

UCAN: Changes in liturgy since Vatican II ‘mixed bag of results,’ Vatican worship official says in interview

Archbishop Albert Malcolm Ranjith Patabendige Don Speaks Out

By Gerard O’Connell 4/25/2007

UCANews (www.ucanews.com) VATICAN CITY (UCAN)

Archbishop Albert Malcolm Ranjith Patabendige Don, secretary of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, has spoken with UCA News about the recent apostolic exhortation on the Eucharist and its significance for the church in Asia.

The Vatican released the document, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (Sacrament of Charity), on March 13. That text, whose English version has more than 25,000 words and more than 250 footnotes, confirms the validity of the liturgical renewal prompted by the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and endorses recommendations made by the Synod of Bishops on the Eucharist in October 2005.

Archbishop Ranjith became one of the first appointments of Pope Benedict XVI to the Roman Curia when the pontiff assigned the Sri Lankan prelate to his present post on Dec. 10, 2005. In this position, he is particularly well placed to comment on the exhortation and its relevance for the church in Asia.

Archbishop Ranjith, 59, studied in Colombo and Kandy in Sri Lanka before going to the Pontifical Urban University in Rome where he gained a degree in theology. After Pope Paul VI ordained him a priest in St. Peter’s Basilica on June 29, 1975, he pursued higher studies and gained a licentiate in sacred scripture from the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome and a special certificate in biblical studies from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

He performed various pastoral and academic duties in Colombo until Pope John Paul II in 1991 appointed him auxiliary bishop of that archdiocese. In 1995, Pope John Paul named him bishop of Ratnapura. From 1995 to 2001, he served as secretary general of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Sri Lanka and chairman of the National Commission for Justice, Peace and Human Development.

In the latter role, he became deeply involved in searching for a solution to Sri Lanka's civil conflict. The government appointed him an emissary on peace negotiations with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka.

Pope John Paul II brought him to Rome on Oct. 1, 2001, as adjunct secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, and appointed him on April 29, 2004, as apostolic nuncio to Indonesia and East Timor.

A broad liturgical program for the Hermeneutic of Continuity?

Luc Perrin, professor of Church History at the *Faculté de Théologie Catholique* of the *University of Strasbourg 2-Marc Bloch*, presents a selection, with comments, of the main aspects of the recent interview of the Secretary of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (CDW), Archbishop A. M. Ranjith, published by the Union of Catholic Asian News (UCAN).

UCA NEWS: How has the liturgical renewal initiated by Vatican Council II been carried out in Asia? What are its positive achievements and negative results?

Prof. Luc Perrin: *The Sri-Lankan number 2 of the Roman Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments already surprised Catholics last year with two interventions that were blunt. The official Roman language had previously banned serious examination of the so-called «Renewal», especially in the liturgical field. We have in this capital interview a sort of resurrection of a voice many bishops dreaded during 25 years – a voice which some faithful and priests have found, on the other hand, encouraging and conforing: the voice of Cardinal Ratzinger.*

*From the very beginning, with his evaluation of the «liturgical renewal initiated by Vatican Council II », Archbishop Ranjith used the 1984 Ratzingerian approach (the famous interview with V. Messori, published in English as *The Ratzinger Report*). The post-Vatican II Church is «a mixed bag of results»:*

Is Archbishop Ranjith the spokesman of pope Benedict XVI? I am not suggesting it: who can tell?... But he is here certainly reflecting the pre-2005 public Ratzingerian way of thinking.

ARCHBISHOP RANJIT: Generally, there have been many changes in the way liturgy was celebrated in Asia since the council. Some of us who were brought up in childhood under the liturgical orientations of pre-conciliar times know what these new changes were and how they affected our life as Catholics.

As your question indicates, there has been a mixed bag of results. Among the positive changes, I see the use of vernacular languages in the liturgy, which helped to lead the faithful to better understand the word of God, the rubrics of the liturgy itself, and a more responsive and shared participation in the celebration of the sacred mysteries.

Adaptations to local cultural practices have also been tried, though not always with good results. The use of the vernacular has at times helped in generating a theological vocabulary in the local idiom that eventually could be helpful to evangelization and the presentation of the message of the gospel to those of non-Christian religious traditions, which constitute the overwhelming majority of the people of Asia.

