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Worship as Public Act on the American Catholic University Campus

For its annual meeting in 2000 the Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA) explored the theme, "Catholicism and Public Life." Given the growing body of scholarly literature on such topics as liturgy and life, mysticism and ethics, and worship and society, readers of *Worship* will not be surprised to learn that the Sacramental and Liturgical Theology group of the CTSA readily saw an opportunity to present material on "Catholic Liturgy and Public Life." When CTSA past-president Mary Ann Donovan averred that addressing the topic of liturgy on the academic campus would provide a genuine service to theologians, her suggestion immediately elicited in me not so much an idea or thesis as an image and event. Having for two years taught in the theology department at Boston College as well as presided regularly at one of the Sunday evening Masses on campus, in May of 1998 I attended the university's Baccalaureate Mass for the first time. It was an experience of liturgy which struck some deep practical theological chords¹ in me at the time, quickly surfaced to memory at Donovan's suggestion and, as a result, constitutes a case — albeit a rather informal one — for this present study.

The structure of this article, following the method of cultural anthropology, will be one of description and analysis, based on my

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¹The content and method of practical theology is an ongoing question in the North American context. For key contributions see Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press 1991), and Rebecca S. Chopp, *Saving Work: Feminist Practices of Theological Education* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 1995). For more brief treatments of the issue, especially in relation to liturgy, see Bruce T. Morrill, "Nonsystematic Reflections on the Practical Character of Liturgy and Theology," in *Bodies of Worship: Explorations in Theory and Practice*, ed. B. Morrill (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press 1999) 173–76; and Bruce T. Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory: Political and Liturgical Theology in Dialogue* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press 2000) xi–xv, 45–47, 60–63, 70, 189.

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participation in and observations concerning that Baccalaureate Mass. In so proceeding I am well aware that anthropological methods of participant-observation are usually significantly more extensive, in terms both of a comprehensive study of the "ritual field"² and interchange with a wide range of the ritual's participants.³ This essay, however, rather than presenting the results of an extended field study, is an initial exploration into a topic offered for the purposes of stimulating questions for not only liturgical theologians but also pastoral ministers responsible for worship occurring in their communities. While the type of community of interest here is the university or college campus, the observations and issues raised may invite analogous reflections in other pastoral contexts. Furthermore, while the setting studied here is Roman Catholic, theologians and ministers in other Christian communions may well find affinities with their own work at institutions of higher education.

As with any exploration, this study bears at the outset promise and danger. Positively, my procedure will provide structure for the essay, as well as serve its content. Rather than wandering around the Catholic campus and ending up with a list of liturgical observations, attention to one particular event can focus the paper, pointing to wider considerations. In terms of content, the Baccalaureate Mass has a highly public dimension. A celebration of the church's most central liturgy, i.e., the Mass, on the eve of the College's most elaborate ritual, i.e., commencement, the baccalaureate condenses symbolically the school's dual institutional identity with both the American "university" and the Roman Catholic "church."⁴

²Development of the concept of the "ritual field" was one of the many significant contributions Victor Turner made to cultural anthropology. See his *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1974); and *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1967).

³The thesis for my masters degree in anthropology was a participant-observer study supervised by Robert F. Murphy. For a liturgical theologian's discussion of methodological issues entailed in participant-observation study of liturgy, see Margaret Mary Kelleher, "Hermeneutics in the Study of Liturgical Performance," *Worship* 67 (1993) 292-318.

