

Eucharist and the Ministry of a Canon Lawyer

Varghese Koluthara

The 'tranquility of order' may flourish while justice is administered in the Church. The role of a canon lawyer in the Church is to foster the administration of justice corresponding to the true nature of the Church. The Church, born on the Pentecostal day, is continuously nourished by the Eucharist. The institution of the Eucharist by Christ provides food for the life of the Church and it is the source and strength of the Church. Canon Law, 'a vehicle of charity' in the Church, has its foundation in Christ. The Eucharist which is the sacrament of truth and charity should inspire a canon lawyer to administer justice with sweetness of mercy. Pope John Paul II invites canon lawyers to contemplate the mystery of the Eucharist 'at the school of Mary' so that they may become effective channels of true justice in the Church and maintain the 'tranquility of order' in her life. Through this article we attempt a bird's-eye-view on the content of *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, *Redemptionis Sacramentum* and *Mane Nobiscum Domine*.

The Church draws her life from the Eucharist. This truth does not simply express a daily experience of faith, but recapitulates *the heart of the mystery of the Church*¹. Pope John Paul II in his encyclical letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (given in Rome on 17th April 2003) speaks on the Eucharist and its relationship to the Church. The Congregation for the Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments through its instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum* issued on 25th March 2004, gives guidelines on certain matters to be observed or to be avoided regarding the celebration of the holy Eucharist. It is a complementary document of instructive character on *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. This is a meditative encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II on the holy Eucharist. The Apostolic letter of Pope John Paul II *Mane Nobiscum Domine* given on 7th October 2004, speaks about the Eucharistic Year (October 2004-October 2005). The apostolic letter offered some basic guidelines and invited all the bishops to celebrate the Eucharistic year with enthusiasm and fervent love.

1. *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*

The encyclical letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* has six chapters and it begins with an introduction of ten articles and concludes with four articles. The first chapter with ten articles is a meditation on the mystery of faith. Chapter two is a reflection on how the Eucharist builds the Church. It is spread through five articles. Chapter three through eight articles deliberates on the apostolicity of the Eucharist and of the Church. The Eucharist and Ecclesial communion is presented in thirteen articles in chapter four. The dignity of Eucharistic celebration is reflectively articulated in chapter five with six articles. The conclusive chapter of the encyclical letter in six articles invites us to the school of Mary who is characterized as the woman of the Eucharist.

Pope John Paul II in the introduction to the encyclical letter underlines the Eucharist and its relationship to Church. The most Holy Eucharist contains the church's entire spiritual wealth: Christ Himself, our Passover and Living Bread². The sacrament of Eucharist was instituted in the Upper Room, and it stands at the centre of the Church's life³. The institution of the Eucharist sacramentally anticipated the events which were about to take place especially in the passion, crucifixion and death on the cross. The Pope comments that Eucharist is too great a gift to tolerate ambiguity and depreciation while he finds shadows alongside the lights on the celebration of the sacrament of the Eucharist in the Church⁴.

Chapter one of *Ecclesia De Eucharistia* analyses Eucharist as the mystery of faith. When the Church celebrates Eucharist the memorial of her Lord's death and resurrection, the redemptive act is re-enacted. The mystery of Eucharist is a mystery of mercy and love⁵. The Church constantly draws her life from the redeeming sacrifice on the cross, perpetuated at the sacred banquet of communion with the Lord's body and blood⁶. The Eucharistic sacrifice makes present not only the mystery of saviour's passion and death but also the mystery of resurrection, which crowned his sacrifice. The Eucharist is a true banquet in which Christ offers himself as our nourishment. The Eucharist thus applies to men and women today the reconciliation won once for all by Christ for mankind in every age. This aspect of the universal charity of the universal sacrifice is based on his words: "this is my body", "this is my blood", "which is given for you", "which is poured out for you" (Lk 22:19-20). Eucharist demands from us that it is "unworthy" of a Christian community to partake of Lord's supper amidst division and indifference towards the poor (Cf., 1Cor 11:17-22, 27-34)⁷.

