

Fr. Perozich comments —

The solution proposed by this bishop to the Amazon Synod to get priests from Rome and the first world to go to the Amazon is the same one proposed in the letter below it from St. Francis Xavier to St. Ignatius.

Personally I had a very short experience in Honduras as a missionary. Affiliated with the Maryknoll fathers, I was trained to respect the culture of the people while I brought the gospel. One priest in San Diego said, “Why does Perozich want to go down there? I won’t go there, but I’ll send him money.” He did.

In our Honduras mission in San Pedro Sula, most of the Maryknoll fathers there at that time were fervent in catechesis, baptizing, liturgy, and integrating the people there into the Catholic church with the love of Christ. In other areas outside of our group, priests promoted more a socialism, material satisfaction, rather than announcement of the gospel that our Honduran group did.

When Fr. Angel Garrachana, a Spanish Claretian was named as bishop of the diocese of San Pedro Sula where he had once served, it had only 1 native vocation I believe. When I left 3 years later he had 15 native clergy which was growing in numbers.

Most extern priests were from Spain, fellow Claretians and Vincentians. The Americans there were Maryknoll missionaries and a few diocesan priests. Others were Redemptorists from Central America.

Challenges certainly included poverty. Maryknoll gave me \$300/month for food and \$300/month for salary, most of which was spent on the parishioners who came for provisions of rice, beans, toilet tissue, soap, lard. Others needed medical care from our small clinic where our doctor worked and medicine was provided.

When someone died, I bought the coffin for \$75 and the plot for \$25. The family prepared and body and dug the grave.

Some priests in remote parishes did NOT receive stipends to sustain themselves or their parishioners. Some told me they were expected to be supported by their families, also poor in other areas of Central America. It was a catch 22.

We went door to door to announce the faith and invite people to church. When I began, we had only 40 attendants at one chapel and 10 at the other on Sunday. When I left in only 3 years, both chapels

were FULL every Sunday, so much so that my successor, an elderly experienced Maryknoller built a third chapel for an adjacent area. Preaching the gospel works. Novelties such as socialism in place of the gospel kills faith, and causes the people to run to non Catholic Christian ecclesial communities to find Christ.

If priests, either in the Amazon or in the first world, are going to bring Christ in difficult areas, they need support financially and spiritually from the bishops, not constraints to promote socialism, married priests, ordained women, and the ideas that are floating around. No one is going to serve that kind of church.

It is curious that priests without mission experience, rather only degrees from pontifical and secular universities, those with a socialist bent are ordained bishops, to direct, to discuss and to make proposals to a synod, where their intellectual programs not only fail to evoke vocations at home, their lack of evangelical experience also kills the Catholic faith in the third world.

The novelties proposed for this “new church” do not promote Jesus, nor faith, nor vocations. Prayerful priests with a love for the gospel, supported by faithful bishops at home, in the missions, and in Rome could go for a time to evangelize.

I had no second thoughts about leaving the comforts of San Diego. A man adapts to his new life when he is supported by love, faithful clergy, and the response of faith in the people that he serves. When it is time to come home, the priest returns enriched with a whole new life and faith experience to bring to the local church from which he was sent.

IN SYNOD’S MARRIED PRIESTS DEBATE, SOMEBODY FINALLY

NAMES ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

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Prelates attend a canonization Mass in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican, Sunday, Oct. 13, 2019. (Credit: AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino.)

News Analysis

ROME - In a Synod of Bishops where priest shortages in the Amazon have been driving discussion of ordaining married men, the surprise really isn't that someone finally noticed there's another solution, one that doesn't require changing the traditional criteria for getting a Roman collar.

The only surprise, probably, is that it's taken this long for someone to say it out loud.

Yet there was Bishop Johnny Eduardo Reyes, apostolic vicar of Puerto Ayacucho, Venezuela, on Tuesday night, naming the elephant in the room during a meeting titled "On the way with the synod, witnesses and martyrs of the faith in the Amazon."

[RELATED: Amazon prelate floats alternative to married clergy: Send some Roman priests home](#)

Basically, Reyes's question was **why some of the gaggle of priests in Rome don't fan out into the field, serving places such as the Amazon instead.**

"All these priests and religious that we see on TV... It cannot be that they're all studying in Rome," he said. "The distribution of priests and religious is not good."

To quote that 90's classic: "Whoomp! There it is."

Grasping why it's such an obvious point requires a bit of basic background about the math of global Catholicism in the early 21st century. There are roughly 1.3 billion baptized Catholics in the world today, over two-thirds of whom live in the global south, especially Latin America, Africa and Asia.

Almost half of those Catholics live in Latin America, including the two largest Catholic countries in the world, Brazil and Mexico. Sub-Saharan Africa, meanwhile, is easily the zone of the Church's greatest growth, with its total Catholic population shooting up by almost 7,000 percent from 1975 to 2000 alone.

To serve that population, the Church in 2017 deployed a total of 414,582 priests, which represents a ratio of one priest for every 3,135 believers. That overall number, however, disguises vast differences by region.

