

**LITURGY**

**REFLECTIONS ON THE**

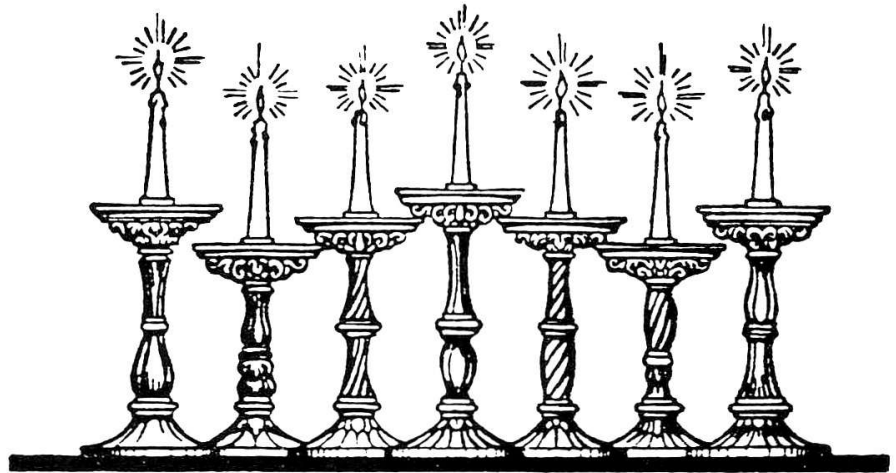
**IN HONG KONG:**

**PAST, PRESENT,**

**AND**

**FUTURE POSSIBILITIES**

by John F. Ahearn M.M.



Having accepted the invitation to set down in writing some reflections on a decade of involvement in the liturgical life of a local church, I begin to realize just how overwhelming that task can be. It becomes even more difficult when the one reflecting is "foreign born", handicapped by language deficiencies, cultural attitudes, and other such baggage. In striving to look as objectively as possible at the local situation, one must also face up to these limitations and weaknesses and try to deal with them as honestly as possible. What I propose to do, then, in this short paper is to indicate how the liturgical life of the Diocese of Hong Kong has developed in recent years, move on to how

I see the present situation, and, in conclusion, offer a few suggestions about how I would like to see the liturgical movement here develop over the next ten years. Let me acknowledge at the outset how indebted I am in these reflections to the creative energy and faith of those who have been, are now, and will continue to be intimately involved in the liturgical life of this local church...which I have come to call my own.

While limiting my reflections to the years I know best - 1975 to 1986, I would like to begin, by way of introduction, with a brief survey of the years immediately following the Second Vatican Council. The task of that time was of staggering proportions: it was nothing short of creating and implementing an entire vernacular liturgy, and to do it in the shortest possible time. Practically speaking, it involved massive translation work, and also the formation-education of clergy, religious and laity. The challenge was worldwide, but for Hong Kong it was even more formidable given the fact that the diocese belonged to no episcopal conference and was, relatively speaking, on its own. Certainly there was the desire and willingness for close cooperation with other Chinese speaking regions, such as Taiwan and Macau; however, the uniqueness of the Cantonese dialect, spoken by most of the people of Hong Kong, demanded a certain amount of independence in translating the new Roman texts. A positive factor in all of this was that its independence also encouraged a greater degree of flexibility and creativity in the diocesan approach to the whole problem of its own liturgical development.

During this period, new texts poured from the presses. The diocese prepared its own versions of the Sunday Mass texts, the rites of infant baptism and confirmation, wedding and funeral liturgies, part of the Psalter for the Liturgy of the Hours, settings for the vernacular Mass and a collection of Chinese hymns. It also adopted texts approved by the Taiwan Episcopal Conference, which included the texts for the ordinary of the Mass, the prayers and readings for weekday Masses, as well as the rite for the anointing of the sick. I was not in Hong Kong at this time, and I hope I have not omitted any major works undertaken by those involved in the vital task of this decade.

It was around 1975 when the Liturgy Commission of

the Diocese began to take on a more defined form and fuller structure, with a direction of its own. Following the general guidelines laid down in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy and working under the Bishop, the Commission gradually formulated three definite areas of responsibility:

1. the liturgical formation and education of clergy and laity, and the development of the overall liturgical life of the diocese;
2. to act as advisor to the bishop in liturgical matters, assessing present needs and future development;
3. the preparation and execution of all liturgical celebrations at the diocesan level, i.e. rites and ceremonies presided over by the bishop.