⁴Historian David J. O'Brien reports that debates about Catholic higher education in the United States have tended to focus on "the church" and "the

As for risks, this method has several. While this paper is a critical study of a specific liturgy as it relates to the wider public life of a Catholic institution, it is not meant as a criticism of Boston College or its campus ministry. I turn to Boston College's Baccalaureate Mass, rather as a representative case just as, for example, David O'Brien analyzed Holy Cross College's mission statement in order to animate his book on Catholic higher education.⁵ The enterprise of campus ministry is complex, drawing on a wide range of pastoral, clinical, theological and social scientific resources. What I have to offer is the research and insights of a liturgical theologian, in the hope that the study will not lapse into the sort of polarization between the "liturgists" and "pastoralists" that has marked the debate about the sacrament of confirmation in this country.⁶ The discipline of liturgical theology itself, moreover, is searching for theoretical methods adequate to increased attention to actual practices of the rites. Continuing to learn much from anthropologists and performance theorists, liturgical theologians find themselves faced with those disciplines' issues concerning the balance of description and analysis and adequate accounting for the researcher's own biases. Added to these issues of praxis are theological concerns of normativity in relation to liturgy as the work of the church. I shall address these theoretical problems in my analysis of this one particular liturgy, the description of which now follows.⁷

THE BACCALAUREATE MASS

Boston College, a Jesuit university, holds its commencement exercises each year on the last Monday in May, with the Baccalaureate

university." See *From the Heart of the American Church: Catholic Higher Education and American Culture* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books 1994) 16.

⁵ See O'Brien, 122-40.

⁶ See Kieran Sawyer, "Readiness for Confirmation," *Living Light* 24 (1988) 331-39; and Arthur J. Kubick, ed., *Confirming the Faith of Adolescents: An Alternative Future for Confirmation* (New York: Paulist Press 1991).

⁷ I am grateful to Fr. Donald MacMillan S.J., a campus minister at Boston College, for providing me much information about Baccalaureate Mass at B.C. I should also note that in the years subsequent to the Baccalaureate I describe in this article, B.C.'s Office of Campus Ministry has made ongoing adjustments in its execution of this annual Mass which, situated on the eve of Commencement, continues to take place on a Sunday in the Easter Season.

Mass being celebrated the previous day at noon. In 1998 the Mass was celebrated on May 24, the Seventh Sunday of Easter on the Roman liturgical calendar. As is customary, the liturgy took place in the university's 8000 seat basketball and hockey arena. A large platform with a sizable table, covered in white, a white podium especially designed to serve as the ambo, a paschal candle, flowers, a backdrop of unadorned cloth panels, and armchairs for the principal celebrant and two concelebrants provided a dignified altar space. On the floor immediately to the right of the platform forty seats were reserved for other concelebrants. Dozens of seats reserved for faculty were to the right side of the main aisle in front of the platform. On the floor to the left side of the platform were members of the university's chorale and liturgical arts group, who served as the choir, while two women on the campus ministry staff and one graduating male senior served as cantors. A professional instrumental ensemble supported the singing. The remainder of the assembly, numbering more than seven thousand, was mostly comprised of members of the senior class (a total pool of 2200) and their families, seated on the rest of the floor and all around the arena, as well as a very small number of graduate students.

The Mass began with the hymn "All Creatures of Our God and King" accompanying a procession, led by seniors carrying a crucifix and two candles, followed by a little over thirty faculty (out of a possible 600) in academic regalia, then a "Book of Remembrance" containing the names of the Boston College community who had died, followed by the Book of the Gospels. Next came a banner depicting Saint Ignatius Loyola, followed by twenty concelebrating Jesuit priests (faculty, administrators, retirees, and graduate students), a master of ceremonies (an associate chaplain), two assisting concelebrants (the university chaplain and one of the associate chaplains), and the principal celebrant (the university president). All of the priests were vested in matching albs, stoles and, in the case of the latter three, chasubles predominantly white in color, with maroon and gold lining and trim (Boston College's school colors). After the greeting, the president introduced the liturgy with warm remarks expressing appreciation for the chaplaincy's successful preparation of the liturgical space, greetings to the graduating class, and then a call for all to express thanks to the parents by means of applause. The remainder of the

introductory rite included the kyrie, a sung gloria, and the proper opening prayer.

