

## SACRAMENTAL AND LITURGICAL THEOLOGY

- Topic: Catholic Liturgy and Public Life  
Convener: Bruce Morrill, Boston College  
Presenters: David W. Fagerberg, Concordia College  
Bruce T. Morrill, Boston College  
Respondent: Susan K. Wood, Saint John's University, Collegeville

Attending to the theme of this year's annual meeting, the group explored the role of liturgy in the Church's public mission. David Fagerberg took a highly conceptual approach, drawing upon such figures as Edward Schillebeeckx, Aidan Kavanagh, Maximus the Confessor, and Pavel Florensky to argue that Christian liturgy functions as an icon to the world. Bruce Morrill analyzed the execution of one specific liturgy, working primarily with the theories of liturgical theologians Lawrence Hoffman and Gordon Lathrop and historian David O'Brien to arrive at some conclusions about the communal identity forged in the public practice of worship.

In "Liturgy as Icon: Public Witness in a Pluralistic World," Fagerberg argued that while the demise of Christendom meant that public life no longer takes place within the Church, the appropriate ecclesial response is not, as some have argued, to insinuate the Church into the secular world, that is, somehow to introduce God to the otherwise profane realm. The Catholic task in post-Christendom consists of being a liturgical icon facing the profane world. The place of liturgy now is not in the world but before it, standing vis-à-vis public life. An icon, according to Florensky, is neither a natural image nor an abstract representation of glory but, rather, an image of glorified nature. An icon reaches its goal when it leads our consciousness out into the spiritual realm where we behold mysterious and supernatural visions. The Church at Divine Liturgy does not exist to provide an escape from the world. Liturgy faces the world iconically, telling the world the truth about itself: that self-sufficiency is a lie, that humanity was made for community, that humanity was made for deification, that beauty is ambiguous, that a person is more than the mask he or she wears, that the image of God we are by creation must pass through the cross in order to become a countenance, that the spiritual is constitutive of creation. The Church-at-liturgy is an icon of the world's transfiguration due to the power of the Holy Spirit, whose eschatological work in Christ, amidst cosmos and human history, enables the Church to visualize the potency of the world.

Bruce Morrill followed cultural anthropology's time-honored method of description and analysis in his "Public Worship on the Catholic University Campus." He presented a participant-observer study of the Baccalaureate Mass performed at Boston College in 1998 as a representative case of how the act of public worship is not only directed to God but also shapes a communal identity among its participants. Morrill analyzed numerous aspects of the liturgical space, elements of the Liturgy of the Word, and the preparation of the eucharistic gifts to

argue that in this particular Mass the institutions of "church" and "university" not only vied for prominence but were significantly governed by further societal factors that O'Brien calls "Americanness." While the Baccalaureate Mass took place on the Seventh Sunday of Easter, little of the spatial and musical features of the liturgy marked the season, two of the three proper readings were replaced, the homily made no reference to the gospel reading or eucharistic euchology, and the general intercessions were replaced with prayers of thanksgiving.

In light of these observations, Morrill questioned whether this enactment of liturgy manifested a limited view of the world, a world characterized by success, wealth, and boundless opportunity but void of any hints of failure, loss, and poverty. The stark absence from not only the prayers but the liturgical assembly of at least some representation of the poor and elderly whom hundreds of the seniors had served during their college years, coupled with the failure to take up a collection for the poor in conjunction with the eucharistic gifts, led Morrill to question the function of the Baccalaureate Mass in relation to the Church's public activity in service to the world. He concluded with broader considerations about the ability of liturgical theologians to make normative claims about the Church's worship and 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.

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