Some negative aspects have been the quasi total abandonment of the Latin language, tradition and chant; a far too facile interpretation of what could be absorbed from local cultures into the liturgy; a sense of misunderstanding of the true nature, content and meaning of the Roman rite and its norms and rubrics, which led to an attitude of free experimentation; a certain anti-Roman “feeling,” and an uncritical acceptance of all kinds of “novelties” resulting from a secularizing and humanistic theological and liturgical mindset overtaking the West.

These novelties were often introduced, perhaps unknowingly, by some foreign missionaries who brought them from their own mother countries or by locals who had been to those countries on visits or for studies and had let themselves be uncritically absorbed into a kind of “free spirit” that some circles had created around the council.

The abandonment of the spheres of the sacred, the mystical and the spiritual, and their replacement by a kind of empiricist horizontalism was most harmful to the spirit of what truly constituted liturgy.

UCA NEWS: How is the new exhortation on the Eucharist relevant for the church in Asia?

ARCHBISHOP RANJITH: Seen as a whole, the document is for me something that re-echoes in the true sense of the word the reform of the Liturgy as it was understood and desired by the Council. I mean not a rejection of positive developments of liturgical reform in force today but the expression of the need to be truly faithful to what was meant by *Sacrosantum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Second Vatican Council, promulgated by Pope Paul VI on Dec. 4, 1963).

One could, in a certain sense, state that documents such as *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (“*The Church [draws her life] from the Eucharist,*” encyclical “*On the Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church,*” Pope John Paul II, April 17, 2003), *Liturgiam Authenticam* (“*Authentic Liturgy*”, instruction “*On the Use of Vernacular Languages in the Publication of the Books of the Roman Liturgy,*” Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, May 7, 2001), and *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (“*Sacrament of Redemption,*” instruction “*On certain matters to be observed or to be avoided regarding the Most Holy Eucharist,*” Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, April 23, 2004) already started the needed adjustments reflective of the indications of the Council.

Sacramentum Caritatis crowns it all with a truly profound, mystical and yet so very easily understandable catechesis on the Eucharist that brings out best the fuller meaning of this most holy sacrament. Pope Benedict wants us to understand, celebrate and live the fullness of the Eucharist.

I feel that in the context of Asia such a call should naturally be appreciated, valued and lived. The basic orientations of *Sacramentum Caritatis* do reflect Asian values like the love of silence and contemplation, acceptance of a deeper life beyond that which is tangible, respect of the sacred and the mystical, and

the search for happiness in a life of sanctity and renouncement.

The stress laid on these aspects makes *Sacramentum Caritatis* a valuable and important contribution towards making the Catholics in our continent live the Eucharist in a truly Asian way.

UCA NEWS: Which aspects of the document are most important for Asia's bishops, priests and Catholic faithful?

ARCHBISHOP RANJITH: From a general point of view, the call to consider the holy Eucharist as an invitation to become Christ Himself, drawn and absorbed unto Him in a profound communion of love, thus making his own glorious splendour shine out in us, is truly in line with the search for spiritual mysticism in the Asian continent.

As I mentioned, Asia is deeply mystical and conscious of the value of the Sacred in human life, moving a human being to look for the deeper mysteries of religion and spirituality. The tendency to banalise the celebration of the Eucharist through a somewhat horizontal orientation, often visible in modern times, is not consonant with that search. Hence, the general orientation of the document is good for Asia.

Going into details, I would say that its seriousness, the tendency to always accent the deeply spiritual and transcendental nature of the Eucharist, its Christo-centric outlook, faithful adherence to rubrics and norms [*nos. 39-40*], interest in sobriety [*no. 40*], proper and dignified sense of celebration, use of appropriate art and architecture, chant and music, and avoidance of improvisation and disorder are all reflective of the Asian way of worship and spirituality. People in Asia are a worshipping people, with worship forms that are centuries old and not inventions of any single individual.

Adherence to rubrics in the other religious traditions in Asia is strict. Besides, their rubrics are profoundly reflective of the special role of the sacred. Thus, the seriousness recommended by the Supreme Pontiff is very much in consonance with Asian ways of worship.

UCA NEWS: Following the Second Vatican Council, there has been much talk, including among Asian bishops, of the need for inculturation of the liturgy. How has this developed in the Asian Churches? What remains to be done, or is it an open process without a concluding date?

ARCHBISHOP RANJITH: As the pope himself states in *Sacramentum Caritatis*, the principle of inculturation “must be upheld in accordance with the real needs of the church as she lives and celebrates the one mystery of Christ in a variety of cultural situations” [*Sacr. Carit.* 54]. We know that it is a need emerging from both the call to evangelization or the incarnation of the gospel message in various cultures, and the requirement of a real and conscious participation of the faithful in what they celebrate.