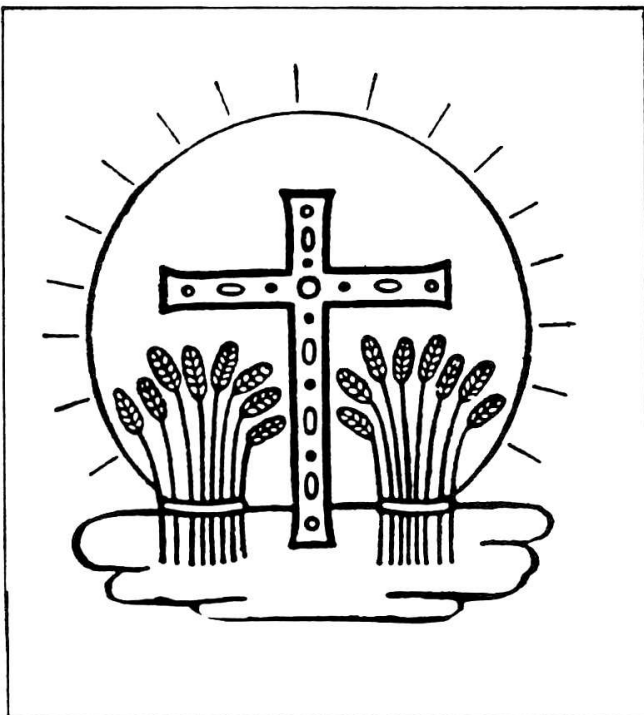
The above areas of responsibility continue to define the purpose and directions of the Liturgy Commission up to the present time.

Representatives of the clergy, religious and laity were invited to become members of the Commission. Their role was to oversee the work of the Commission Office, (which took care of the actual day-to-day operation), to foster good relations with other diocesan structures and organizations, and to offer advice and encouragement for new projects and suggestions for new directions in all areas of liturgical development. The Commission, through the expansion of the liturgy curriculum at the major seminary, brought seminarians into closer involvement with its work, especially in the formation and celebration of the liturgy on the diocesan level.

The more pressing needs of the diocese were handled first. A network of communication began to take shape with the establishment of parish liturgy committees. Special liturgical texts were prepared for the celebration of major local festivals, such as the Lunar New Year, Ching Ming and Chung Yeung. "For the Life of the World", a newsletter dealing with up to date developments in the liturgy, was made available to all the parishes. A set of various rites for the Sacrament of Reconciliation was prepared and made available for use throughout the diocese. A diocesan Liturgical Arts and Architecture Commission was established to help those involved in renovating or constructing places

of worship. Along with the above, the Commission sponsored seminars for clergy, religious and laity on how best to implement the revised rites and ceremonies as they became available for use.

One of the important roles the Commission played was in facilitating the many liturgical changes that have become a feature of the modern church renewal. Some of these changes can add confusion and distress if not properly handled on the pastoral level. A case in point was the implementation of the indult, originally given in 1969, allowing for reception of Holy Communion in the hand. It met with a certain amount of resistance among a minority of the clergy and laity, but after an extensive educational campaign throughout the diocese, the option was adopted and has now become an ordinary way of receiving Communion, alongside the more familiar form of oral reception.



Interest in the liturgy continued to grow in Hong Kong, and parishes made greater efforts to establish their own liturgy committees. To help them, a handbook was published, and staff visits were made to each parish to encourage their formation and to offer assistance in setting them up. Study camps and seminars dealing in a wide variety of liturgical topics were also conducted to satisfy the growing interest among Christians of all ages and backgrounds in the liturgical renewal.

As work progressed, it became more and more apparent that one of Hong Kong's greatest needs was for a review of the rites used for the Christian initiation of adults into the Church. Hong Kong has always enjoyed the grace of having many adult catechumens. However, the catechetical programmes and liturgical rites surrounding the catechumens were scattered in terms of quality and method.

In general, a period of instruction was followed by baptism, using an adapted form of the baptismal rite for children, with the new Christians received into each Christian community in relative isolation from the larger community of the local church. There was a growing desire for some structures and rites to integrate the catechumenate and the conversion experience into the full liturgical life of the church. Close co-operation with the catechetical centre, and consultations with catechists, clergy, and others began. Study was made of the model rite of adult initiation. Seminars were conducted for the clergy and for catechists. The model rite was studied and adapted for use in the Diocese. In addition, in order to bring the initiation process into a wider Diocesan scale, area and Diocesan liturgical gatherings of the elect and newly baptized were organized and have become part of the Diocesan liturgical life and integral to most of the parish catechumenates. Today, Hong Kong has the catechumenate established in all parishes. The liturgical rites surrounding the stages of the catechumenate, as well as the reception of the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist at the Paschal Vigil are more or less standard practice in most parishes.

