

**LITURGY, SACRAMENTS, AND AESTHETIC PRACTICES—  
INVITED SESSION**

Topic: Liturgy, Sacraments, and Aesthetic Practices  
Convener: Anne E. Patrick, Carleton College (Emerita)  
Moderator: Anne E. Patrick, Carleton College (Emerita)  
Presenters: Cecilia González-Andrieu, Loyola Marymount University  
James Caccamo, St. Joseph's University

Although the research areas and perspectives of the presenters differed, they consulted with each other in developing their papers to foster communication across the divide between the traditional devotions of immigrant communities and the technological advances of contemporary life. Both speakers showed colorful illustrations to accompany their presentations. Cecilia González-Andrieu opened the session by observing that the “past” orientation associated with immigrant experience needs to be balanced with the “future” emphasis of technology, and James Caccamo observed that both papers involve case studies from liturgical lives with implications for the broader church.

González-Andrieu then gave a presentation entitled, “In the Presence of the Holy.” She indicated that the current wave of anti-immigrant feeling in this country involves an anti-Latino agenda that ignores the long history of Hispanic presence in North America, which has been “erased” from dominant historical accounts and inadequately treated in histories of U.S. Catholicism. She also observed that “much of the wholesale stereotyping of Hispanics stems largely from the uncritical and uninformed observation of their religious practices.” Maintaining that the “public and aesthetic embodiment of faith” typical of Latino churches is an important way of resisting assimilation, she suggested that scholars would do well to study the “aesthetic symbols, spaces, and practices” of Latino Catholics, which reveal their understanding of the holy. She illustrated this approach by analyzing several crosses displayed at Dolores Mission in East Los Angeles, a “tiny, vibrant and extremely poor Jesuit parish.” Most of the crosses are handmade by parishioners and have no corpus; they are “performative” rather than “decorative,” being used for re-enacting the passion of Jesus as well as for marches for peace and justice. There is one procession cross that represents the “unknown/desconocido” and another announcing “Jesus sin fronteras,” which is often repainted after names have been glued to it representing those recently dead from violence. There are also crosses planted in the parish grounds, which “mark place, remembrance, and history.” One is near a site where victims of gang violence bled to death, and several others represent a symbolic parish cemetery commemorating those who died alone in the desert, “desconocido.” All together, these crosses “proclaim how it is this community understands what it is to live in the presence of the holy and to be present to the holy” and function as “a living Gospel proclaiming that Jesus does indeed abide with us and in us ‘to the end of time.’”

James Caccamo then spoke on “Mediating God in a New Media World.” He noted that both Trent and Vatican II adapted the liturgy in the wake of “a change in the means of social communication.” This change was precipitated by the invention of moveable type in the sixteenth century, and by electronic technologies in the twentieth century. Today we are experiencing a “third wave of media change” because of the “digital revolution,” which may lead to further liturgical adaptations. He discussed features of contemporary communication practices that are likely to impact liturgical life: curation, constant communication, and self-

instrumentalization. Curation, which involves “filtering information, symbols, and experiences,” has long been an aspect of culture; indeed, rituals and the biblical canon are examples of curated information. Today, however, when there are virtually no limits to accessible information, curation has become a “survival skill,” through which individuals choose to access data from limited sources they find congenial. He wonders if people may “move away from liturgy as a primary locus for curating important information.” Secondly, increased diversity of neighborhoods and constant electronic communications are likely to affect parish liturgy as worshipers seek “more personal relevance” across “the breadth of their lives,” but find it difficult to participate attentively because of habits of multi-tasking. Finally, the practice of “consenting instrumentalization of the human person,” expressed in people’s willingness to surrender personal information for the perceived benefits of technology, may undermine appreciation for human dignity and thus affect liturgical participation. Moving beyond the liturgy to concerns of social justice and the common good, Caccamo noted that the “digital divide” between the technological “haves” and “have-nots” is exacerbated by a self-curated environment in which “gated communities of information” ignore the realities of oppression beyond themselves.

There was animated discussion following the papers, which touched on the connections between curation and the “editing out of Hispanic presence” in the United States, and also on topics including embodiment and liturgical language, changes in parish life, and the ambiguities of electronic connectedness.

ANNE E. PATRICK  
*Carleton College (Emerita)*  
*Northfield, Minnesota*