Yet, already *Sacrosanctum Concilium* indicated clear parameters within which the adaptations of the liturgy to local cultural patterns are to be carried out. It spoke of admitting into the liturgy elements that “harmonize with its true and authentic spirit” [*SC* 37], ensuring the “substantial unity of the Roman rite is preserved” [*SC* 38], provided such is decided by the competent ecclesiastical authority, meaning the Holy See and, where legally allowed, the bishops [*cf* 22: 1-2]. It also called for prudence, in the choice of adaptations to be introduced into the Liturgy [*SC* 40: 1], the need to submit such to the apostolic see for its consent, if needed, a period of limited experimentation [*SC* 40: 2] before final approval and consultation of experts in the matter [*SC* 40: 3].

Sacramentum Caritatis follows the same line, that adaptations of liturgy to local cultural traditions be handled according to the stipulations of the various directives of the church and in keeping with a proper sense of balance “between the criteria and directives already issued and new adaptations” [*no.* 54], and these too “always in accord with the apostolic see” [*ibid.* 54]. In short, inculturation through adaptations, yes, but always within clear parameters that ensure nobility and orthodoxy.

As for what has been carried out up to now, one cannot be altogether satisfied. Some positive developments are visible, like the large scale use of vernacular languages in liturgy, making the sacraments better understood and to that extent better participated, and the use of art, music and Asian gestures at worship. But a lot of arbitrariness and inconsistency can also be noted, arbitrariness through the permitting of all kinds of experiments and

officialization of such practices without proper study or critical evaluation.

I once was listening to a radio talk given by a Buddhist monk in Sri Lanka who ridiculed Christians for allowing local drum beating in their churches without knowing that those beats in fact were chants of praise for the Buddha. This could be just one instance of unstudied absorption of local traditions that are per se incompatible with what we celebrate.

By inconsistency I mean practices we introduce as adaptations but per se are incompatible with our culture, like just a bow instead of genuflection or prostration before the holy Eucharist, or communion in the hand received standing, which is far below levels of consideration given to the sacred in Asia. In some countries, instead of introducing liturgical vestments or utensils reflective of local values, their use has been reduced to a minimum, or even abandoned. I was at times shocked to see priests and even bishops celebrating or concelebrating without the proper liturgical attire. This is not inculturation but de-culturation, if such a word exists.

Inculturation means deciding on liturgical attire that is dignified and full of respect for the sacred realities celebrated, not abandoning them. I feel that the episcopal commissions on liturgy in Asia at continental, regional or national levels should, with the help of experts, study these issues carefully and seek ways and means to enhance the meaning, dignity and sacredness of the divine mysteries celebrated through solid adaptations that are critically selected and proposed to the Holy See for due approval.

A closer spirit of cooperation with the Holy See in this matter would be needed. There is too much drifting in the matter and even an attitude of “who cares?” that leaves everything to free interpretation and the creativity of single persons. Besides, I wonder if there is a sufficient awareness of what the council itself mentioned on the matter and the guidelines given in *Varietates Legitimae* (“*Legitimate Differences,*” instruction, *Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments*, Jan. 25, 1994) and no. 22 of *Ecclesia in Asia* (“*Church in Asia,*” apostolic exhortation on the *Church in Asia*, Pope John Paul II, November 6, 1999).

UCA NEWS: In No. 54 of *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Pope Benedict advocates “continued inculturation of the Eucharist” and calls for “adaptations appropriate to different contexts and cultures.” What does this mean in Asia?

ARCHBISHOP RANJITH: Asia is generally considered to be the continent of contemplation, mysticism and a deep seated spiritual outlook on life. These orientations may have resulted from or even led to the origins of most world religions in this continent. Any attempts at inculturation of the liturgy or of Christian life cannot bypass these profoundly mystical orientations typical of Asia.

As Christians, we ought to show that Christianity is Asian in origin and it has an even profounder sense of mysticism within it that it can and wishes to share with others. It would be a pity if we strive to project our faith as an appendix of a secular and globalizing culture that endorses secular values and seeks to represent these in Asia. Unfortunately, sometimes in our way of doing things, we do project such an image. This makes us “foreigners” in our own continent.

