

**NEW PONTIFICATE**

## Cardinal Goh: Leo will clarify doctrine

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Several cardinals told us that Cardinal William Goh Seng Chye's speech was one of the most appreciated during the general congregations. This comes as no surprise, as the archbishop is known for his doctrinal clarity, pastoral zeal, and liturgical sensitivity. The *Daily Compass* interviewed him shortly before he left Rome.

**Your Eminence, do you think the cardinals elected the right man?**

'Yes, I think Pope Leone XIV is exactly the Pope the world needs right now. Pope Francis strengthened the missionary dimension of the Church, seeking to bring the Gospel to all of humanity, including sinners, the marginalised, and the vulnerable. However, I believe that the least pleasant aspect of his pontificate was that his teachings appeared ambiguous in his attempt to reach everyone in terms of doctrine and morality.

**Has this led to the polarisation that has affected the Church in recent years?**

If we are not clear about what the Church teaches, it is very difficult to work together in unity. Although both those on the so-called 'left' and 'right' of the Church are interested in promoting the mission of evangelisation, there has been internal division on certain issues, such as marriage, LGBTQ+ rights, and transgender rights. These issues have divided the Church because, at a certain point, it became unclear what the right thing to do was. People came to church and said, 'But the Pope said this'. However, being truly inclusive means saying: "yes, we understand you are struggling. That you cannot live the Gospel. We will help you; we will walk with you. It may take time. We will help you fall in love with Jesus slowly. One day, perhaps, you will come to understand." This is an important distinction.

**Do you think Leo XIV will be able to resolve the doctrinal disputes?**

Yes, as an Augustinian, he has a solid foundation in the tradition and spirituality of St. Augustine. On the other hand, he has worked in Peru and is familiar with situations of poverty and suffering. Furthermore, he has been in Rome for several years and is therefore familiar with the challenges facing the Curia. Having been prior general of his order, he has already demonstrated his leadership skills. During his first public appearances, he has been sober and careful about what he says and does. He seems to me to be a man who is aware that when a pope makes comments, they are taken seriously; for this reason, he exercises caution and prudence. This is to be appreciated, as it means people will not be confused. I believe he will be able to clarify doctrine, preventing the "left" and the "right" from fighting amongst themselves. He will not be ambiguous and will not leave the interpretation of his words open to individual interpretation.

**On that note, you will be aware that the last few years have been difficult for those who love the Tridentine Mass. What will become of them in the new pontificate?**

Personally, I believe there is no reason to stop people who prefer the Tridentine Mass. They are not doing anything wrong or sinful. Of course, the unity of the Church must be preserved, but we already have different rites, such as the Syro-Malabar rite. We can

accept different ways of celebrating the Eucharist, so I believe we should not stifle those who prefer the Tridentine rite. Ultimately, what matters is not the rite or the form in which it is celebrated, but whether one encounters God in depth.

**What is your experience of communities that love the ancient liturgy in your diocese?**

I do not personally celebrate the Tridentine Mass, but I am not opposed to those who do. In my country, there is a small group of around 300 people, mostly young professionals. Sometimes I ask them, "Why do you prefer this celebration?" They reply that they find it more reflective and contemplative, and that it brings them closer to God. Why should I stop them? Of course, if they reject the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, that would be another matter entirely, and they should be disciplined. But they do not, so I do not think we should discriminate against them. After all, this is the Mass that has been celebrated for hundreds of years, hasn't it?

**In Asia, Christians are persecuted, and the situation is getting worse. What is the situation regarding religious freedom on your continent?**

Persecution varies from country to country. Some is very subtle; others make life really difficult. But I think it all depends on the country. Thank God, we don't have these problems in Singapore. Once again, religious freedom depends on the government. The problem arises when religion and politics mix. In my country, there is a clear dividing line. The Church does not interfere in government or favour any particular political party; it limits itself to speaking about moral and social issues. Elsewhere in Asia, where there is an established religion, whether Muslim or Hindu, religious freedom becomes problematic because politicians want to defend a particular religion in order to win votes. Religion may also use politics to gain power, of course.

**What urgent issues will Leone XIV, who is partly Peruvian, face in Asia?**

He already has the perspective and experience of what it means to reach a world that is different from his own. In particular, he is familiar with the poor and marginalised areas that are prevalent in Asia.

The difference with Latin America is that Christianity is often in the minority in Asia, but Catholic communities are very active, just as they are in Africa. Latin America, on the other hand, is struggling against what we might call routine faith, as well as the incursions of sects. Here in Asia, we don't have these problems. However, as a minority, Pope Leone will need to consider how the Church engages with other religions.

**Are you disappointed that the Pope is not Asian?**

No, I am not concerned if the Pope is Asian, European, or of any other nationality. I don't

vote based on continent or culture. I want to vote for a Pope who is truly inspired by the Holy Spirit. Someone who can unite the world and walk in truth and love. I believe Leo XIV is the right man for the job.