Inauguration of President John T. Butler, S.J.

Remarks by Nicholas Burns, '78

October 16, 2026

Father Butler, it is a true honor to join you and this extraordinary gathering of the Boston College family this afternoon so that we can all thank you for carrying our university's torch forward into the 2030s and beyond.

You have the support of every one of us here in Conte Forum and tens of thousands of Eagles across our country and the globe.

This is an auspicious day for BC because you begin your service with many strengths and extraordinary promise.

One clear strength is the continuity of leadership that has preceded you. Few institutions in American society can say they have been led for 54 consecutive years by two wise, judicious, effective and faithful leaders. Boston College has been blessed to have had Father Monan and Father Leahy at the helm for over half a century. They have made us into the ascending university we are today.

I came to BC as a commuter student in September 1974 at the encouragement of my parents and of my lifelong friend and mentor, Father Tony Penna, who is here today. We were, back then, a student body composed principally of Bostonians, New Englanders and a few random Yankees fans from New York and New Jersey and other parts of the East Coast--we New England Catholics and Red Sox fans were taught, after all, to be charitable, even to Yankees fans!

I loved BC from my very first class with Professor Mark O'Connor in European History who is also here today. I don't think any of us realized, however, that our university was nearly broke in those years, and that it might have been forced to close its doors had it not been for the vision, wisdom and determined leadership of Father Monan.

Decades later, our daughter Elizabeth graduated from BC in 2008 and again 2018—she's a double Eagle-- and our daughter Caroline graduated in 2012. They benefited from the school that Father Leahy built—one of much higher academic standards, on an expanding campus and with a more expansive educational mission. Father Leahy made us into a national university composed of students from every state and every race, ethnicity and faith in our diverse nation and from many countries across the globe. We all saw how hard Father Leahy worked, how much he cared and how much he accomplished to raise us up

by every degree of measurement—academically, financially, esthetically. He defines "Semper Fidelis".

Father Butler, you now form with Fathers Monan and Leahy a trio of Jesuit leaders that is precious for Boston College and is the rock upon which you can lead us into the future.

My final point is to say how much we need you at this moment. We need the deep experience you've gained on our campus for many years. We need your wisdom to help us navigate the exciting but also tumultuous time in which we live.

We are facing a future of contrasts—a time of unprecedented technological change that is transforming our economy, the purpose of work, the role of the university and even the relationship between humans and machines.

Advances in Artificial Intelligence may help us to cure many forms of cancer but they could also undermine, if we're not careful, the very nature of what it means to be human. That was one of Pope Leo's messages in Magnifica Humanitas.

BC's Jesuit values are made for this moment. Given all that is at stake, people across the political spectrum, from all walks of life, are looking for ethical and moral leadership. They want to be led and inspired by good people with good values.

How else to explain one million people lining the Champs Elysee to honor Pope Leo in secular France, to sing with him in Notre Dame, to celebrate mass at the Stade de France and to pray with him at Lourdes?

In this sense, this is also a transcendent moment for BC. As a university embedded in the worldwide Catholic Church—1.4 billion people on every continent, Boston College has an opportunity under your leadership to step further out into the world, and to become a global university with an even greater global mission.

As it does, BC must continue to do what makes us distinctive—to prepare our students for public service, to be men and women for others, particularly immigrants and the less fortunate, and to help make our country and our world more just and more peaceful.

Father Butler, Father Jack, you begin today with the support, the optimism, and the prayers of the Boston College community as you shepherd our university to be a force for good and a force for hope here in the U.S. and in the world for the years to come.

Congratulations.