The Liturgy of the Word did not include the proper first and second readings for the Easter "C" Cycle from the Books of Acts and Revelation but, rather, substitutions from the Book of Wisdom and a Pauline epistle. Senior women did the readings, while the student cantor led the responsorial psalm (Psalm 27). The associate chaplain seated with the president came forward to proclaim the Gospel passage for the day, John 17:1-11, and then preached the homily. Building upon a story of his having chanced upon people practicing a form of martial arts on a beach, the homilist developed a theme lauding focused dedication to one's tasks and offering warm encouragement for the seniors' endeavors. I could not discern any direct or indirect references to the biblical readings, the prayers for the Mass of the day, or the liturgy of the Eucharist. The Prayers of the Faithful were read by several male and female members of the senior class. These were not general intercessions but, rather, prayers of thanksgiving for parents, friends, teachers, and the Boston College community.

Four students brought forward large glass vessels of hosts and wine as the choir led the assembly in singing Hass's "The Name of God." After the preparation of the gifts all of the concelebrants assembled behind the altar table. All sang the various acclamations for the Eucharistic Prayer from Haughen's Mass of Creation. As fifty-three eucharistic ministers (seniors, priests, and a few lay faculty) distributed hosts throughout the arena, the choir supported the communion rite by singing Mozart's "Ave Verum," Hurd's "I Am the Vine," and Canedo's "Alleluia! Give the Glory." At the end of the concluding rite the same parties comprised the procession, accompanied by "Now Thank We All Our God." A reception for all followed on the plaza outside the university's main library.

LITURGY AS RITUAL:

UNVEILING COMMUNAL IDENTITY

In his *Beyond the Text* Lawrence Hoffman has proposed what he calls a "holistic approach" to studying liturgy. Hoffman argues that in its almost exclusively text-based methodology, modern liturgical scholarship failed to grasp an interpretive principle fundamental

to liturgy, namely, that “worship is not a text; it is human behavior.”⁸ Consequently, historians of liturgy had largely assumed that philological and form-critical study of prayer or ritual texts is sufficient for understanding what the texts meant for the people who actually performed them. Hoffman’s point is that the study of liturgy cannot be a unidirectional movement from liturgical texts in themselves to conclusions about the impact of their content upon the peoples and societies who practically apply them in any given time and place. The literary model of liturgical interpretation needs to be supplemented by a wider range of disciplines which study history and society, giving evidence for how a people constructs their identity. The two trajectories of liturgical texts and wider social and historical processes “converge” in “the act of prayer, in which the people, as living reality, act out the world as it sees it, and from which its members return to their several homes to shape their lives about the contours of the world as presented in prayer.”⁹ An assembly’s act of worship then, *as act*, is not only directed to God but also imparts a message to them about who they are, what reality they inhabit, and what hopes they entertain. Put another way, the religious enactment of a worship text is also an “unveiling of communal identity.”¹⁰

Hoffman’s theory and methodology, which have strong affinities with the work of such liturgical theologians as Margaret Mary Kelleher¹¹ and Kevin Irwin¹² and performance theorist Bruce Kapferer,¹³ provide a framework for our analysis of the 1998 Baccalaureate Mass at Boston College. In the conclusion to his

⁸ Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Beyond the Text: A Holistic Approach to Liturgy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1987) 45.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 172–73.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 172. See also, 59.

¹¹ Margaret Mary Kelleher, “Liturgy: An Ecclesial Act of Meaning,” *Worship* 59 (1987) 482–97; and “Liturgy and the Christian Imagination,” *Worship* 66 (1992) 125–47.

¹² Kevin W. Irwin, *Context and Text: Method in Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville, Mn: The Liturgical Press 1994).

¹³ Bruce Kapferer, “Performance and the Structuring of Meaning and Experience,” in *The Anthropology of Experience*, ed. Victor W. Turner and Edward M. Bruner (Urbana: University of Illinois Press 1986) 188–203; and *A Celebration of Demons: Exorcism and the Aesthetics of Healing in Sri Lanka*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Berg/Smithsonian Institution Press 1991).

book Hoffman argues that the focus of liturgical study should not be the text but rather what he, strongly influenced by the work of Victor Turner, calls “the liturgical field, the holistic network of interrelationships that bind together discrete things, acts, people, and events into the activity we call worship — or better still, ritual. Within that field, one may single out any given relationship between or among any number of data for attention.”¹⁴ This present study, then, seeks to interpret the elements comprising the liturgical field of the Baccalaureate Mass in relation to its wider social field of an American Catholic university. I shall begin with elements of the liturgical space.

