



CONVENTION FOR THE PROMOTION OF THE SACRED LITURGY IN ASIA

- By Rev. Fr. C.A.G. Christopher sss

Let me thank the Almighty for giving me a wonderful opportunity to attend the first ever Convention for the Promotion of SACRED Liturgy in Asia which was held in Sri Lanka from the 16th to the 21st September 2008. I must also thank Rev Fr. Nilindra Gunsekera the Provincial Superior of the Sri Lanka Province of Christ the Bread of Life for having chosen me and bestowing me with the honour of representing the Men Religious at this convention. I also wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to His Lordship the Bishop of Kandy Rt. Rev Dr Vianney Fernando for encouraging me to participate at this important convention, as he felt that it would help me immensely as I am engaged in Lecturing in Liturgy at the National Seminary, Ampitiya, Kandy and what I would grasp at this convention should come in handy in my many religious activities in the Parishes, conduct Liturgical Seminars for the different groups. This convention has strengthened my conviction of merely following the Liturgical Norms (General Instruction of the Roman Missal - GIRM), and to avoid certain abuses that were being observed by me in the past.

The theme of the Convention was “Promotion of Sacred Liturgy in Asia - Liturgy as a Glimpse of Heaven on Earth” and it was enlivened by inspiring liturgies, thought provoking talks and lively discussions in groups and in the general assembly.

Worship in an Asian Context

1. One of the most important goals of the convention was to recapture the age-old religious fervour of Asia and bring it to the service of liturgical renewal so ardently desired by the Second Vatican Council. While rejoicing over the fidelity of the ‘little flock’ of Christian on this vast continent to the Gospel and the forms of worship that were handed down to them, the participants expressed a deep longing for a renewal spirit based on the ever urgent necessity to promote the liturgical life in the Church together with the cultural genius of the communities they represented.
2. The ‘sense of the sacred’ stands at the heart of the cultural values to which all Asian people are most attached. An aura of holiness is expected to surround every element related to worship. In order to better live out the Gospel, the Christian community derives spiritual strength and motivation from its own definitive prayer traditions which took on their present form and identity over centuries of experience. Originating from the Lord Jesus Christ himself, these traditions constitute the rich heritage of the Catholic Liturgy. Liturgy has developed a distinctive individuality of its own and is organic in nature and venerable in its historical continuity over two millennia. Pope Benedict XVI emphasizes this continuity and points out that the Church is the guardian of this great heritage (cf. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, No.3)
3. The Holy Father’s vision and deep understanding of Sacred Liturgy is evident both in his magisterial teachings and example that he gives when celebrating the Divine Mysteries. His cosmic theology of the worship of the whole Church resonates in an Asian context and his affirmation of hermeneutic of continuity is welcome in cultures which have a deep sense of living tradition and organic development.
4. Asians are deeply attached to their cultures and proud of their civilizational heritage. Delegates remembered how in earlier ages the Church touched with the power of the Gospel the cultural geniuses of the Germans, Celts, Slavs, Syrians and Egyptians, for example, stirred them to new life in Christ and offered them salvation, and how she herself in turn was

enriched by the cultural wealth of these peoples. So too it is a historic moment today when the great civilizations of Asia with enormous potentialities for the future are in encounter with the Church and the Gospel she announces. This encounter leads them step by step to have a 'glimpse of heaven on earth' in divine worship.

5. The Church considers that effective use of cultures could enhance and help enrich the Christian liturgy. Inculturation in matters of language, gestures, postures, art and music is important. But this process has to be carried out and strengthened further and especially with a great sense of responsibility, never ignoring the organic nature of the cultures concerned and the historic continuity of the Catholic Liturgy. Seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit in prayer, a prudent sensitivity towards the *sensus fidei* of the Catholic People needs to be kept in mind.
6. When pastoral zeal combines with cultural and religious sensitivity new ground is broken. On the contrary, hasty and unreflected changes weaken or damage the religious significance and life transforming power of worship. Asian values of contemplation, mysticism, and silence could find stronger expression in Christian Liturgy.

Reflections on the Liturgical Situation in Asia

7. Participants rejoiced at the many achievements in these countries in aspects such as liturgical participation, translations, community involvement, training of personnel as well as careful forms of inculturation. The quality of Catholic Liturgy, its sense of prayer, its rich symbolism and music not only deepen the life of the particular Churches but effectively help to evangelize many people.
8. They highlighted the complex situation in the day-to-day life of the Church in many countries. Some countries continue to suffer from poverty, insecurity due to migration, violence and religious and other forms of extremism. Some do not enjoy freedom of religion, and others have just emerged from the "Catacombs". In almost all these countries, the Church constitutes a minority of the population and is marginalized and even persecuted.
9. These varied situations hinder the promotion of liturgical life. The Churches under persecution have little possibility of expressing their identity as worshipping communities. Those that have recently come out of persecution are struggling to establish the basic structures.
10. Some local Churches lack trained personnel of native origin who could further the growth of a profound sense of adoration as well as spiritual and moral renewal in their communities. Others do not have trained personnel to coordinate the work of translating liturgical texts, organizing formation programme and promoting liturgical life.



