope at the head, in Apostolic succession.

Secondary rites from the traditions of the peoples can help to ingrain in culture the Sacraments, which are the means of salvation instituted by Christ. They may, however, not become independent, so that, for example suddenly marriage customs become more important than saying “I do” to the very Sacrament of Matrimony itself. The sacramental signs, as they have been instituted by Christ and the Apostles (word and material symbol), cannot be changed at any price. Baptism cannot be validly administered in any other way than in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and with natural water, and in the Eucharist, one may not replace with local food the bread made of wheat and the wine from the vine. That would not be inculturation, but an inadmissible

interference with the will of Jesus as founder of the Church, and also would constitute a destruction of the unity of the Church at her sacramental center.

When inculturation here is referring to the secondary external celebration of divine worship and not to the Sacraments – which is *ex opere operato*, through the living Presence of Christ, the founder and true giver of Grace in these sacramental signs – then the following sentence is scandalous, or is at least thoughtless: “Without this inculturation the liturgy can be reduced to a ‘museum piece’ or ‘property of a select few.’” (IL 124)

God is not simply omnipresent and equally present in all religions, as if the Incarnation were merely a stereotypically Mediterranean phenomenon. In point of fact, God as Creator of the world is present as a whole and in each individual human heart (Acts 17:27seq) – even if the eyes of man are often blinded by sin, and his ears are deaf to God’s Love. But He comes by way of His Self-Revelation in the history of His chosen people Israel, and He comes very close to us ourselves in His Incarnate Word and in the Spirit which has been poured into our hearts. This self-communication of God as a Grace and life of each man is spread in the world by way of the Church’s proclamation of her life and her cult – that is to say, by way of the mission for this world according to the universal mandate of Christ.

But He already works with His helping and prevenient Grace also in the hearts of those men who do not yet know Him expressly and by name, so that, when they hear about

Him in the Apostolic proclamation, they can identify Him as the Lord Jesus, in the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3).

## **6. The Criterion of Discernment: the Historical Self-Communication of God in Jesus Christ**

What is missing in the IL is a clear witness to the self-communication of God in the *verbum incarnatum*, to the sacramentality of the Church, to the Sacraments as objective means of Grace instead of mere self-referential symbols, to the supernatural character of Grace, for which reason the integrity of man does not just consist in communion with biological nature, but in the Divine Sonship and in the grace-filled communion with the Holy Trinity and for which reasons eternal life is the reward for the conversion to God, the reconciliation with Him, and not only with the environment and our common world.

One cannot reduce the notion of integral development to merely mean the provision of material resources. For man receives his new integrity only by way of perfection in Grace. We receive it presently in Baptism, whereby we become a new creature and children of God, and one day in the Beatific Vision in the community of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit and in communion with His saints. (1 John 1:3; 3:1 seq).

Rather than proposing an obscure approach comprised of vague religiosity and a futile attempt to turn Christianity into a science of salvation by sacralizing the cosmos, nature's biodiversity and ecology, one must turn to the very center and origin of our Faith: "In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make

known to us the hidden purpose of His will by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature.” (Dei Verbum 2)