The Eucharist which builds the Church is well studied in chapter two of the encyclical letter. Church is built up through sacramental communion with the Son of God who was sacrificed for our sake. It is commemorated right from her inception and will continue till the end of the age. The Eucharist thus appears as both the source and summit of all evangelization since its goal is the communion of mankind with Christ and in him with the Father and the Holy Spirit⁸. The gift of Christ and his Spirit which we receive in the Eucharistic communion super abundantly fulfils the yearning for fraternal unity deeply rooted in the human heart⁹.

Chapter three well explains the apostolicity of the Eucharist and of the Church. There is a profound relationship between Eucharist and Church which is one, holy, catholic and apostolic¹⁰. If the Eucharist is the centre and summit of the Church's life it is likewise the centre and summit of the priestly ministry. Pope reminds the Christian faithful that they have to keep alive a genuine hunger for the Eucharist so that no opportunity for the celebration of the mass will ever be missed¹¹.

The Eucharist is the culmination of all the sacraments in perfecting our communion with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Chapter four of the encyclical letter underlines that the celebration of the Eucharist, however, cannot be the starting point for communion; it presupposes that communion already exists, a communion which seeks to consolidate and bring to perfection¹². Invisible communion, though by its nature always growing presupposes the life of grace, by which we become partakers of the divine nature and the practice of the virtues of faith, hope and love. The Eucharist as the supreme sacramental manifestation of communion in the church, demands to be celebrated in a context where the outward bonds of communion are also intact¹³. Thus Eucharist creates communion and fosters communion.

Reading the account of the institution of the Eucharist in the Synoptic Gospels we are struck by the simplicity and solemnity with which Jesus on the evening of the Last Supper instituted Eucharist. In the wake of Jesus' own words and actions and building upon the ritual heritage of Judaism the Christian liturgy was born. The development of sacred art and liturgical discipline, which took place in lands of ancient Christian heritage, is also taking place on continents where Christianity is younger¹⁴. Pope John Paul II reminds in the fifth chapter of the encyclical letter that priests have got a special responsibility to preside over the Eucharist in *persona Christi* to provide a witness to and a service of communion not only for the community directly taking part in the celebration, but also for the universal Church, which is part of every Eucharist¹⁵.

Since Mary the Mother has a profound relationship with his Son we are invited to the school of Mary, 'the women of the Eucharist'. Certainly Mary must have been present at the Eucharistic celebrations of the first generation Christians who were devoted to the breaking of the bread (Acts 2:42). Mary is a woman of the Eucharist in her whole life. The Church which looks to Mary as a model, is also called to imitate her in her relationships with this most holy mystery¹⁶. In a certain sense Mary lived her Eucharistic faith even before the institution of the Eucharist, by the very fact that she offered her virginal womb for the incarnation of God's word. As a result there is a profound analogy between the 'Fiat', which Mary said in reply to the angel and the 'Amen' which every believer says when receiving the body of the Lord¹⁷. The Eucharist, like the canticle of Mary, is the first and foremost, praise and thanksgiving. Pope John Paul II exhorts us in the sixth chapter of the *Ecclesia De Eucharistia* that Eucharist has been given to us so that our life like that of Mary may become completely a *Magnificat*¹⁸.

Pope John Paul II at the conclusion of the Encyclical letter strikes note on his personal life as a priest and his devotion to Eucharist. He writes, "each day my faith has been able to recognize in the consecrated bread and wine the divine Wayfarer who joined the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and opened their eyes to the light and their hearts to new hopes" (cf. Lk 24: 13-35)¹⁹. By giving Eucharist the prominence it deserves and by being careful not to diminish any of its dimension or demands, we show that we are truly conscious of this gift. Again we are invited at the school of the saints who are the great interpreters of true Eucharistic piety. Finally, as a concluding remark the encyclical letter draws our attention to listen to Mary in whom the mystery of Eucharist appears, more than in anyone else as a mystery of light²⁰.

2. *Redemptionis Sacramentum*

The instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum*²¹ of the Congregation for the Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments is of eight chapters with a preamble of fourteen articles and a conclusion of two articles. Chapter One²² instructs on the regulation of sacred liturgy with detailed discussion on the role of diocesan bishop, Conference of bishops, priests and deacons. The participation of lay Christian faithful in the Eucharistic celebration²³ is studied in chapter two. It instructs that Lay Christian faithful has to have active and conscious participation in the Eucharistic celebration. Their ministries in the celebration of the holy mass are also clarified through this chapter. Chapter three²⁴ discusses on the celebration of mass. It is presented through a theological discussion on the matter of the holy Eucharist, the Eucharistic prayer, the other parts of the mass and emphasizing the joining of various rites with the celebration of mass. The theme of Holy Communion is reflected theologically in

chapter four²⁵ of the Instruction. It tries to correct some of the unsound practices on Holy Communion. The chapter clarifies the dispositions for the reception of Holy Communion, distribution of Holy Communion, the communion of priests and the communion under both kinds.