To consider “liturgical space,” as Louis-Marie Chauvet has theorized, is to take into account all of the various material elements of a liturgy and how they function together in the actual celebration of a given rite.¹⁵ These physical, bodily elements usually include such stable, if not immovable, objects as the baptismal font, altar table, ambo, and presidential chair, each of which by its design and placement symbolizes the irreducible importance of word, sacrament, and ministry in the work of the church. Moreover, the positioning of these anchoring objects in relation to each other within an oratory or church building should be such as to establish symbolic juxtapositions, to use Gordon Lathrop’s term,¹⁶ communicating crucial elements of the economy of salvation. Examples could include the altar and ambo comprising two “tables” of wisdom and holiness¹⁷ or the symmetry of font and altar manifesting the singular and ongoing moments of grace in the lives of believers.¹⁸

The Baccalaureate Mass at Boston College, of course, does not take place within such normative architectural conditions but rather, due to the overwhelming liturgical-spatial feature of an assembly numbering some 7500 people, in a large sports complex.

¹⁴Hoffman, 173.

¹⁵Louis-Marie Chauvet, “The Liturgy in its Symbolic Space,” in *Liturgy and the Body*, ed. Louis-Marie Chauvet and François Kabasele Lumbala, Concilium 1995/3 (London/Maryknoll: SCM Press/Orbis Press 1995) 29–39.

¹⁶Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress 1994) 79–83.

¹⁷Lectionary for Mass: Introduction (1981), no. 10.

¹⁸See Bruce T. Morrill, “The Meaning of Confirmation: Searching with the Bishop, the Liturgy, and the Holy Spirit,” *Liturgical Ministry* 9 (2000) 49–62.

While the seating capacity may be the primary criterion for this location, one cannot ignore the symbolism of the arena as the locale for high profile, televised sports competitions that have helped garner the university national recognition. The Baccalaureate Mass finds its physical context within this space symbolic of American collegiate athletics. While the chaplaincy conscientiously installs an elegantly appointed altar table and ambo, these key liturgical fixtures invite different sorts of symbolic reflections among the participants who see them here in juxtaposition to the massive athletic forum's symbols of competition and prowess.

Liturgical space, Chauvet explains, is also comprised of numerous moveable elements, whose selection, placement and movement vary according to particular rites, seasons, and pastoral occasions: music and chants, flowers, paschal candle, the use of certain gestures and postures, as well as the roles of different ministers and the assembly. Along with the stable fixtures, all of these elements both relate in their own unique ways to various beliefs and values in the Christian tradition and relate within a particular liturgy to one another so as to create in the entire space a particular experience of the tradition.

In the case of this Baccalaureate Mass, Roman Catholic tradition mingled with that of the university of Boston College itself, with assorted symbolic features sharing, if not vying for prominence in, the total liturgical space. The entrance procession included the standard elements listed in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, but with symbols of the university interspersed as well. The latter included the academically robed faculty, the university's Book of Remembrance, and the banner of Ignatius Loyola, which notably divided all of the preceding elements of the procession from the clerics who, it would seem, followed under the banner of their founder. The entrance song served well the function defined in the G.I.R.M., intensifying the unity of the gathering and accentuating the season.¹⁹ "All Creatures of Our God and King," with its repeated Alleluias, announced an Easter liturgy. Still, one wonders whether the selection might not have been made in relation to the First Principle and Foundation of Saint Ignatius's Spiritual Exercises — the purpose of all created things being the glory of

¹⁹ General Instruction of the Roman Missal (1975), no. 25.