Take, for example, the large scale abandonment of the cassock or religious garb by many priests and religious in Asia, even missionaries. They hardly understood that in Asian culture, persons dedicated to God or religion are always visible in his or her own garb, like the Buddhist monk or the Hindu *sannyasi* (holy man). This shows we do not understand what inculturation truly means. Often enough, it is limited to a dance or two during the Holy Mass or sprinkling of flowers, the *arathi* (closing prayer song) or beating a drum.

In mind and heart, however, we follow secular ways and values. If we are truly Asian, we should focus more attention on the mysticism of Jesus, His message of salvation, the great value of prayer, contemplation, detachment, simplicity of life, devoutness and reflection and the value of silence, and forms of liturgical celebration that focus great attention on the sacred and the transcendent. We Asians cannot be secularists who do not see anything beyond the visible and the tangible.

So too in liturgy, instead of concentrating on just a few exterior gestures of cosmetic value, we should focus on the accentuation of the mystical and the spiritual riches conveyed to us, and highlight these more and more even in our

dress and behavior. The universal church would gain from a church in Asia that becomes a tangible expression of Christian mysticism in an Asian way.

UCA NEWS: Regarding inculturation, Pope Benedict encourages episcopal conferences to “strive to maintain a proper balance between criteria and directives already issued and new adaptations, always in accord with the apostolic see.” Are bishops’ conferences in Asia working along these lines?

ARCHBISHOP RANJITH: Generally, I notice a lot of goodwill on the part of the episcopal conferences in this matter. However, there are problems too. As I mentioned, it may be better to have a clear spirit of coordination between the FABC (Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences) and our congregation in this matter. The FABC does have regional coordinating bodies for human development, evangelization, inculturation, ecumenism and dialogue, education, social communication, etc., but I am not aware of such a body for liturgy and worship. Establishing such a regional body would certainly help.

Liturgy is important, for “*lex orandi, lex credendi*” (the law of prayer is the law of belief). It would then be able to animate and provide quality, meaning and proper awareness to the national episcopal commissions for liturgy on this all important component of ecclesial life. A lot of work still needs to be done in order to achieve better results.

The “proper balance” about which the holy father speaks is due to the need to ensure, on one side, a healthy spirit of openness to inculturation in the liturgy, and, on the other, the need to safeguard the universal character of Catholic liturgy, a treasure handed down to the church by its bi-millennial tradition.

UCA NEWS: Can you give a concrete example of what “maintaining a proper balance between criteria and directives and new adaptations” means?

ARCHBISHOP RANJITH: By “proper balance,” the holy father means, on one side, faithfulness to the universal and Catholic tradition of the celebration of the holy Eucharist, enshrined in the Roman rite itself, and, on the other, the space provided in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and *Varietates Legitimae* for adaptations. As No. 21 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* indicates, there are “unchangeable elements divinely instituted” and “elements subject to change” in the liturgy. Only the latter may be changed, and even that is to be done on the basis of norms that the council itself laid out in the third chapter of the same document.

In the case of the Eucharist, it is the same approach. The Eucharist is not what the church made but what has been the Lord’s own gift to us, a treasure to be guarded. Hence, even though exigencies of evangelization and of the inculturation of the gospel message in various situations demands a certain amount of diversity, this is not to be left to the whims and fancies of the individual celebrant. The areas open to diversity are limited and pertain to language, music and singing, gestures and postures, art and processions [*SC* 39]. In these areas, adaptation is possible and should be undertaken after proper study, due approval of the bishops and then the consent of the apostolic see [*SC: Ch. III*].

Thus, the sense of balance between safeguarding the essentials and seeking to integrate cultural elements is very much needed if the church is to profit spiritually. At the same time, I would hold more essential not only adaptations of that type but the noble and dignified celebration of every liturgical act, making it reflect the mysticism of the East. It would be more helpful than just a series of external adaptations, even those introduced following established procedures.

Besides, the love of silence, a contemplative atmosphere, chant and singing reflective of the divine mystery celebrated on the altar, sober and decorous attire, and art and architecture reflective of the nobility of the sacred places and objects, are all Asian values often reflected in places of worship of other religions and more expressive of a truly Asian outlook on liturgy.

ARCHBISHOP RANJITH: The holy father is expressing his appreciation and encouragement of the heroic witness of some Christians for whom the practice of faith brings with it hardship, persecution and suffering. When we talk of such difficult situations, it does refer directly to places where there is explicit obstruction and persecution of the Christian communities. Such harassment is motivated at times by political factors, at other times by religious factors.

