

## Book Reviews

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Francis Cardinal Arinze  
*Celebrating the Holy Eucharist*  
 San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006  
 126 pages. \$11.95

Nigerian-born and raised, convert from Ibo at the age of nine, and since 2002 Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments, Francis Cardinal Arinze has written a very accessible overview of modern liturgy. Exploring the source and summit of the Christian life from several angles, the cardinal's latest book can serve equally well as a basic introduction to or thoughtful review of the magnificent constellation of topics circling the Eucharist.

Cardinal Arinze professes no startlingly new insights on the liturgy (I recall no citations to scholarly works or secondary sources), and he harbors no reactionary sentiments. Instead, he writes and thinks with the Church in presenting the centrality of the liturgy for Christian life, and in turn the centrality of the Eucharist for the liturgy. With accuracy and simplicity, for example, he explains the need for and the contributions of the liturgical renewal movement of the early twentieth century, how the Council exercised its charism of discernment over that movement of the Holy Spirit, and the degree to which that movement and its conciliar fruits have been marshaled or betrayed by post-conciliar events.

Cardinal Arinze, at one time the youngest bishop in the world and now among the last conciliar participants still exercising a significant administrative office in the Church, has an almost unparalleled vantage point from which to assess the post-conciliar liturgical experience. Happily, his writing on the liturgy is marked not only by firm faith but by a refreshing freedom from the penchant of other highly-placed dicastery officials to nuance practically to nothing every theological utterance lest some group somewhere feel slighted by one's simply pointing out the obvious.

A particular strength of the cardinal's book is the ease with which he incorporates quotations from, or close paraphrases of, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, the *Roman Missal*, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a variety of dicasterial statements on liturgy, the 2005 Synod on the Eucharist, and even the *Code of Canon Law*. With disarming directness, students will find themselves alerted to (or reminded of, as the

case may be) the major liturgical books, those dicasterial statements which are most important to understand, and the conciliar or papal documents that should most inform one's thinking. At no point, though, does any of this come across as a resort to proof-texts, but rather as a holy prelate's utilization of the living resources with which every liturgist can and should be familiar. Indeed, his "seamless garment" discussion style has contributed to my sense of a man writing from within the Church's liturgical tradition, and not as one simply commenting on it.

If pressed to find any weakness in the work, I suppose I could wish that the connection between the other sacraments and the Eucharist had been made in more detail (since reliable post-conciliar resources in that area are so few), and that the link between the Liturgy of the Hours and the Eucharist had received more than a passing mention. Beyond that, there is only my nagging concern that many recent ecclesiastical statements about "inculturation" of liturgy seem to take a naïvely optimistic view about the feasibility of such a process. Too little recognition is given, I think, to the need for a frank admission that some cultures might, in the end, simply have nothing to offer authentic Christian liturgy. But I tread lightly here: who am I to advise a prelate who, forty years ago already, wrote his doctoral dissertation at the University of London on "Igbo Sacrifice as an Introduction to the Catechesis of Holy Mass"?

EDWARD N. PETERS  
 SACRED HEART MAJOR SEMINARY  
 DETROIT, MI