God. Such, of course, is the multivalency of symbolism. Notable, however, is the fact that none of the subsequent music during this Mass was for the Easter Season. This would seem to indicate that other criteria located in the university community, such as favorite selections of students or staff, signature pieces of the university chorale, etc., held sway. The merging of ecclesial and university tradition was also delicately managed in having chasubles, stoles, and altar coverings designed in white but trimmed with the university colors. While the banner depicting Ignatius in chasuble and biretta took up residence on the altar against the backdrop of maroon hangings, a paschal candle also stood to one side. The candle, however, was susceptible to being lost amidst the large platform's other appointments, including red and yellow flowers, especially since no incensing occurred during the liturgy.

The strongest evidence that the primary institutional source for the Mass was the American university's culture and calendar, and not that of the Roman Catholic Church, emerged in the Liturgy of the Word. Dispensing with two of the proper readings of a Sunday in Easter is a strong dismissal of ecclesial tradition, which sees in the Order of Readings from the Acts of the Apostles and, in Year C, from the Book of Revelation presentations of "the life of the primitive Church, its witness, and its growth," as well as "the spirit of joyous faith and sure hope proper to this season."²⁰ The Introduction to the Lectionary of the Mass explains the importance of the Order of Readings in terms of the people's need for "knowledge of the whole of God's word," with the "choice and sequence of the readings" in the Easter season "giving the faithful an ever-deepening perception of the faith they profess and of the history of salvation."²¹ The decision to choose different readings according to some other criteria, perhaps considering texts such as the Book of Wisdom relevant to the educational enterprise, would seem to betray an indifference to not only the authority of the *ordo* but also the wisdom therein. Here I acknowledge my making a normative claim concerning the tradition, but I do so with a passionate conviction that the lectionary is one of the church's greatest treasures, one pastorally attuned to the cycles of the year while presenting a

²⁰ Lectionary for Mass: Introduction, no. 100.

²¹ *Ibid.*, no. 60.

given church community with an “otherness” of text and salvation history that they might otherwise neglect, if not avoid.

One of the most important elements of the Roman liturgical reform and yet one of the least successful to date according to repeated national polling in U.S. parishes is the value, meaning, and purpose of the homily.²² A homily relating the mission of the Catholic university, its members and graduates, with the mission of the early church, the hope found amidst persecution, and the mystical participation of all people in the salvific plan of God could robustly serve that particular day both as an Easter Sunday and a university baccalaureate. To substitute reflections on personal achievement with little to no reference to the readings chosen or the liturgical day being celebrated or even the nature of the eucharistic celebration²³ would seem to be a lost opportunity, if not a disservice to the assembly. Commencement speakers notoriously struggle to find something significant if not unique to say to graduates; a homilist is spared the search by being presented with singularly powerful sources. Thinking less normatively and more descriptively, the homily given in this Mass would seem to be a case in which Hoffman’s two trajectories of liturgical text and wider social processes converged in an act of worship wherein communal identity was more strongly shaped by the latter — the culture of selective, private higher education in American society.

The Liturgy of the Word for the Mass concluded with the Prayer of the Faithful, comprised of several statements of thanksgiving. Four graduating seniors, men and women, lined up in single file behind the ambo, with each reading one prayer and then exiting to the side. Each prayer began with the words, “In thanksgiving for . . .,” followed by mention of parents, faculty, classmates and their contributions or achievements, and concluding with “we pray to

²² Robert Taft made an observation several years ago that can still function as a touchstone for assessing local efforts at liturgical practice and renewal: “The great irony of most of the present efforts in [liturgical] creativity is that it is precisely in the two areas officially left to our creativity — the homily and the intercessions following the Scripture lessons — that our worship is so unredeemably awful.” Robert Taft, “Response to the Berakah Award: Anamnesis,” *Worship* 59 (1985) 322.