Again according to official Vatican numbers, there's one priest for every 1,916 Catholics in the United States and Canada, but just one priest for every 7,203 Catholics in South America. Drilling down, the contrast between Brazil and the U.S. is especially arresting. The U.S. has 37,000 priests for around 70 million Catholics; Brazil, with twice that Catholic population, has 13,000 fewer priests.

A single factoid tells the larger story: Europe today has 42 percent of all priests, but just 23 percent of the world's Catholic population.

Bishop Wellington de Queiroz Vieira of Cristalândia in Brazil said the same point often applies within national boundaries too during a Vatican briefing Wednesday, arguing that sometimes there's "a lack of a missionary spirit, a willingness to go to border areas or difficult areas."

If the Catholic Church were Microsoft or Walmart, it would have implemented a plan a long time ago **to shift personnel to where its markets are growing**. Instead it's effectively doing the opposite, as wealthy northern churches are becoming increasingly reliant on importing priests from the developing world to plug perceived gaps. In the U.S., for instance, some 30 percent of all priests today are foreign-born.

As Philip Jenkins put it almost two decades ago, "Viewed in a global perspective, such a policy can be described at best as painfully short-sighted, at worst as suicidal for Catholic fortunes."

Reyes is hardly the first bishop who's noticed. All the way back in 2005, during a Synod of Bishops on the Eucharist, Bishop Lucio Andrice Muandula of Xai-Xai in Mozambique drew the seemingly obvious conclusion: "One must insist on the equal redistribution of priests in the world."

There's even a patron saint waiting in the wings for the cause: 95-year-old Slovakian Cardinal Jozef Tomko, former prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

In 2001, they issued a document titled "Instruction on the Sending Abroad and Sojourn of Diocesan Priests from Mission Territories." The gist was that transfers of clergy are damaging to the Church in the South. India, Tomko said, didn't have enough priests to take care of its 17 million Catholics, yet at that time there were 39 priests from India working in one Italian diocese alone. Overall, Tomko claimed, there were 1,800 foreign priests in Italy, with more than 800 working in direct pastoral care.

"Many new dioceses could be created in mission territories with such a number of diocesan priests!" Tomko complained.

Of course, there are often legitimate reasons for priests from the developing world to go abroad, and the Church in the developing world often feels pride in what's called the "reverse mission", sending their priests today to re-evangelize the very places which once dispatched missionaries to evangelize them.

Yet bishops in the global south could put a dent in these trends by tightening permission for their priests to leave. There's a terribly simple explanation for why those bishops generally don't say no: Money.

When a priest from a developing nation shows up in Europe or North America, sometimes the receiving diocese will compensate the bishop back home directly. Sometimes the priest devotes a share of his salary to his home diocese, and sometimes he's able to go on the mission circuit over the summer and raise money for the church back home.

However the situation is configured, it's usually a revenue stream, and cash-strapped bishops in the developing world often depend on it. Further, those priests often feel their opportunities are greater in the West and aren't terribly eager to go back.

The hard question the Amazon synod may want to confront is this: Is the problem really that there aren't enough priests? Or, is the problem at least partly that the priests we do have are in the wrong places? And, is there a better way to get money to churches in the developing world rather than, de facto, financing a chronic exodus of clergy?

None of that bears on the argument over married priests, of course, and there may well be good arguments in favor of moving in that direction. If the only question, however, is how to get priests to the people who need them, Reyes is undeniably right - a married clergy is hardly the only option the bishops might want to explore.

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From the letters to Saint Ignatius by Saint Francis Xavier, priest

(E Vita Francisci Xaverii, auctore H. Tursellini, Romae, 1956, Lib. 4, epist. 4 [1542] et 5 [1544])

Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel

We have visited the villages of the new converts who accepted the Christian religion a few years ago. No Portuguese live here the country is so utterly barren and poor. The native Christians have no priests. They know only that they are Christians. There is nobody to say Mass for them; nobody to teach them the Creed, the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the Commandments of God's Law.

I have not stopped since the day I arrived. I conscientiously made the rounds of the villages. I bathed in the sacred waters all the children who had not yet been baptized. This means that I have purified a very large number of children so young that, as the saying goes, they could not tell their right hand from their left. The older children would not let me say my Office or eat or sleep until I taught them one prayer or another. Then I began to understand: "The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

I could not refuse so devout a request without failing in devotion myself. I taught them, first the confession of faith in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, then the Apostles' Creed, the Our Father and Hail Mary. I noticed among them persons of great intelligence. If only someone could educate them in the Christian way of life, I have no doubt that they would make excellent Christians.

Many, many people hereabouts are not becoming Christians for one reason only: there is nobody to make

them Christians. Again and again I have thought of going round the universities of Europe, especially Paris, and everywhere crying out like a madman, riveting the attention of those with more learning than charity: “What a tragedy: how many souls are being shut out of heaven and falling into hell, thanks to you!”

I wish they would work as hard at this as they do at their books, and so settle their account with God for their learning and the talents entrusted to them.

This thought would certainly stir most of them to meditate on spiritual realities, to listen actively to what God is saying to them. They would forget their own desires, their human affairs, and give themselves over entirely to God’s will and his choice. They would cry out with all their heart: *Lord, I am here! What do you want me to do?* Send me anywhere you like – even to India.