

## LITURGY IN THE LIFE AND MISSION OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS: THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL MEETING

More than 60 Jesuits from 22 countries gathered together at the Archdiocese of Bangkok's Baan Phu Waan Pastoral Training Centre from the 21<sup>st</sup> to the 25<sup>th</sup> of June 2004 to continue discussions begun two years ago in Rome on the role that liturgy plays within the role of Jesuit life and our common mission. They were joined by a number of advisors, including Ling-Chu Teresa Chien, Director of a newly-founded liturgical research institute at the Jesuit University in Taipei, Toshimitsu Miyakoshi, Executive Secretary of the Committee on Liturgy for the Japanese Bishops' Conference, and Dr. Suwanna Sathanand, the leading specialist on Buddhism in Thailand.

Despite the fact that there are more trained Jesuit liturgical scholars in the world than in any other religious order, I often encounter a certain level of suspicion in my visits to various Jesuit communities around the world. "Isn't 'Jesuit' and 'liturgist' a contradiction in terms?" they ask. I think this is in part because some Jesuits still think of liturgy as merely "rubrics" and a gathering of Jesuits on the topic of liturgy might suggest that their agenda is to correct the liturgical practice of their brothers! Most of us are well acquainted with the joke about liturgists and terrorists: "You can at least negotiate with a terrorist!" It must be said that over the years some of the criticisms about liturgists (even "Jesuit liturgists!") have not been without foundation.

But the reforms of the Second Vatican Council promoted a liturgy that

considers very significant the role which Christian worship plays in forming moral behavior; its integrative in uniting the “service of faith” and “the promotion of justice,” or as the Council’s Liturgy Constitution called it: “the source and summit of the Christian life.” Here, as “contemplatives in action” and those committed to “the faith that does justice,” we Jesuits actually have a rightful place in the liturgical academy, and — I would even venture to say — have an important contribution to make to the Church’s liturgical renewal precisely as Jesuits. In a very Ignatian way, Karl Rahner often spoke of this Jesuit approach to liturgy as “the Liturgy of the World” — liturgy that intersects with life and recognizes the intrinsic relationship between the Body of Christ celebrated in the Eucharist and the poor and suffering Body of Christ which lies abandoned in doorways and in the streets of our cities.

Rahner’s “Liturgy of the World” has both called to mind the important work Jesuits have done historically in the area of inculturation and also left the challenge of making inculturation of the gospel a priority in our ministry as Jesuits in our own day. Indeed, whether one thinks of Matteo Ricci and the so called “Chinese Rites Controversy” or of numerous other examples from Jesuit history, we have a rich tradition in commitment to the relationship between faith and culture with worship at its centre which should encourage us as we move toward the future — even with our decreasing numbers.

The first meeting on Jesuit liturgy held in Rome two years ago was a larger gathering of almost 140 coming from 35 countries, and was more formal in style, treating a variety of topics: the liturgical renewal of Vatican II; Liturgy in the Society of Jesus; the Sacramentality of the Word; Inculturation; Ecumenism; Interreligious Dialogue; the Liturgy of the World; Liturgy and Justice. Participants at that meeting were asked to delineate the major liturgical issues for the Society of Jesus as we look toward the future. When the preparatory commission met afterwards to tabulate the results of the survey, there was a surprising level of unanimity coming from all corners of the globe: Yes, there was universal concern about the liturgical formation of younger Jesuits (especially in the area of preaching and liturgical presidency) but of the greatest concern was the topic of inculturation — both our proclamation of the Word and our worship. Father General agreed with the group’s consensus about the

importance of the topic in our desire as Jesuits to serve the universal mission of the Church in this postmodern society, thus we agreed that inculturation would be the next topic to be treated by the Jesuit liturgists.

Given the vastness of the topic itself, the Bangkok meeting limited its scope to the Inculturation of the Liturgy of the Word. Two excellent keynote presentations were offered by noted Indian anthropologist Michael Amaladoss, S.J. and Anscar Chupungco, O.S.B., a Filipino scholar who introduced the concept of liturgical inculturation to the universal Church after the Council. Following those foundational presentations, participants spent the remainder of the week in cultural/language groups (and alternately in plenary session) working on a statement which will be discussed and approved at the next meeting scheduled for 2006, and then published and made available both in the Society and throughout the wider Church. In 1995, The Lutheran World Federation approved a similar statement at an international meeting at Nairobi and that text has been widely utilized in ecumenical circles ever since. Our hope is that through the lens of Jesuit spirituality and mission, we will be able to add a uniquely Ignatian perspective to that same discussion.

On a human level, the two gatherings at Rome and Bangkok have offered participants a degree of fraternal and professional support which had already been present in other groups such as the International Jesuit Ecumenists who have met regularly for a number of years now. Despite the extraordinary work that some Jesuit liturgists have been doing in countries as varied as Brazil, France, Indonesia, and India, many had never met other Jesuit colleagues in the same field before. So there was a good deal of interest and encouragement offered for the various projects and works presented.

At Bangkok, participants voted to form themselves into an international body — “the International Jungmann Society for Jesuits and Liturgy” after the great Jesuit liturgical scholar Joseph Andreas Jungmann who was one of the chief architects of Vatican II’s Liturgy Constitution. Legally, formation of a professional society will allow the group to receive funding from several foundations which require legal incorporation to receive financial grants. Professionally and fraternally, the group makes a commitment to one another that it wishes to meet regularly for mutual enrichment with rotating leadership through elected officers, offering

itself as a service our resource to the General of the Society, to individual provinces and communities, and to the wider Church.

Keith F. Pecklers, S.J.

[Keith Pecklers (NYK) is Professor of Liturgy at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome and Professor of Liturgical History at the Pontifical Liturgical Institute of Sant'Anselmo. His recent books include *Dynamic Equivalence: The Living Language of Christian Worship* (Liturgical Press), *Worship* (Continuum, London; and Liturgical Press), and an edited volume, *Liturgy in a Postmodern World* (Continuum). He was elected President of the newly-formed International Jungmann Society in Bangkok and will be succeeded in 2006 by Brother Pierre Faure of Paris.]