

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

The subtitle of this book forthrightly indicates the character of its content. Conversational in tone, the text candidly conveys the passionate liturgical-theological convictions of a Roman Catholic cleric devoted to the renewal agenda of the Liturgical Movement as it shaped Vatican II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy and the reformed rites and official instructions produced in its wake. Philippine Benedictine Anscar Chupungco, a student at the Pontifical Liturgical Institute (San Anselmo) in Rome during those heady years, peppers the pages of his book with recollections of the tenets and personalities of the "greats" who taught him: Vagaggini, Martimort, Nocent, Marsili, and others. Chupungco himself succeeded those men as a faculty member and then president of San Anselmo, while also serving a number of Vatican congregations and ecclesial commissions. The book's memoir-dimension thus provides numerous anecdotes and asides concerning the post-Vatican II reform and what has evolved from the often ill-fated vision of his and his mentors' agenda. True to his words in the book's preface—his being "honestly ill at ease with anything approaching criticism of official position with respect to controversial issues" (xv)—Chupungco practices restraint at moments when he cannot contain his strong opinions on a host of liturgical and pastoral issues.

Those musings (the other term in the book's subtitle) appear in a series of five chapters that Chupungco says follow the plan of "most textbooks of theology" (xv), despite his having just on the previous page disclaimed, "This work is not meant to be a textbook..." (xiv). Such a seemingly conflicted message at the outset is indicative of the constantly morphing genre of the content that follows, portions of which read like class lectures on liturgical theology at the introductory level, rehearsing basic theories and histories bearing little news but occasional insights for professors currently teaching such courses. Topics discussed at some length include the notion of salvation history and the hope borne of the liturgy, the sixteenth-century origins of the Western concept of the church year, anamnesis and epiclesis, the value of rubrics and the bane of rubricism, the ecclesial dimension of Christ's presence in the assembly, etc. The treatment of trinitarian theology in chapter three is largely unremarkable until the last couple pages when Chupungco relates the Holy Spirit, Calvary, and the

Eucharist in ways resonant with the beauty of patristic mystagogy. All of this is to say that the overall theological content of the chapters is uneven in terms of originality.

The exception, at least for this reviewer, is the fifth chapter, “Per Ritus et Preces,” in which Chupungco discusses issues of language translation and inculturation, his genuine academic-theological specialty. The authoritative force of his wisdom and knowledge rings through such assertions as, “Translation is in reality a form, perhaps the highest form, of inculturation” (205-206). This dictum functions as the crescendo for an argument he sustains through an enlightening review of the turbulent (and to the minds of many liturgists, ecclesial-politically scandalous) history of the rise and fall of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL). Chupungco writes on that topic as the ultimate insider, having served on the commission for many years, even chairing the subcommittee charged with the work of translation and revisions. What he recounts from the past decade is a series of moves by the Vatican that rejected translation work done according to the principle of dynamic equivalence, which requires a deep knowledge of both languages in their contexts so as effectively to meet the ear of the receiving culture, replacing it with a method of formal correspondence, “which basically consists of word-for-word translation” (206). For the reader lacking acquaintance with the negative ecumenical implications of that hegemonic assertion of all things Roman, these pages will prove particularly informative.

The value of Chupungco’s *Musings and Memoir* is the witness to the school of progressive, ecumenical liturgical-theological thought that blossomed in the wake of the Second Vatican Council yet enjoyed only a springtime (with my bow here to Lucien Deiss) in the 1970s, then a brief summer in the 1980s, before autumnal decline into the present wintry season (another nod, now to Karl Rahner). *What, Then, Is Liturgy?* will, in my estimation, serve its best purpose in distant years as a resource for liturgical historians (if there be such) interested in our current era. Chupungco provides a contemporary counter-voice to the Vatican’s reassertion of centralized, hierarchical, and narrowly Roman power over and through the implementation of *Liturgiam Authenticam*, *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, the 2002 General Instruction of the Roman Missal, and the 2011 English translation of the Mass. From that perspective, the book becomes a more interesting read, not only for the anecdotes and observations but also for the filial and priestly piety the author exudes while nonetheless exposing

historical sources of clericalism and criticizing examples of the same in current Roman Catholic practice.

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