²³ These are the criteria for the homily found in *Lectionary of the Mass: Introduction*, no. 24.

the Lord." Thus, the prayer was not an act of intercession but, rather, an acknowledgement of "blessings." Normatively, however, such thanksgiving is expressed elsewhere in the euchology of the Roman Mass, as it should be. The assembly's response to the proclamation of God's word, on the other hand, is one of intercession for the needs of the church, for public authorities and the salvation of the world, for those oppressed by any need, and for the local community.²⁴ The wisdom of the church's liturgical tradition became evident to me in its absence as I participated at that point in the Baccalaureate. I became naggingly aware of students I knew who had struggled, some who had failed, others who had lost grandparents or even friends, as well as those many who might feel alienated from parents or peers or church. My thoughts wandered further outside the sports arena to the poor, the children, the elderly that a significant percentage of this senior class had served weekly in greater Boston and annually in Appalachia, Mexico, or Jamaica. Why was it that the needs and concerns of these people were absent from this act of worship on the Lord's Day? The world being revealed in the liturgy seemed definitely limited in scope which, if we follow Hoffman's theory, could only limit the vision the participants took back into the society around them.

The beginning of the liturgy of the Eucharist pressed further my awareness of the absence of the poor, whether in person or by other symbolic means, in the Baccalaureate Mass. In terms of symbolism, no collection was taken up for the poor. What has perhaps been most fascinating to me as I have shared my reflections on this liturgy with colleagues (both at Boston College and elsewhere) has been their universally negative reaction to my conviction that a collection for the poor should have been taken. My peers judge this to be an impolite imposition upon a captive audience or a surefire means of angering a body of parents who have spent so much money over four years. But therein lies the rub. The collection in the Roman Mass is "for the church or the poor."²⁵ In this situation, the assembly is not that of a local church and, thus, the collection could only be for the poor. The identification of any raising of money on campus singularly with the advancement of

²⁴ General Instruction of the Roman Missal, no. 46.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

the university's finances is a perception that should give the Catholic-affiliated institution pause.

Perhaps of even greater concern should be the widespread tendency of Christians to disassociate the offering of eucharistic gifts to God from their offering material gifts to the poor. Gordon Lathrop argues that the Christian crisis of sacrificial offering, articulated as early as Justin's juxtaposition of the liturgical bread and wine with the food given to the poor, is better understood at present as a question posed to all the churches than a problem whose answer is readily proffered.²⁶ But allow me to offer an answer for this situation anyway. The chaplaincy at Boston College takes up collections at all Sunday liturgies throughout the school year, announcing each week the particular charity that will benefit. To take up a collection at the senior class's last Sunday assembly should not seem an imposition at least to *them*. Since their parents are the invited guests to this eucharistic feast, perhaps it is the students alone who should make a contribution. The money could be raised during Senior Week for beneficiaries nominated by the class, and the donation presented at the preparation of the gifts,²⁷ avoiding the logistical nightmare of passing baskets through 8000 seats.

My observations about the poor, finally, go one step further from the euchology of intercessions and the offering of gifts to the question of the personal absence of the poor from this baccalaureate assembly. One of Johann Baptist Metz's prophetic criticisms of middle-class Christianity is its tendency to practice a checkbook sort of charity that avoids actual involvement with the poor. The church must stop praying *for* the poor and the outcast and start praying *with* them. Only such a change in the actual location of the clerical leadership and socio-economically secure members of the church, Metz argues, can establish the authenticity, the authority, the power of its prayer and thus make prayer itself "political and influential."²⁸ Typical of the voluntarism prevalent among American

²⁶ Gordon Lathrop, "Forum: The Bodies on Nevado Ampato: A Further Note on Offering and Offertory," *Worship* 71 (1997) 546-54.

²⁷ The General Instruction of the Roman Missal, no. 49, allows for the "money or other gifts for the church or the poor" to be either "brought by the faithful or collected at the Mass."

