

BOOK REVIEW

What, Then, Is Liturgy? Musings and Memoir. By Anscar J. Chupungco. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2010. 251 pp. \$29.95. ISBN 978-0-8146-6239-7.

As we entered into the beautiful season of Advent in 2011, the English speaking nations began use of the revised liturgy of the *Roman Missal, Third Edition*. The Faithful have been asked to embrace the new liturgy in order to “belong more deeply.” What better way is there to prepare ourselves than an assessment of the meanings of liturgy? Fr. Anscar J. Chupungco, a Benedictine of the Abbey of Our Lady of Montserrat in Manila offers us just what we might be looking for: an opportunity to review the liturgical changes of Vatican II and look to the future to analyze what is now taking place. This book is both a reminiscence of the author’s experience in the field of liturgy as well as a compilation of his thoughts on the subject. He is a former president of the Pontifical Liturgical Institute in Rome, a teacher of liturgical history and inculturation, executive secretary of the Philippine Episcopal Commission on Liturgy, and, currently secretary of the Asian Liturgy Forum. He has also served as a consultant to the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and the Congregation for Catholic Education. In addition, he was a member of the Advisory Committee for the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) and has authored numerous works on the subject of liturgy.

The mentoring of Salvatore Marsili, a Benedictine abbot who participated in Vatican Council II and later became a professor of liturgy at the Pontifical Liturgical Institute, guided Fr. Chupungco in developing his own teaching and research of liturgical theology, which he delineates essentially as the “trilogy” of “salvation history and liturgy, paschal mystery and Pentecost, and anamnesis and epiclesis” (67). Throughout the book he elaborates on these themes, referring to the many persons and writings which have influenced him, even going back to Patristic times. He reminds us, too that the paschal mystery is always at the center of liturgy as it represents for us “an object of faith, a statement of love, and the source of hope” (73).

We begin with a discussion of liturgical reforms, mostly focusing on those which took place as a result of the Second Vatican Council. This was not an easy time. During the years of the Council and the ensuing period of instituting the reforms, there was much discord, debate, tension, emotion and especially challenge. A look back at all of the documents produced by the Council fills us with awe at the tasks tackled and completed. And of course, that process is still a work in progress. We are told of the importance of what took place and that which still needs to be implemented.

The next portion of the book is dedicated to the crux of the titular question, *What is Liturgy?* Fr. Chupungco states that “the liturgy is a rich complex...of theology, history, spiritual insight, and pastoral care” with “no single definition able to capture its nature and purpose” (51). To begin at the beginning, he shows us the root of the term liturgy which through time had come to mean service to others, and which further has been understood as the official worship of the Church. He discusses the Word, sacraments, sacramentals, blessings and virtually all components of liturgy including clergy, ministers, the assembly, music, and environment. He also offers a theological explanation of the Trinity present in all of our liturgical practices.

In his section on the importance of how we worship, he addresses the issue of ritual language in his work with the Advisory Committee of ICEL whose primary function was to translate the texts of the mass into English. There were many who challenged the work and motives of the committee. He states “in all honesty, I can assure ICEL’s critics that it had no other agenda than to communicate faithfully, nobly, and memorably to the English-speaking faithful the message of liturgy” (184). The many steps taken in the process of translation are enumerated including the use of exegesis, hermeneutics, scientific methods, and philosophical study. He believes that “liturgical translation is a work of art” (194), and there are some undercurrents of dismay at the revisions made by the ICEL Consultants’ Committee formed in 2000.

The author concludes with a discussion of spirituality indicating that “everything in life...is a moment to experience the presence of God” and is “an intimate connection with social, economic, and political life” (235). He looks to the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* to define liturgical spirituality:

by enumerating its chief practices: listening to the word of God; celebrating the sacraments, especially the Eucharist; participating in other liturgical rites; and as prerequisites or consequences, carrying out God’s will with deeds; applying oneself to prayer, self-denial, and active service to others; and the practice of all the virtues. (236)

He further examines some components of liturgical spirituality such as prayer, the Word of God, sacraments, psalms and an awareness of being Church.

This book was written with the encouragement of some of Fr. Chupungco’s students due to their fascination with his vast knowledge of and firsthand experience with the complicated topic of liturgy. Although there is much factual information offered, the more appealing passages are his personal commentaries and reflections. “What then is liturgy?” is a complex question which he tackles from a developmental, historical, theological, and spiritual vantage point. His writing is both erudite and personal, sprinkled with touches of humor. His passion and great love for liturgy in particular and the Church in

general are obvious on every page. He expresses legitimate concerns, applauds the work of so many, and presents an optimistic overview. *What, Then, is Liturgy? Musings and Memoir* has left me with a greater understanding and appreciation of the way we as Catholics celebrate our faith. It is also a timely work which should be read by all concerned with and involved in the current liturgical changes.

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