Certain other matters concerning the Eucharist are studied in chapter five²⁶ of the Instruction. The place for the celebration of holy mass should always be a sacred place and the instruction reminds that it is never lawful for a priest to celebrate mass in a temple or sacred place of any non-Christian religion²⁷. When mass is concelebrated by several priests, a language known both to all concelebrating priests and to the gathered people should be used in the recitation of Eucharistic prayer²⁸. Masses are not to be multiplied contrary to the norm of law, and as regards Mass stipends all those things are to be observed²⁹. The instruction also underlines that sacred vessels for containing the body and blood of the Lord must be made in strict conformity with the norm of tradition and of the liturgical books³⁰. The instruction reminds the Ordinaries to see that sacred ministers celebrate holy Mass with proper sacred vestments³¹.

Chapter six³² of the instruction takes up the issues of the reservation of the most holy Eucharist and the Eucharistic worship outside the mass. It says that the forms of adoration that are not only private but also public and communitarian in nature, as established or approved by the Church herself must be greatly promoted³³. The worship of the Eucharist outside the Sacrifice of the mass should be vigorously promoted by the pastors³⁴. The instruction approves that before the holy Sacrament either reserved or exposed, the praying of the Rosary, which is admirable "in its simplicity and even its profundity is not to be excluded".³⁵ The pastoral value of the Eucharistic congresses is also highly recommended in the instruction³⁶.

The extraordinary function of the lay faithful is discussed with details in chapter seven³⁷ of the Instruction. When Church's need require it "pastoral assistants" can be appointed from lay faithful but the Instruction reminds us that attention should be paid that they do not take upon themselves what is proper to the ministry of the sacred ministers³⁸. It warns that it is never licit for lay persons to assume the role or the vesture of a priest or a deacon or other clothing similar to such vesture³⁹. A diocesan bishop may delegate for reasons of real necessity a lay faithful as the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion. It also says that the extra ordinary minister of Holy Communion may administer Communion only when priests and deacons are lacking. It is never allowed for the extra ordinary minister of Holy Communion to delegate anyone to administer the Eucharist, as for example a parent or spouse or child of the sick person who is the communicant⁴⁰. Only on account of the scarcity of sacred ministers, lay members of Christ's faithful may be granted permission for preaching during the mass. It can be granted only by the local Ordinary⁴¹. It is unthinkable on the Lord's day to substitute for Holy Mass either ecumenical celebrations of the word or services⁴². The Instruction strongly reminds us that those who have left the clerical stage should not celebrate the Sacrament or give the homily⁴³.

Chapter eight⁴⁴ of the Instruction prescribes the remedies for the abuses in the celebration of the holy Eucharist. The abuses are to be carefully avoided and corrected. The diocesan bishop must take measures to check the abuses in the Eucharistic celebration. All Christian faithful have the right to lodge a complaint for any abuses in liturgy to the diocesan bishop or to the competent Ordinary or to the Apostolic See⁴⁵. Let all Christ's faithful participate in the mass

fully consciously and actively as they can. Every sacred minister should always remember that he is a servant of sacred liturgy. Thus the Instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum* concludes that the instruction be observed with serious and immediacy wherever abuses are found in the celebration of the Most Holy Eucharist.