Emphasis on this initiation process for adult catechumens has been the Commission's main thrust for several years now. In my opinion, it is imperative that these rites continue to develop and find wide acceptance among pastors and catechists. If catechumens have a genuine conversion experience (whatever way this might express itself in terms of each individual), steeped in the scriptures and rooted in liturgical life, the future of the church will be strong and vibrant. (This I believe to be the number one priority of the local church, not simply in terms of its liturgical elements but also including its catechetical content and methodology.)

Music is inseparable from liturgy, and during this time work began on compiling a new hymnal specifically aimed for general use at liturgical functions. Selected for their liturgical suitability, most of the chants and hymns were composed by local artists, with efforts being made to bring them into harmony with the tonal structure of the Cantonese dialect. At the same time, the Commission undertook the

task of reprinting a previous hymnal, after the arduous task of tracking down those who held the copyrights and obtaining their permission for publication.

The needs of children were of special concern to the Commission. A Children's Liturgy booklet, containing eucharistic prayers for children and other prayers suitable for the celebration of liturgies with children, was brought out for use in the parishes. This was followed by a revision of the funeral liturgy, which also included the rite for use at a cremation, which was rapidly becoming the most common form of burial in this overcrowded territory. The Eucharistic prayers for the sacrament of reconciliation were also translated and published at this time.

The Asian Colloquium on New Ministries, sponsored by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences aroused even further interest in a topic that had been discussed for a long time: how best to develop non-ordained ministries in local churches. The primary concern of the Liturgy Commission was, naturally enough, concerned with Liturgical Ministries. First consideration was given to the ministries of reader and acolyte. Because of the canonical stipulation that these ministries be limited to men, the Commission made no effort to develop these ministries in an official way. Instead, it offered training courses and seminars to help the "unofficial" readers of the diocese, men and women who already had the responsibility for proclaiming the Word of God at liturgical celebrations. Focus then turned to the need for special ministers of the Eucharist. This ministry, given to both men and women, has been implemented in about one third of the parishes in the Diocese. The service of these ministers include the assisting in the administration of communion during the Eucharist and in bringing the Eucharist on Sunday and feast days to the sick and the elderly. Initially, there was some fear that such ministry would not be accepted by the faithful. However, in fact this has not been the case. The only ones to resist this ministry have been the clergy.

Among the Commission's more recent publications have been the revised texts for funerals, rites for the dedication and blessing of churches, and the rite for reception of a baptized Christian into full communion with the Church.

A more ambitious project has been the revision of the liturgical texts for the ordinary of the Mass and the texts used for Sundays. The original translations were of uneven quality in some places, and the booklets themselves were in poor condition due to much use, so it was decided to revise the translation. The publication by the church in Taiwan of a revised translation gave further impetus to this task. Already several seasonal booklets have been completed, and it is hoped that the work will be completed within two years. When it is finally finished, it will allow for the publication of a Chinese Sacramentary, Lectionary and Gospel Book; to date, there are no such publications in the Chinese language.

The Wedding Liturgy is also in the process of being revised and will include many more local options.

There have been a lot of other types of activity of the Commission including efforts to have celebrations of Solemn Evening Prayer or services of the Word as alternatives to the Eucharist for certain Diocesan functions. (This would be on such occasions as Easter Sunday or on other days when there have been other Eucharistic celebrations.) Efforts have also been made to encourage other types of celebrations than the Eucharist for schools etc. when the majority of participants would not be Catholic. One of the problems encountered in these years has been the fact that it seems that the only type of liturgical gathering common today is the Eucharist. It seems that is the only thing that most parishes know how to do when they gather. The richness of the past with its myriad forms of devotions and the Liturgy of the Hours needs to be studied so that a wider variety of liturgical celebrations may be possible today.

Before closing this part of my reflections, I would like to draw attention to the great amount of progress made in recent years in assisting in the training of choirs, musicians, and choir directors. The Sacred Music Committee of the Commission holds regular seminars and study days for parish choirs. It enables choirs to define their liturgical role as servants of the worshipping community gathered for prayer and not as members of a chorus putting on a recital. Plans are now underway for the formation of a diocesan choir, and a third hymnal is also being readied for use in the diocese.

