

Inculturating Liturgy in Sri Lanka:

**Contextualization in
the Church of Ceylon**

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The sanctuary of Christ Church Baddegama. The cover picture is of Trinity College Chapel Kandy, both © Phillip Tovey.

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Contents

1	Introduction Phillip Tovey	4
2	The Sri Lankan Context: History & Social Setting and the Church's Attitudes to Local Cultures, Religions, Ideologies Keerthisiri Fernando and Rasika Abeysinghe	6
3	The Ceylon Liturgy Phillip Tovey	17
4	Alternative Contextualization: The New World Liturgy and the Workers Mass Marc Billimoria	33
5	Examples of Contextualization in Current Liturgies Narme Wickremesinghe	46
6	Bibliography	62

1

Introduction

Phillip Tovey

The Church of Ceylon is two dioceses extra-provincial to Canterbury but governed by a single General Assembly (synod). It has a rich history of inculturation of the liturgy. This story is not well known, and the purpose of this book is to tell the story to the rest of the Anglican Communion and the wider church. Sri Lanka has a unique mixture of cultures and religions, Buddhist and Hindu, in which the Christian church has developed. There has also been a context of strong socialist ideology. It is in this context that the church lives. Is the church to be in a westernised form requiring people to abandon their culture, if they wish to become Christians? This question has been wrestled with for almost a century. Out of religious and ideological dialogue the church has developed liturgical forms that help shape Sri Lankan Christians (rather than Christians in Sri Lanka). This has been fostered from the 1930s by some exceptional Christian leaders who took bold steps to contextualise worship. These include Lakdasa de Mel, Lakshman Wickremesinghe, Yohan Devananda and Vijaya Vidyasagara. The Ceylon Liturgy of 1931 was one of the first liturgies to be written by Sri Lankans and incorporate inculturation as a basic philosophy. This book tells the story of these developments.

The next chapter sets the context. In order to examine the liturgies an understanding of the context is required. It is written by two authors. Keerthisiri Fernando is bishop of Kurunegala and a noted sociologist. Rasika Abeysinghe is a priest and school chaplain with several books published on social context. Together they explain the cultural background for liturgical development.

Introduction

The third chapter is by Phillip Tovey, an international liturgical scholar and a priest and Principal of the Local Ministry Pathway in the Diocese of Oxford. It examines the development of the Ceylon Liturgy and its influence in the current eucharistic rites of the Church of Ceylon.

The fourth chapter is by Marc Billimoria, who is a priest and Warden (Principal) of S. Thomas' College, Mt. Lavinia on the outskirts of Colombo. It looks at the liturgies developed by Yohan Devananda and The Christian Workers Fellowship. The first is the New World Liturgy and the second is the Workers' Mass. Both have influenced official texts and been seed grounds for developing inculturation.

The fifth and final chapter is by Narme Wickremesinghe, a retired Consultant in Occupational Medicine who has served in the Church of Ceylon Liturgical Committee from 1976 to the present day and was its Chair when the inculturated liturgies were approved by the Episcopal Synod and General Assembly. It looks at the way inculturation is a part of the present liturgies of the Church of Ceylon.

We make this rich story of inculturation in Sri Lanka available to the rest of the Communion in the hope that others will be encouraged to take steps appropriate to their context.