Some countries seek to impose or establish state sponsored “churches” to control the Catholic community that way. This latter type of attitude seeks to cut off the hierarchical bonds between these churches and the one of Peter in order to weaken them from within. Such attempts are not so successful, as the spiritual bonds, which cannot be broken that way, continue to link each ecclesial community to the universal church, the mystical body of Christ.

For me, however, another type of situation is more prevalent. It is generally common in Asia where, due to the predominance of one or the other world religion, there are restrictions and controls indirectly placed on the Catholic Church. In such situations, there exists an even worse form of undeclared harassment of Catholics. Missionaries are disallowed, it is difficult to construct ecclesial buildings as no permission for such is granted, public manifestations of faith are controlled, restrictions are placed on Catholic education, laws against conversion are put into force or proposed, and all kinds of discriminating acts are perpetrated. In short, in such situations one needs true heroism to profess and practice one’s faith.

I would not name these countries as such, for obvious reasons, but the world knows who they are. Given this situation, the call of the supreme pontiff, “for greater religious freedom in every nation so that Christians, as well as followers of other religions, can freely express their convictions, both as individuals and as communities” [*Sacr. Cari.* 87] is timely indeed.

UCA NEWS: In no. 62 of the exhortations, the pope suggests that celebration of Mass in Latin and use of Gregorian chant could be done on some occasions and in parts of the liturgy. What do you think Catholics in Asia feel about this? Have you detected a desire for the Mass in Latin among Catholics in Asia?

ARCHBISHOP RANJITH: *Sacrosanctum Concilium* never advocated total abandonment of Latin or of Gregorian chant. It stated that “the use of the Latin language, except when a particular law prescribed otherwise, is to be preserved in the Latin rites. ... But since the use of the vernacular ... may frequently be of great advantage to the people a wider use may be made of it especially in readings, directives and in some prayers and chants” [SC 36: 1-2]. Besides, it wished that “a suitable place may be allotted to the vernacular in Masses which are celebrated with the people, especially in the readings and ‘the common prayer’, and also as local conditions may warrant, in those parts which pertain to the people” [SC 54].

In the same passage, the council wished that care be taken to “ensure that the faithful may also be able to say or sing together in Latin those parts of the ordinary of the Mass which pertain to them” [*ibid.*].

The point is that the vernacular is not the normal language of the liturgy for *Sacrosanctum Concilium* but Latin, with permission being granted for the vernacular to be used in specific areas such as the readings, some prayers and chants and parts that pertain to the people. What is remarkable is that it advocates the use of Latin even in “those parts of the ordinary of the Mass which pertain to them” [SC 54].

Unfortunately, a quasi total abandonment of Latin took place almost everywhere soon after the council, so only the older generation of Catholics in Asia has an idea of the use of Latin in the liturgy and of Gregorian chant. With a strong vernacularization of the Liturgy and of seminary formation, the use of Latin did almost completely disappear from most of Asia.

This is rather unfortunate. I am not sure if there is a marked yearning for a return of Latin in the liturgy in Asia. I hope it would be so. Some Catholics who are aware of the beauty of Latin do express such a desire. They have seen or come to experience liturgies celebrated in Latin in Rome or elsewhere and

are fascinated by it. Others are fascinated by the old Latin rite, the Pius V Mass now being celebrated in some places of Asia.

But the larger portion of Asian Catholics is still unaware of the value of Latin in the holy Mass. I wonder what they would say if some form of Latin is reintroduced. They might like it and, knowing the spirit of devotion that Asian Catholics carry within themselves, it would certainly help deepen their faith even further. Our people know that not all divine realities are within the reach of human understanding and that there should be room for some sense of spiritual mystery in worship.

Besides, it would be good for the church in Asia not to remain cut off from new trends emerging universally, one of which is a fresh appreciation of the church's bi-millennial Latin heritage. This is not to say we ought to abandon the vernacular and embrace Latin *in toto*. A sound and sober use of Latin as well as the vernacular, on the lines of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, would be a gain for all. Besides, in Asia some other religions have preserved an official "liturgical" language, like Sanskrit for Hinduism and Pali for Buddhism. These are not spoken languages but are used only in worship. Are they not teaching us a lesson that a "liturgical language" which is not in common use can better express an inner mysticism of the "sacred" in worship?

UCA NEWS: The pope wants "future priests" to learn Latin in seminaries, so as to read Latin texts and sing Gregorian chant. How do you think young Asians studying for the priesthood regard that call? Will Asia's seminaries welcome it?

