



Do This: Liturgy as Performance

Richard D. McCall

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Dramatic elements have always been apparent in the historic Christian liturgy. Because the liturgy is a structured action and not merely a verbal narrative, it has historically been both illuminated by and confused with other types of performance, such as theatre and drama. This confusion has been compounded by the fact that much analysis of liturgy has focused on the linguistic and theological aspects of the event and not on its elements of performance.

In *Do This: Liturgy as Performance*, Richard D. McCall presents a systematic approach to the liturgy as event rather than text, using tools made available by contemporary performance theory. McCall follows the rise of dramatic interpretation of the early Christian liturgy from its beginnings through such elements as costumes, interpretative text, and gesture. He then examines the development of performance theory, focusing on the work of Victor Turner and Richard Schechner, and asks if it can be applied to the liturgy. Three views of liturgical theology, especially that of Aiden Kavanagh's, which holds that the liturgy as enacted is liturgy properly presented, set the stage for McCall to construct a definition of liturgy as a mode of performance. In chapter 4, McCall brings Aristotle's categories in the *Poetics* to bear on liturgical action. In the final chapter he analyzes an actual liturgical enactment: the celebration of the Mass at Rome in the early eighth century according to the Gregorian Sacramentary and the actions described in *Ordo Romanus I*.

"In this excellent book, Richard McCall addresses the question of what it means to speak of the liturgy as drama. This claim is often made, but generally without adequate attention to what this claim actually means. In *Do This*, McCall undertakes this task and offers to his readers a thorough analysis of the multi-faceted issues that the question raises. McCall brings to this task not only his knowledge of liturgical history and theology, but also his extensive professional experience in theatre. The central act of the Christian Eucharist is placed within the context of the wide range of human performative acts, with a careful analysis of both similarities and differences. McCall's book offers enormous insight into this aspect of the Eucharistic rite."

—Louis Weil, Hodges-Haynes Professor of Liturgics, Church Divinity School of the Pacific

"Richard McCall takes what is perhaps the most obvious yet most neglected element in the liturgy, its dramatic character, and gives it superb theoretical substance. Liturgical studies can have many starting points but the most neglected of all is Jesus' command: Do this in memory of me. While the 'this' can be codified into rubrics, the essence of the command, i.e., the 'do' in 'Do this' is that it must be performed. Dr. McCall deftly and brilliantly explores the nature of such performance and its implications for liturgical studies. In this, he has advanced the field significantly." —Alejandro Garcia-Rivera, Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley

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