DIVINE WORSHIP REVIEW AFRICA

NEWSLETTER

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The Presence of Sacred Images in Liturgical Worship and Environment:

"YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FOR YOURSELF AN IDOL (GRAVEN IMAGE)" Exodus 20:4

All religions express truth about divine realities through symbols and signs to facilitate our relationship with God. Symbols and signs enable oneself to transcend from the visible–material–human realities to the invisible–immaterial–divine realities. Signs and symbols occupy a significant place in human life. Man needs signs and symbols (language, gestures and actions) to communicate with one another (Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC] 1146).

From the observation of a great sacramental theologian, Louis–Marie Chauvet in his book, *Symbol and Sacrament,* "Signs and Symbols" are always mixed together in the concrete world such that it is impossible to say unilaterally that this object is a sign and that object is a symbol" (Chauvet, 1995). Writing in his "Le discours et le symbole", Edmond Ortigues, a psychoanalytic philosopher maintained that a symbol can be

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distinguished from a sign since "the symbol does not refer, as does the sign, to something of another order than itself; rather, its function is to introduce us into an order to which it belongs, an order presupposed to be an order of meaning in its radical otherness" (Ortigues, 1962).

Consequently, symbols have single, simple and defined meaning whereas signs have multiple interpretations. The duo (symbols and signs) do not stand for kinds of images rather they describe the functions fulfilled by images. For instance, the image of a triangle could be a symbol of hierarchy or a sign of danger or mountain.

Following its root in the Latin word "imitari, an image has the ability to copy or imitate". An image is the visual representation or general impression of an object, scene, person or abstraction produced on a surface or stored in electronic form. It is judged by how realistically it captures the person or the thing they represent. The idea of image is understood in many ways. Images can be in various forms – portraits, photographs, graphics, paintings, digital illustration, individual, video frames carving, and sculptures.

Many Christians are disturbed by the way Catholics venerate the images used in Christian liturgical worship irrespective of the divine injunction in Deuteronomy 5:9, where God said concerning idols, *"You shall not bow down to them."* This commandment condemns polytheism and the manufacture of images in the heavens above, below the earth or beneath the waters (cf. Ex. 20:4–6; Dt. 5:8-10; Lev. 26:1; Lev. 19:4; Ezekiel 41:17–18; Ex. 20:3, Dt. 4:15–18).

The fear is that such representation might end up in idolatry (just as it happened with the story of the golden calf in Exodus 32). According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, "Idolatry consists in divinizing what is not God. Man commits idolatry whenever he honours and reveres a creature in place of God, whether this be gods or demons (for example, Satanism), power, pleasure, race, ancestors, the state, money etc… Idolatry rejects the unique Lordship of God; it is therefore incompatible with communion with God" (CCC 2113). It is reasonable that God has to prohibit any attempt to represent Him in any artistic form since He has made His face totally unknown to his people.

There are circumstances in the Old Testament where the Lord permitted and commanded the making of statues like the cherubim, the bronze serpent and the ark of the covenant (Ex. 25:10–22; 1 Chr. 28:18–19; Num. 21:4–9; Wis. 16:5-14; Jn 3:14-15; cf. 1 Kgs. 6:23–32, 1 Kgs 7:23-26; 1Kgs. 8:6–66; 2 Chr. 3:7–14). From here, we observed that mysterious beings can be Re-Presented by material realities. This inspired the seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, which in 787 allowed the veneration of sacred images as against the Synod of Elvira that prohibited the exhibition of images in the Church.

Strictly speaking, "the Christian veneration of images is not contrary to the first commandment which proscribes idols. Indeed, the honour rendered to an image passes to its prototype and whoever venerates an image venerates the person portrayed in it. The honour paid to sacred images is a respectful veneration, not the adoration due to God alone" (CCC. 2132). Religious worship is not directed to images in themselves, considered as mere things, but under their distinctive aspect as images leading us on to God incarnate. What the sacred images do is to lift our hearts to heaven for a deeper and personal contemplation on the mystery of our faith.

The veneration of images is also justified in the First Apology of St. John of Damascus against those who attack the divine images when he says: "I do not adore the creation rather than the Creator, but I adore the one who became a creature, who was formed as I was, who clothed Himself in creation without weakening or departing from His divinity, that He might raise our nature in glory and make us partakers of His divine nature".

The Second Vatican Council Fathers in article 125 of Sacrosanctum Concilium (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), provided clear instruction on the positioning of sacred images in the Church and the moderation of the numbers to avoid a devotion of doubtful orthodoxy.

Veneration of sacred images is a wayto honour and adore one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (cf. Eph 4:6). One fact we must never rule out is that images act as a visual aid for the people of God. We have photographs of our grandparents to remember them and share stories about who they were with other people. We have images of our leaders to honour them and preserve their memory. Jesus, Mary, Joseph and the saints are no different than any other important public figure in our world today.



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Question 1:

How many times are incense used within the Mass?