²⁸ Johannes Metz, "The Courage to Pray," in Johannes Metz and Karl Rahner, *The Courage to Pray*, trans. Sarah O'Brien Twohig (New York: Crossroad Publishing

schools, both secular and religiously affiliated, Boston College's undergraduates are avidly involved in community service. Not only are many of the local and distant projects sponsored by the chaplaincy — in the attempt to connect faith with works of justice — but the College of Arts and Sciences offers certain core philosophy and theology courses that include a service requirement. Not surprisingly, all of these programs and courses are oversubscribed, reflecting the widespread observation that this younger generation of Americans, as many as 60 percent,²⁹ are not only volunteering service but also consider such experiences essential to their engaging academic subject matter or religious beliefs.³⁰ Commentators question, nonetheless, the depth of commitment that youth have to the marginalized they serve, wondering whether these experiences will prove integral to how this generation goes about leading the course of economics and politics when their turn comes. My point here is that if the poor and marginalized are only to be served at a distance from the Catholic university campus but not welcomed as honored guests at the school's climactic eucharistic feast, then what actual model of church is in practice?

Objections to my argument have included the following: The parents and their graduating children should be the center of attention at this Mass. The number in attendance would swell significantly if these poor came. It's hard enough to get up on that Sunday morning and get the family together for a noon Mass, let alone having to pick up people a couple of miles away in greater Boston. But what do these objections really amount to? Is not the festive, expensive ball on Commencement Weekend an ample opportunity for families to celebrate exclusively together? Does not the president of the university invite all at the Commencement ceremony to stand and applaud the parents? The issue is: What makes the Baccalaureate *as a Mass celebrated on a*

1981) 20. See also, Johann Baptist Metz, *The Emergent Church: The Future of Christianity in a Postbourgeois World*, trans. Peter Mann (New York: Crossroad 1987) 34–47.

²⁹ See John Leland, et. al., "Searching for a Holy Spirit," *Newsweek*, 8 May 2000, 63.

³⁰ See Tom Beaudoin, "Beginning Afresh: Gen-X Catholics," *America* (21 November 1998) 12; and Dean R. Hoge, "Get Ready for the Post-Boomer Catholics," *America* (21 March 1998) 9.

Sunday in Easter a distinctive event in the *public* activity of the Catholic university?³¹

CAMPUS WORSHIP AS PUBLIC EVENT?

Perhaps one of the factors conditioning the socially self-referential quality that I perceived in the Baccalaureate Mass, as well as the general suppressing of the church's seasonal *ordo*, lies in a repeated observation that David O'Brien has made about Catholic higher education and American culture. Early in his *From the Heart of the American Church* O'Brien states: "American Catholics — maybe all American Christians — are very interested in the personal and community aspects of religion and a lot less interested in the religious dimension of things political and intellectual."³² Further into his argument O'Brien makes the point in a slightly different way: "Christianity makes claims on personal lives and sustains warm communities of mutual support, but it makes a shrinking contribution to our collective lives as Americans."³³ O'Brien argues that analysis of American Catholic higher education has been generally misguided by thinking in terms of a dialectic between "the church" and "the university" when in fact the major societal (and thus, institutional) factor is actually the "American-ness" of all involved in these enterprises. He is critical of those analysts who consider American Roman Catholics as compromised by "the world." For O'Brien "church" and "world" are not simply separate, let alone opposed, entities, and thus he believes that the typical efforts to establish the Catholic "distinctiveness" of these schools is misguided.³⁴ The effort of the universities and colleges, rather, should be to contribute to Roman Catholicism's duty to raise issues and help shape public life in America, "to share responsibility in common human problems."³⁵

³¹ For a compelling theory of rituals as public events whose designs and practices either construct or reflect the participants' version of the social order, see Don Handelman, *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990) 3–62.

³² O'Brien, 16.

³³ *Ibid.*, 73.