Practical Suggestions

(a) *Congregation for Divine Worship and National Commissions for Liturgy*

12. There was widespread consensus among the delegates on the following matters:
 - there be more effective contacts and communication between the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments and National Bishops' Conferences and the National Commission for Liturgy;
 - the use of internet would facilitate access to documents of the Holy See on Sacred Liturgy and enable the

Congregation to give official explanations about or commentaries on documents for the benefit of clergy, religious and lay faithful and to develop correct forms of liturgical renewal;

- where possible, the Congregation could provide liturgical texts and translations through the internet;
- representatives from the Congregation for Divine Worship could organize occasional training and ongoing formation programme for the members of the national commission for Liturgy;
- if a language goes beyond one territory, the countries involved could form a joint commission for translation on the basis of the indication given by the *Liturgiam Authenticam*.

(b) *Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences*

13. It was very much desired the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) consider establishing a specific office or desk to help promote liturgical life in Asia.

(c) *Liturgical Abuses*

14. The delegates expressed their anxiety about liturgical abuses particularly relating to the Holy Eucharist. Consensus was expressed on the following matters that:

- liturgical celebrations should be in tune with the Asian spirit of devotion and sense of the sacred but according to the norms prescribed by the liturgical books;
- local Ordinaries and National Conferences of Bishops should carefully ensure the proper observance of liturgical norms;
- bishops have the obligation to keep vigilance over liturgical orthopraxis as the chief liturgists in their own dioceses (cf. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, No.39);
- they are also responsible for Liturgy in the houses of religious men and women, ashrams and religious movements;
- religious superiors have the special responsibility of ensuring that the communities under their care faithfully follow liturgical norms;
- a report about liturgical life in the diocese might be sent every three years for the study by the National Commission for Liturgy.



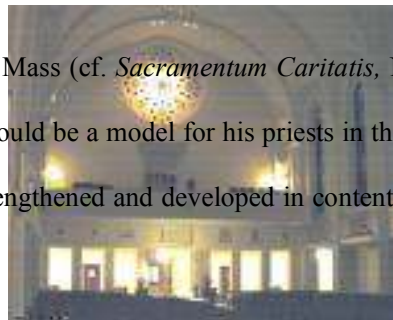
(d) *Liturgical Formation*

15. Proper celebration of Liturgy depends on the formation of priests, religious and lay faithful.

- All seminaries should have qualified personnel to teach and animate liturgy. Liturgy should be given greater importance in academic formation, not only in the seminaries but also in the formation houses of religious men and women.
- To strengthen liturgical formation and in coherence with magisterial teachings, especially of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI on the hermeneutic of continuity, it would be helpful if the Holy Eucharist be occasionally in celebrated in Latin in cathedral churches, bigger parishes, seminaries, shrines and so forth.
- The National Commission for Liturgy should organize an ongoing formation programme for the individual dioceses in the country.
- All priests should be educated on the revised *General Instruction of Roman Missal* to better understand the (*ars celebrandi*). With proper training and solid prayer life, this should help them to achieve an interior preparation to be the servants of sacred mysteries and to encounter

the inner beauty and mystery of the sacrifice of the Mass (cf. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Nos. 32-42)

- As the liturgist par excellence, the diocesan bishop should be a model for his priests in the art of celebrating.
- Existing formation programme for laity should be strengthened and developed in content and method.



(e) *Liturgical Practices*

16. Delegates also made suggestions in the following areas of liturgical life.

- Music in Sacred Liturgy should be truly liturgical, that is, the Church's loving praise of God. While it also promotes active participation, it should not be left to the whims and subjective initiatives of individuals. It would be appropriate to promote local traditional music and also the Gregorian chant and to discourage hymns that do not represent the deeper sense of sound doctrine and the sacred.
- While popular devotions are important, every effort should be made to harmonize these practices with the liturgical year and celebrations, maintaining the distinction between Liturgy and personal devotions.
- Eucharistic adoration, so strongly endorsed by Pope Benedict XVI (cf. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Nos. 66-69), should be promoted. The delegates supported the setting up of adoration chapels, with due Episcopal approval, independently of the main church building where the Holy Eucharistic is celebrated.

The Church in Asia which forms a minority community faces numerous challenges and the Christian community is called upon to bear witness to the Gospel as many horizons are opening out before them. These include: inculturating the Message in various cultural contexts, stirring communities to live with the grace of the Gospel, developing prayer-forms in keeping with the genius of the people, bringing prayer-experience closer to the people through translation and the use of culturally meaningful symbolism.

The sacredness of the Liturgy of the Eucharist as well as the Liturgy of the Hours depends on the presider who should strictly follow the Liturgical Norms and help every participant to experience the taste of the Heavenly Liturgy. In this respect the *Instruction Redemptionis Sacramentum* by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments informs us about the things that are to be observed and certain things that are to be avoided regarding the most Holy Eucharist and these instructions should definitely help us to avoid any abuses taking place in the celebration of the Eucharist. If all priests including the Religious Priests, the Religious Houses and the Houses of Formation could strictly follow the Liturgical documents it would help to avoid or minimize any abuses. The Liturgical Norms are to be followed strictly in all circumstances and the Bishop of the Diocese should take extra care to monitor this, so as to enable all the Christians to experience the unity and oneness of the Church.

Finally, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the Conference of the Major Religious Superiors for giving me the opportunity to participate in this first ever Asian Convention for the Promotion of Sacred Liturgy

It is my prayerful wish that the entire Church in Asia and Sri Lanka in particular, would experience the oneness by celebrating the Liturgy of the Eucharist by following the Liturgical Norms in all circumstances.

‘Let us worship as we live and to live as we worship’