I hope the above report, while not exhaustive by any means, might give the reader some idea of the nature and scope of the work of the Liturgy Commission in Hong Kong, especially during the past ten years. I would like to move on now to some reflections on the present situation as I see it, with some very personal observations on how I view the task ahead.

### The Laity

The laity in Hong Kong has shown great interest in the liturgy - in its preparation and proper celebration. Yet the question remains: how much have the liturgical reforms really touched the lives of the majority of believers? Most of the participants in liturgy seminars, workshops, lectures, extra-mural programmes, etc. are young people, seeking as they say... "further understanding of the meaning of the liturgy." The young take advantage of every educational opportunity offered, and still they retain the desire to learn more...no amount seems to be enough to satisfy their hunger. Despite all this, the fact that liturgy is first and foremost worship does not seem to have entered yet into their thinking. Often they approach liturgy as a puzzle to be solved, or a series of intricate ceremonies to be explained, re-explained, and then explained again. It seems to me that the evidence points to a serious lack of liturgical formation in the catechumenate, our Sunday schools, and other religious formation programmes which we offer our young. This lack I would call the failure to bring our catechumens and children first of all to the experience of God in prayer. I am more and more convinced that many of our so-called liturgical problems are not liturgical problems at all, but rather the result of a failure to meet successfully the challenge of basic Christian formation, especially in the area of scriptural formation.

However, one cannot put all of the blame on the lack of good solid Christian formation. What is also seemingly amiss is the quality and types of liturgical celebrations that the vast majority of the faithful are subjected to. Week in and week out, in hastily prepared celebrations that seem to be simply recitation of texts at people, in surroundings that seem to show little or no care or upkeep or attempt at decoration or cleanliness - such celebrations (if they may be so called) can only tend to develop numbness or at most confusion in all but the most immune.



Christian liturgy is an art form, a ritual activity in which faith is recognized, renewed, consoled and strengthened in encounter with God. The liturgy should be at the heart of catechesis, spirituality, prayer, community life, and serve as the source of Christian witness and mission. All too often I have heard the young ask: "What is the meaning of the liturgy; what does it have to do with my life?" The question points to the failure of our liturgy to become part of the fabric of Christian life as experienced in Hong Kong. All too often for far too many, the liturgy is something stilted, alien and not fulfilling. To be sure, there are those who do enter deeply into prayer during liturgical celebrations, but I have a feeling they do so not because of but in spite of the ritual, and most of these are to be found among our elderly. Youth is full of enthusiasm; they are also very self-conscious. Their self-consciousness is reflected in their faith. This is due in part to the many pressures they are subjected to in our modern society, its clash of cultures, and the urban environment. In many cases, the liturgy is for them a hollow act, only one of many activities demanding their attention - and certainly not the most important one. Yet the study of the liturgy continues to be an educational attraction for them, perhaps because it offers a hope for solving the puzzle. The worship of God seems to be too simple, almost superficial, to them. And I propose that what lies at the root of this attitude is the experience of worship to which they have been exposed.

For many, faith or religion is reduced to a set of moral teachings, a list of rules and regulations on right conduct, and even the gospels are searched out for what they have to say about proper ethical behaviour. Unfortunately, the search is in vain, for the gospels are not primarily about teaching a rule of moral conduct, but rather, they have much to say about relationships - our relationship with God, with ourselves, and with each other. I suspect that today we are paying the price for a catechetical mind-set based on moral precepts, which characterized the church for many centuries. Such a catechesis may be said to have de-racinated people - not only with regard to China but in other places as well. However, a western mind-set or world-view does not fit comfortably on the people of the East. In fact, it is a rather ill-fitting garment which may serve

the purpose of protecting the wearer from the elements and retaining warmth against the cold, but it is one worn without much comfort and seldom with beauty. These days, this discomfort is voiced more and more in rumblings of discontent and perplexity, in the assertion of neo-nationalism and even racism. The present quest for localization and indigenization is a modern imperative, and one that calls for a new type of garment. What this might mean for local churches is something that has yet to develop. But the numbers of active laity now involved in the church here are an inspiration to anyone who is working to open up new frontiers for the development of ministry. Already, more and more ministerial responsibilities have been returned to the laity, whose rightful owners they indeed are. And a new type of catechist is now being formed, one that not only imparts information about the faith, but knows from the wisdom born of experience what that faith is all about. This kind of catechist is an absolute necessity.