Answer: The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) 276 identifies five occasions when incense may be used:

a. During the entrance procession,

b. At the beginning of Mass, to incense the cross and the altar;

c. At the Gospel procession and the proclamation of the Gospel itself

d. After the bread and the chalice have been placed upon the altar, to incense the offerings, the cross, and the altar, as well as the priest and the people.

e. At the showing of the host and the chalice after the consecration. (GIRM, 276).

Question 2:

What is the traditional way of incensing the oblata (gifts of bread and wine)?

Answer: The priest makes the three signs of the cross over the bread and wine and then three circles, two counter–clock wise and one clockwise. *See the images below*

Image a.

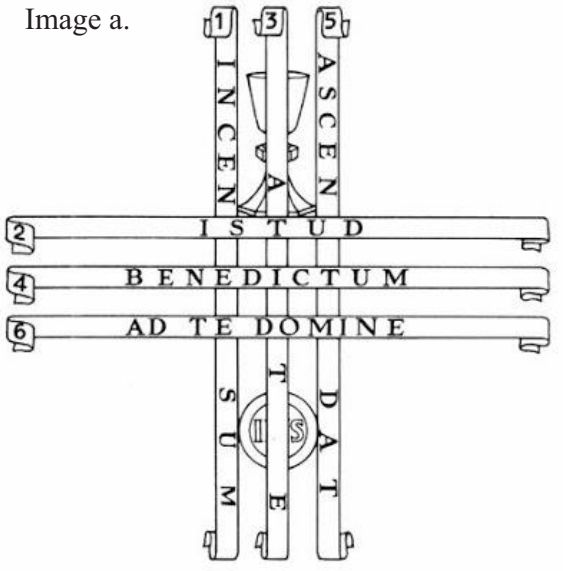
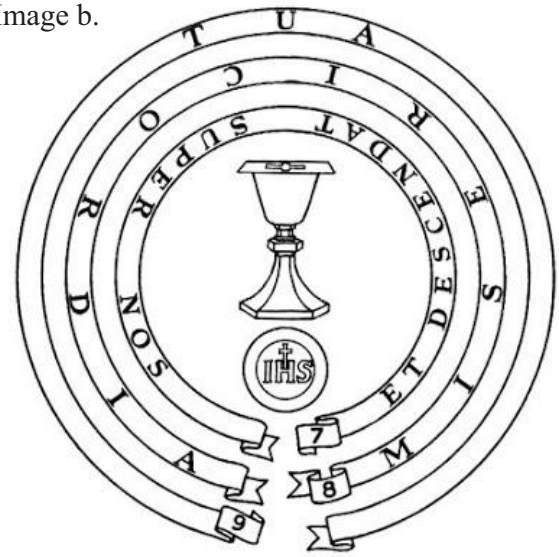


Image b.



Question 3:

What you should know about incensation of images or liturgical objects within the Mass?

Answer: According to the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) 277:

The Priest, having put incense into the thurible, blesses it with the Sign of the Cross, without saying anything. Before and after an incensation, a profound bow is made to the person or object that is incensed, except for the altar and the offerings for the Sacrifice of the Mass.

Three swings of the thurible are used to incense: The Most Blessed Sacrament, a relic of the Holy Cross and images of the Lord exposed for public veneration, the offerings for the Sacrifice of the Mass, the altar cross, the Book of the Gospels, the paschal candle, the Priest, and the people.

Two swings of the thurible are used to incense relics and images of the Saints exposed for public veneration; this should be done, however, only at the beginning of the celebration, following the incensation of the altar.

The altar is incensed with single swings of the thurible in this way:

"a) if the altar is freestanding with respect to the wall, the Priest incenses walking around it;

"b) if the altar is not freestanding, the Priest incenses it while walking first to the right-hand side, then to the left.

"The cross, if situated on the altar or near it, is incensed by the Priest before he incenses the altar; otherwise, he incenses it when he passes in front of it.

"The Priest incenses the offerings with three swings of the thurible or by making the Sign of the Cross over the offerings with the thurible before going on to incense the cross and the altar."

ABOUT DIVINE WORSHIP REVIEW AFRICA

Divine Worship Review Africa is a Catholic newsletter organized by an Association of Liturgical Scholars from different parts of Africa towards promoting authentic liturgical practices, consciousness and education among our people.

Our efforts are focused on providing resources such as articles clarifying liturgical abuses and facilitating discussions that illuminate the rich tapestry of our liturgical heritage. By doing so, we seek to empower our fellow priests, religious and lay faithful to discover and appreciate the beauty and solemnity of liturgical worship.

In a world where the sacred often finds itself overshadowed by the secular, Divine Worship Review Africa stands out as a beacon of hope, guiding the faithful towards a more profound and meaningful worship experience.

Through comprehensive liturgical education and the promotion of liturgical consciousness, we aim to nurture a worshipping community deeply aware of the significance and transformative power of the Sacred Liturgy.

We believe that a well-informed and liturgically conscious assembly is better prepared to preserve and celebrate the sacred mysteries with great devotion and marvelous fidelity. We therefore invite you to join us in this noble cause. Your support, contribution and prayers are invaluable treasures to the success of this apostolate.

Forward your articles, responses, posts, letters and questions on issues affecting liturgical worship in Africa to this address: liturgicalconversation@gmail.com.