3. *Mane Domiscum Domine*

The Apostolic letter of Pope John Paul II *Mane Nobiscum Domine* deals about the Eucharistic Year (October 2004-October 2005). "Stay with us, Lord, for it is almost evening" (Lk 24:29) was the insistent invitation to Jesus by the two disciples journeying to Emmaus. The Apostolic Letter presents that the image of the disciples on the way to Emmaus can serve fitting guide for a year.⁴⁶ The breaking of the word has always been at the centre of the church's life. Thus Pope John Paul II dedicated an entire year for getting inspired from the Eucharistic sacrament.⁴⁷ The year of Eucharistic remembrance served to mark the beginning and the end (the international Eucharistic congress from 10 - 17 October 2004 in Mexico and for the ordinary assembly of the synod of bishops held in Vatican from 2 - 29 October 2005).⁴⁸

The Apostolic letter *Mane Nobiscum Domine* is divided into four small chapters. It has got an introduction of five articles and a conclusion of three articles. Chapter one is written under the title, 'in the wake of the council and the great jubilee' is intended for taking the Church into the third millennium. Late Pope John Paul reminded the Church that the year 2000 would be intensely Eucharistic; in the sacrament of the Eucharist the saviour, who took flesh in Mary's womb twenty centuries ago, continues to offer himself to humanity as the source of divine life.⁴⁹ We are invited to contemplate with Mary the Mother to understand the face of Christ. Thus we are led from the year of Rosary to the year of the Eucharist.

Chapter second develops the theme the Eucharist as the mystery of the light. The Eucharist is the light because it is a meeting of two tables i.e., the table of the word and the table of the bread.⁵⁰ Pope had invited us to open ourselves up to the dimensions of the Eucharistic mystery. He encourages us to be a celebrating, worshipping and contemplating community. Eucharist as the source and manifestation of communion is explained in the third chapter of the apostolic letter. We "walk with Christ" to the extent that we are in relationship with his body. Eucharist is both the sources of ecclesial unity and its greatest manifestation. Thus, Eucharist is an epiphany of communion.⁵¹ The Eucharist as the principle and plan of 'Mission' is studied in chapter four of the *Mane Nobiscum Domine*. Eucharist not only provides the interior strength but also gives its plan for the mission of the Church. Eucharist is not merely an expression of communion in the Church's life but it is also a project of solidarity for all humanity. Thus, we become promoters of communion, peace and solidarity when we take part in the Eucharistic celebration.⁵² Late Pope John Paul II dreamt that the year of the Eucharist would be for every one a precious opportunity to grow in awareness of the incomparable treasure which Christ has entrusted to his Church.⁵³

Concluding Reflections

(1) The instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum* deals with certain matters to be observed or to be avoided regarding the most Holy Eucharist. From the outset the instruction we learn that it is directly addressed to the Latin Church and to the Latin liturgical celebration of the Holy Eucharist⁵⁴. As canonists when we look for a comparative approach from the two codes of

Canon Law - the expression of 'two lungs of the same Catholic Church'⁵⁵ and 'vehicles of charity'⁵⁶ in the universal Church, - curiously in the document the citation of CCEO, in the parallel context of CIC, is found missing. This instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum* is issued from Vatican in the context of the encyclical letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. Thus it demands that eucharistic celebration is done with its sacredness in both the Latin and the Oriental *sui iuris* Churches with their ritual variations. The curious omission could be justified on the ground that the Latin Church and the Congregation for the Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments are not legally competent to give instructions on matters to be observed or to be avoided regarding the celebration of the Most Holy Eucharist among the Oriental Catholic Churches. It also could be understood as the Congregation for the Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments is giving space for the autonomy of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches in instructing the Oriental Catholic Churches in their liturgical celebrations. On the other hand, for the Congregation for the Oriental Churches it may be difficult to find out a 'melting pot' where five liturgical traditions are put together and taken care of for instructing on 'certain matters to be observed or to be avoided' regarding the celebration of the Most Holy Eucharist among the twenty two Oriental Catholic *sui iuris* Churches. Moreover, the codes of Canon Law recognize the rightful autonomy of the liturgical laws in the Church⁵⁷.

(2) In our society where we find serious problems today on faith and practices we need to grow up in Eucharistic love. Because it is the source and summit of Christian life. The canonists should find meaning in the Eucharistic sacrificial dimension in their ministerial work. Our minds may not get blocked by the 'letter of the law' but we should seek after the 'spirit of the law' in administering justice in our interpretations as well as in our judgements. Let us learn at the school of Mary to understand the love of Christ capsuled in the form of the law of the Church for the grater 'tranquility of order' in the Church.