ARCHBISHOP RANJITH: There is no question of a welcoming. I think it is a need, and rather than falling into a well of isolationist narrow mindedness or a purely empiricist approach to faith that, by the way, is not Asian and does not leave room for an understanding of that which is transcendent, our priests and seminarians should be encouraged to open out to the wider reality of their faith, which is Catholic and universal, its bi-millennial roots and development and its mystical and sacred dimensions. And since Latin has been at the very root of much of the developments in theology, liturgy, and ecclesial discipline all along, seminarians and priests should be encouraged to learn and use it.

This would help the church in Asia not only to grasp better the content of the *depositum fidei* (deposit of faith) and its development, but also discover a theological language of its own, capable of presenting the faith to the peoples of Asia convincingly [*cfr. Ecclesia in Asia 20*]. Learning Latin is in no way a going backward but, on the contrary, going forward. Only thus could a truly profound process of inculturation take place. Any so-called theology not rooted in the founts of sacred scriptures and the tradition of the church, prayed on one's knees and illumined by the light of a holy life is but empty noise-making and would lead only to disorder and confusion.

The same is true of liturgy. Latin is the ordinary liturgical language of the church. In the origin and development of the Roman rite, it had a major role to play. Thus, a sufficient knowledge of this language would facilitate a better understanding and appreciation of the beauty of what is celebrated. As the holy father stated, “the beauty of the liturgy is part of this mystery; it is a sublime expression of God's glory and, in a certain sense, a glimpse of heaven on earth” [*Sacr. Carit. 35*].

Celebrating in Latin thus would help build a sense of awe and respect as well as a profound spiritual link with what the Lord himself inspired the church to assume as its form of worship. This openness to Latin would also help the students appreciate better the role of Gregorian chant in the church. The holy father wishes that it “be suitably esteemed and employed” as it is the “chant proper to the Roman liturgy” [*Sacr. Carit. 42*]. Learning the simplicity and beauty of this great body of chant would also help musically talented priests and seminarians in Asia to be inspired by it and be able to compose dignified and prayerful chant forms that can harmonize better with the local culture. It would be presumptuous to assume that using Gregorian chant would harm inculturation of the liturgy. It could actually be beneficial.

UCA NEWS: Is there anything else you wish to tell churches in Asia about the exhortation and how they should implement it?

ARCHBISHOP RANJITH: A careful look at *Sacramentum Caritatis* convinces me more and more that it is not only a treasure trove of information, inspiration and a truly pastoral yet deeply theological reflection on the Eucharist but, more so, a document that seeks to bring to completion that which was truly desired by the Second Vatican Council and its document on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. The post-conciliar reform of the Liturgy, though laudable in some aspects, had not been all that faithful to the spirit of the council.

As Cardinal Ferdinando Antonelli, a member of the commission that worked on the reform then, attested: “I am not happy about the spirit. There is a spirit of criticism and impatience towards the Holy See which would not augur well. And then, everything is a study on the rationality of the liturgy and no concern for true piety. I am afraid that one day one would say of all this reform what was said about the reform of the hymns at the time of Urban VIII: *accepit liturgia recessit pietas* (as liturgy progresses, piety goes backward); and here *accepit liturgia recessit devotio* (as liturgy progresses, devotion goes backward). I hope I am wrong” [from the diaries of Cardinal Antonelli, April 30, 1965].

We have seen a lot of banalization and obscuring of the mystical and sacred aspects of the liturgy in many areas of the church in the name of a so-called “Konzilsgeist” (council spirit).

In the last 20 years or so, the church has sought to set the course of liturgical reform straight and in line with the indications of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Documents such as *Liturgiam Authenticam*, *Varietates legitimae*, *Redemptionis Sacramentum* and *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* are part of that attempt, and *Sacramentum Caritatis*, which is a collegial document in that it collects the propositions of the bishops’ Synod on the Holy Eucharist, is the culminating moment, I would say, of that course of “setting things right.” It truly is a correction of course and should be welcomed, appreciated, studied and put into practice.

The cultural heritage of Asia is deeply religious and conscious of the value of the sacred and mystical in human life. So the church in Asia should welcome this document and its orientations, which are directed very much towards a restoration of the profound values of spirituality and faith into liturgy most wholeheartedly and take necessary steps to implement its indications as zealously and as faithfully as possible.

This is my wish for the church in Asia, the continent of mysticism.

Gerard O'Connell is the special correspondent in Rome for UCA News.

The End.