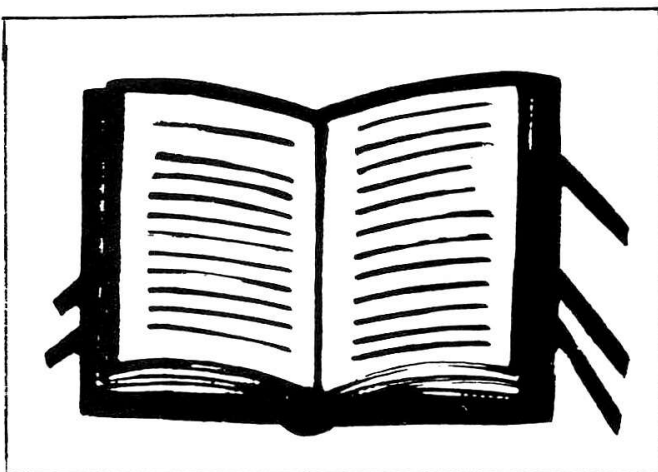
One might ask what all of the above has to do with the liturgy and its future development. The answer is simply: everything. If the faith foundation is solid, and it is lived and celebrated liturgically, the future development of the Church in Hong Kong will be secure. But it must be given room to grow.

### The Clergy

For the past twelve years, it has been my responsibility and privilege to have been involved in the formation and education of the seminarians and young clergy of the diocese. In their dedication, faith, and spirituality, they have been for me a source of inspiration and strength. I have also worked closely with many of the older and more experienced priests. It is primarily their interest and commitment that has enabled the Church of Hong Kong to grow.

In all honesty, however, it must be noted that here as elsewhere there are signs of uneasiness, struggle and discontent between the two groups of younger and older clergy when it comes to matters concerning the liturgy. A young priest may be assigned to a parish where liturgy is an activity to be hastily and perfunctorily performed, or the object of neglect, or weighed down with peculiarities that result more

from the individual peculiarities of the pastor than from any theological, historical, or spiritual inspiration. In such a situation, the young priest can do no more than hold his own or make independent efforts to survive in what is seen and felt as an uncomfortable or even hostile environment. Under such circumstances, the liturgy is not a haven



but rather a battlefield for opposing views. The multiplication of different liturgical practices within the parish and among neighboring parishes adds confusion to disharmony. Correcting such a state of affairs is made more difficult by the fact that the liturgy has been so much a part of clerical identity in the past so as to encourage the false assumption that all priests are "experts" in this area, an assumption that exists even among those who rarely spend time on its study or reflect on its major importance in their parish ministry. Ultimately, it is the people who suffer.

Another factor that can dull the enthusiasm and zeal of many of the younger clergy, is the amount of energy that must be poured into the parish just to maintain its present existence. Attention to the tasks that have accumulated with its history, so many of which are non-essential, can drain a young priest of his innate missionary zeal. Often the pastor, himself caught in the web of parish activities, is unwilling or unable to play the role of "master" to a "disciple" - an educational role innate to Asian cultures and part of a young man's expectation.

The frustration of the young priest sometimes gives birth to some strange phenomena. He regresses to a kind of theology not learned in the seminary but one he only half absorbed, and often erroneously, as a child in catechism class. The liturgy becomes for him his only forum for self-assertion, a way of letting the people know that he is there. Yet preaching the Word of God becomes a terrible burden to him.

The task of opening the Word of God for the congrega-

tion is often sloughed off in favour of comments on "life" or "social reflections". Fear of rejection can lead him to forget the hard words of the gospel, and even to abandon the herculean task of scriptural preaching as being "too far above the heads of the people." One must add to this list the cultural constraints and role expectations in order to fully appreciate how such pressures are not easily faced nor relieved. All of this takes its toll on the clergy and hence on the liturgy. When the clergy are faced with faithful and others who 'know more' than they do, as always, those threatened resort to authoritarianism to cope. The primary area of conflict in this regard is usually the liturgy.

### The Rites

I have long had a vague, uneasy feeling about the use of the Roman Rite in developing further the worship-life of the church in Hong Kong. In my earlier analogy, I likened it to a garment that no longer, if ever, really fits. To be sure, it has served the purpose of helping to give warmth, protection, form, and shape to the worship-life of a young Chinese church. But I believe the time has come to weave new garments better tailored to the Body of Christ as we find it today in Hong Kong.

