

# Advance thanks

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [March 22, 2000](#) issue

I wouldn't recognize Rosie O'Donnell if we bumped into each other's baskets at the supermarket, but I know she's big on television. And on the basis of just one of her sentences, reported in a recent issue of *Time*, I nominate her for a position on liturgical commissions and other groups that decide what should go on in contemporary worship and public prayers.

"I bumped into God backstage, and he said, 'You're welcome,'" O'Donnell said. As *Time* reported, she was "assuring prospective Grammy winners that each didn't have to thank God in acceptance speeches." I consider that useful advice for moving things along at public rites, good for the name of God, and kind to viewers of award ceremonies and overtime football games.

I know, I know: we used to gripe that Hollywood and major league sports were too secular, and now it sounds as if we are griping that they are too religious. But by deflating God-and-me egos and pulling the rug out from under those who try to make God a part of their platforms, O'Donnell has made us aware of something important: these routine public incantations turn religion into a rote secular blurting. They do not really lift the secular into anything sacred.

There should perhaps be a few more, "I know, I know's" in these remarks, since I know repetition is not all bad. Readers may remind me that many of the oratorios I like, along with such services as the Paschal Vigil liturgy, take a line or two from scripture or the creeds and spin them out in fugal repetition for minutes on end. And postmodern relativists may accuse me of subjectivity if I suggest that a Handel oratorio has a staying power that a Grammy Award winner's thanking of God does not. Or that the Orthodox Church's liturgy might evoke as profound a sense of thanks to God as the boasting words of triumphant NFL warriors.

During the presidential campaigns we are getting heavy doses of repetitious praising and thanking of God. These amount to claims by various candidates that they have an inside track to divine favor. Maybe it would be God-pleasing and time-saving to resolve that, as the primary season comes to an end and candidates get really

serious about claiming and praising and thanking God, they start off with the following public service announcement:

Be it noted that all of the candidates thank God in advance for all that comes, be it success or adversity; and be it understood that not chattering about it does not mean they are not genuinely grateful to God.

This might help to restore the acts of praising and thanking to expressions of awe. It is awe that is missing when tuxedoed, decolletaged, armor-plated or flag-waving celebrities do their repetitious thankings. So right now I will say not "Thank God," but "Thanks, Rosie."