(3) The Eucharist which is the supreme sacramental manifestation of communion in the Church should inspire the canonists to learn the language of communion and express them in their legal verbalizations. Pope John Paul II on 18th October 1990, when he promulgated the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches through the Apostolic Constitution *Sacri Canones*, made use of two biological symbols of human body, lungs and heart, in emphasizing the communion between the Latin Church and Oriental Churches. Our ministry should give importance in studying both codes of canon law and convey the 'supreme law' of the Church as the 'salvation of the souls'.

(4) Canon Law, which is the 'vehicle of charity', should always promote charity. Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian charity. Our ministry in the church should reflect perfectly the Eucharistic charity and truth. Does our interpretations of the law promote in the Church the Eucharistic aspect of the charity and truth? The Eucharistic love should permeate every action of a canon lawyer.

(5) A good canon lawyer should permeate with spirit of a 'good shepherd' in interpreting the 'supreme law' of Christ as expressed through the Codes of Canon Law. Jesus calls us in the Church to be the ministers of Eucharist. Prophet Ezekiel sets the model of good shepherd for canon lawyers: "I will look for those that are lost, bring back those that wander off, bandage those that are hurt, and heal those that are sick" (Ezek 34:16). As the prophet Ezekiel teaches us our ministry is a vocation to be good shepherds in administering law with compassion and justice. Our professionalism should always be guided for the greater goal of achieving the

'salvation of the souls', which is the 'supreme law' of the Church. Borrowing the language of St. Paul it is 'unworthy' of a canonist 'to partake of the Lord's supper amid division and indifference towards the poor' and when justice is denied or delayed to the unprivileged.

¹ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, Rome 2003 (Reprinted by Carmel International Publishing House, Trivandrum 2003) 5.

² *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, n.1.

³ *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, nn.2-3.

⁴ *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, n. 10.

⁵ *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, n. 11.

⁶ *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, n. 12.

⁷ *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, n. 12-20.

⁸ *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, n. 21-22.

⁹ *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, n. 24.

¹⁰ *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, n. 26.

¹¹ *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, n. 33.

¹² *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, n.35.

¹³ *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, n.38.

¹⁴ *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, nn.48-51.

¹⁵ *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, n. 52.

¹⁶ *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, n.53.

¹⁷ *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, n. 55.

¹⁸ *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, n. 58

¹⁹ *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, n. 59.

²⁰ *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, n. 62.

²¹ Congregation for the Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Instruction, *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, Rome 2004 (Reprinted by Pauline Publications, Mumbai 2004).

²² *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, nn.14-18.

²³ *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, nn.36-47

²⁴ *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, nn.48-79.

²⁵ *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, nn. 80-107.

²⁶ *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, nn. 108-128.

²⁷ *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, n. 109.

²⁸ *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, n.113.

²⁹ *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, n.116.

³⁰ *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, n.117.

³¹ *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, n.126.

³² *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, nn. 129-145.

³³ *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, n.129.

³⁴ *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, n.134.

³⁵ *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, n.137.

³⁶ *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, n.145.

³⁷ *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, nn. 146 - 168

³⁸ *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, n.149.

³⁹ *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, n.153.

⁴⁰ *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, nn.157-160.

⁴¹ *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, n.161.

⁴² *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, n.167.

⁴³ *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, n.168.

⁴⁴ *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, nn.169-171.

⁴⁵ *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, n.184.

⁴⁶ John Paul II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, Vatican 2004, n.2.

⁴⁷ John Paul II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, n.3.

⁴⁸ John Paul II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, n.4.

⁴⁹ John Paul II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, n.7.

⁵⁰ John Paul II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, n.12.

⁵¹ John Paul II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, n.21.

⁵² John Paul II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, nn.26-27.

⁵³ John Paul II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine*, n.29.

⁵⁴ The norms contained in the present instruction are to be understood as pertaining to liturgical matters in the Roman rite, and, *mutatis mutandis*, in the other Rites of the Latin church that are duly acknowledged by law (cf., *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, n.3.).

⁵⁵ John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Sacri Canones* (The Apostolic Constitution by which Code of Canons of Eastern Churches was promulgated on 18th October, 1990) Latin- English Edition, TPI:Bangalore, 2001, xxiv.

⁵⁶ John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Sacri Canones*, xxviii.

⁵⁷ John Paul II, *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* (CCEO) c.3; *Code of Canon Law* (CIC) c.2.