The Roman Rite has its own particular genius and beauty. It is characterized by its simplicity and theological purity. Highly intellectual in content and meaning, it finds in the Latin language an almost perfect vehicle for the expression of these traits. The question must be asked however, is this the ethos of the Chinese church? To take one example: it is virtually impossible to translate into Chinese many of the theological terms found in the Latin liturgy. I am more and more of the mind that the Roman Rite is simply not an adequate enough vehicle to give shape and expression to the faith of a people whose culture is highly symbolic and ritualizing, and whose life-styles are defined by myriads of interlocking relationships where feeling abounds and intellectual explanations often find little relevance when confronted with the consuming desire for harmony in all things.

This failure of the Roman Rite to mesh well with the Chinese mind and character never seems so alien and inadequate as it does when called upon to ritualize marriages, funerals, language and music. Unfortunately, I have never personally experienced the style and form of worship as it was celebrated in pre-Vatican II Hong Kong. I have been told, however, that it much resembled the style of celebration found in the newly re-opened churches on the mainland. It was a highly ritualized event, with few if any printed texts for the faithful to follow, as they chanted aloud the prayers of the Mass or other prayers in Chinese. The chanting was interspersed with moments of silence, while through it all the priest continued to celebrate the Mass in Latin. This type of communal prayer or liturgical style can still be experienced here to some degree when older Christians gather for wakes, or for adoration on Holy Thursday, or for some other occasions of devotion. It is a completely unselfconscious, reverent, and totally engaging form of prayer; and in my opinion it could well have served as the starting point for the development of a Chinese rite following the reforms of Vatican II. This, however, is hindsight and hindsight achieves nothing. The fact is that the ecclesial climate of that time would never have tolerated such a 'deviation'. Today that situation has changed.

One of the unfortunate results of the Vatican II reforms in liturgy, with its emphasis on translation of texts as the basic method of implementation, has been the de-ritualization of worship. The predominant style of celebration becomes a formal recitation of texts, with participation relegated to 'reading along'; here the 'medium' is forsaken for the 'message'; singing and chanting are confined to only certain portions of the ceremony; ritual movements are stilted and self-conscious rather than relaxed and expansive; art and symbol are abandoned and give way before a new wave of utilitarianism and the lust for greater efficiency; the faithful are numbed into a state of senselessness by words, words and more words. The real struggle going on here is a people trying to cope with an alien form of worship. Liturgical education is reduced to the explanation of texts, or an exercise in some type of form criticism that is of little interest to either the clergy or the laity.

The liturgy never has been, nor should it ever become, a matter of liturgical texts. When the new rites were introduced unease and dissatisfaction with these new forms manifested itself in Hong Kong as elsewhere in the rampant changing, deleting, addition and editing of the rites by individuals, and also in appeals to the authority of the rubrics, liturgical laws, and sacred commissions to do something about it. Authority was being called upon to either get rid of the garment or at least tailor it to fit properly.

The generation whose faith was nurtured and developed by the 'new' liturgy are precisely the ones who are today searching for the meaning of the liturgy. It is ironic that their yearning for fellowship, peace and joy, which should be the fruits of Sunday worship, are now finding more fulfillment in Sunday yam chas and picnics, with the result that the search for meaning in the liturgy is frequently abandoned in favour of more readily accessible and engaging forms of community expression. The same indifference can be found among the clergy. It is not a question of dedication or commitment in either group. The task lies in finding the appropriate ways of giving authentic expression to our faith-life in a liturgy that is readily accessible, whose meaning is grasped on many levels and a Liturgy that is totally engaging.

A larger part of the work of the Liturgical Commission in Hong Kong has been in translating and implementing the texts of the Roman Rite. And this work will have to continue into the future. There is a strong commitment here to intelligent and accurate textual translations, and an equally strong reluctance to depart from the texts and liturgical legislation and rubrics, already set down by Rome. Given the present approach to translation and liturgical celebration, there will remain the need for some years to come to 'explain' everything in order to make up for weaknesses in basic catechesis and ritual experiences. The Commission will continue to commit itself to further this education, and above all to continue to encourage

the laity and clergy's appreciation and concern for liturgy.