³⁴ See *Ibid.*, 16, 30–34, 157.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 121. For a recent study of post-Vatican II Catholicism in the United States, see the last three chapters of Mark S. Massa, *Catholics and American*

What I find ironic in O'Brien's compelling book is the way in which liturgy plays no role in his strategy for advancing the public mission of Roman Catholic educational institutions.³⁶ Reporting that campus ministers complain of strained relations with the religious studies or theology faculty, who consider them second-class citizens in the university, O'Brien seems himself to view liturgy only in terms of personal and psychological development. Perhaps liturgy is too distinctively Catholic, in O'Brien's view, to serve the wider public mission or perhaps the way in which liturgy is practiced in America gives little evidence for a connection between the church's sacramental liturgy and its participation in the liturgy of the world. If such is the case, then it would seem that liturgical theologians, such as Maxwell Johnson,³⁷ must continue to press the issue of whether their discipline can make normative claims about liturgy. To that agenda I would add the issue of whether there are qualities inherent to Christian liturgical tradition whereby its practice is formative of believers' public, ethical engagement in the world.³⁸

This all leads to further considerations. My description and analysis of this particular ritual event has been governed in no small part by at least two interrelated categories of normative claims, namely, the liturgical doctrine and law of the Roman Catholic Church and the historically informed theoretical principles of liturgical theology. Together, these amount to a substantial range of normative demands that the ministers of the local community of faith must take into account in service to their assembly. Some of the most problematic principles for the 1998 Baccalaureate Mass at Boston College, as I have tried to argue in my analysis, included the priority of the Lord's Day (and more specifically, a Sunday of Easter) over other commemorations or themes on the liturgical or academic calendar; the structure of the Mass's Liturgy of the Word,

Culture: Fulton Sheen, Dorothy Day, and the Notre Dame Football Team (New York: Crossroad 1999).

³⁶ For his three-point strategy, see O'Brien, 119–20.

³⁷ See Maxwell E. Johnson, "Can We Avoid Relativism in Worship? Liturgical Norms in the Light of Contemporary Liturgical Scholarship," *Worship* 74 (2000) 135–55.

³⁸ See Bruce T. Morrill, "Anamnetic Action: The Ethics of Remembrancing," *Doxology* 17 (2000) 1–20; and Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory*, 180–212.

with its proper readings for the day, as well as the nature and function of its intercessory prayers; and the importance of taking up a collection for the poor in conjunction with taking up bread and wine as a sacrament of Christ. In critically wrestling with this particular ritual celebration I have tacitly accepted the judgment of Boston College's administration and campus ministry that the Mass is the most apt form of worship in this context.

It may well be the case, however, that at the beginning of the twenty-first century the Mass of the Roman Rite is not the type of liturgy best suited to the pastoral needs of an American Catholic university on the eve of its commencement exercises.³⁹ As a service of worship the Baccalaureate need not be a Mass at all but, rather, might better take the form of a festive evening prayer or solemn vespers. In the Catholic institutional context this would allow for greater flexibility in the arrangement and content of ritual elements and the liturgical space. Among the advantages of such a pastoral strategy would be the university's ability to offer a form of worship in which non-Catholics and even non-Christians (an increasing percentage of the student body, faculty and staff of American Catholic colleges and universities) would have a better chance of participating fully. Adopting such an approach risks reducing the Baccalaureate liturgy to a celebration of "immediate feelings"⁴⁰ of achievement and nostalgia and thereby conceding any substantially prophetic or formative role for the church's liturgical tradition in educating and empowering the members of the academic community in their social-ethical praxis. Conversely, however, one could argue that crafting a non-eucharistic liturgy attentive to the cultural and religious diversity of the increasingly complex academic campus might enable the *American Catholic university* to challenge and transform aspects of the *church's* tradition. To conclude with such a liturgical proposal, then, is to break wide open the issue of how the categories "American" and "Catholic" vie for priority in shaping the mission and identity of Catholic higher education in the United States at the dawn of a new millennium.

³⁹ For this line of questioning I am indebted to David N. Power, who introduced this alternative approach during the discussion of my original paper at the meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America.

⁴⁰ See Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon Press 1994) 146-48.



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