Yet this is not enough. As the Church in Hong Kong seeks to strengthen itself and renew itself in Christ, as it seeks to discern more clearly its mission both in Hong Kong and as part of the Chinese nation, I believe it must develop new liturgical forms that can give shape, and meaning, comfort and beauty to a growing local church whose need and desire is to give authentic worship to the Lord.

As a necessary step in achieving this goal, I would suggest that a liturgical centre be established in the diocese. This should not be an office, but rather a community, a parish or its equivalent, where serious experimentation with forms, ritual, and the creation of Chinese liturgical texts can take place in a worship environment. Such a community should be broad-based, not catering simply to one or another age group, and certainly not to the disgruntled or those seeking something other than authentic worship in faith.

Such a worship-centre would have the direction and cooperation of people with a variety of liturgy-related skills, e.g. sociologists, anthropologists, urban specialists, artists, musicians, theologians, scripture scholars, linguists, experts on Chinese history and culture, as well as liturgists. I would see the task of such a team as taking the basic framework of Christian liturgy: the seven sacraments and the liturgy of the hours common to all the rites, and developing new forms of such celebrations that would be compatible with the ethos and traditions of the local people. This team would also develop a liturgical cycle and lectionary more in tune with the needs of the local church. This would, of necessity, be based on the general framework of the liturgical year of the eastern and western churches and also on the revised lectionary, which is finding acceptance in many non-Catholic Christian churches as well. At the

same time, the centre would attempt to discern and develop forms of popular piety which would flow from and are related to the liturgy. After successful experimentation and discernment, these forms would be introduced gradually into the local liturgy in Hong Kong and even for use in Chinese churches in general.

What I am suggesting is not merely a reshuffling of the present texts and rites, or a superficial 'sinicization' of existing forms of worship; nor am I suggesting a return to some motion-picture set interpretation of China's cultural past. While Chinese culture and cultural forms have roots, traditions, and a history, the culture is continuing to evolve, grow, and develop; a fact that has to be taken into consideration in all of this. Our criterion, then, must be the Gospel as it is heard, accepted, and lived out in our present society. It is from this that the garment of Christian worship must be woven.

Let me hasten to add that I am not calling for a schism, nor for a rejection of all things Roman. But I do feel it is time that we strive to implement the full vision of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, and that the encouragement and support already given during this period of reform be utilized to develop a local liturgy. It is not, in fact, the use of the Roman rite which makes the Roman Catholic Church what it is. Now, in the past, and into the future, it is the certainty of our faith, our unity, our obedience to the Gospel that defines the Church. Under the universal pastorship of the Holy Father, linked with the apostolic church through the bishops, the Church is truly one, holy, catholic and apostolic. Being the Body of Christ in the world today, is what makes us a church, and not simply the use of identical texts for liturgical worship.

It used to strike me as particularly odd that the Catholic church in China, while staunchly asserting its right to independence as strictly a Chinese church, continues to use a totally non-Chinese liturgy - the Tridentine Rite - in worship. This apparent contradiction, however, must be understood in light of China's long history of dealing successfully with contradiction and even living in harmony with contradiction. Based on my experience of the Hong Kong church, I do believe the church in China has a distinct



advantage here in being in a position to develop a genuine Chinese form of worship, which must surely come with time. There are those who feel that we can best assist the church in China by making our Chinese texts available to them and encouraging them to follow the same pattern we ourselves are following. When requests come to our office for Chinese liturgical texts, I always send them off with a certain amount of reluctance. My reluctance does not spring from any fear of government complications, but rather from the fear that we might be imposing on them yet another alien form of worship, offering another ill-fitting garment not properly tailored to their needs. Certainly, the many small communities in China that are now using in private the Chinese texts do find great consolation in being able to understand the prayers and especially the scriptures. Yet, I cannot bring myself to believe that simple translation is enough.

I am sure that the Church in China will develop in time a Chinese rite. But I also believe that the task of the church in Hong Kong is to take immediate steps in this direction. It is only a matter of time before the garment must be changed, and if the church here can begin to develop now new forms of worship from its reflection on its own worship experience, this will be of inestimable value in the task of developing a true Chinese rite which can readily find acceptance in most Chinese Catholic communities. In Hong Kong, we have not only the experience and the expertise, but we also have the freedom and enthusiasm to begin this vital task.

Ten years of experience is really not a lot, yet, I offer these reflections as my honest impressions of where we must go. The negative points that I have raised are by no means criticisms, but rather the pointing out of the signs and the symptoms that the liturgical garment no longer fits.