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by NCR Staff

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Reader responses were in support of making a clear distinction between the word "church" and the word "hierarchy." First read the original argument from Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese. The following letters to the editor have been edited for length and clarity.



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Thank you, Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese, for a somewhat clarifying article about the use of the word church. It has to be used carefully.

The same is true of the word father. No priest is officially a father in the Catholic Church unless he came into the Roman Catholic Church from the Episcopalian church. Let us do it like some other countries and use the word Reverend or just Mr. or by first name.

It is time to change.

ELIZABETH AVERILL

Madison, Wisconsin

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I write to support Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese acknowledging that he and too many others too often use the word "church" when they ought to be using the word "hierarchy." For a long time, I have been preaching and teaching that the major problems in our church are problems of the hierarchy and not of the "People of God," including all the baptized.

The recent highlighting of the coverup of the sex abuse in the church reaffirmed my conviction about this. A bishop was proposing that the church needs to ask forgiveness for our failings. I said "No, it is not the church, it is the hierarchy of our church that needs to ask forgiveness. Do not lump the failings and sins of bishops and priests with the rest of the church."

Another example is the "church's teaching on birth control." No, it is the hierarchy's teaching on birth control. A long time ago the vast majority of lay members of the church came to a different understanding of the place of birth control.

I hope that NCR and your writers will be careful to make that distinction. It may even help to encourage some lay people to see their rightful place in the church.

(Fr.) LOUIS ARCENEAUX, CM

New Orleans, Louisiana

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Thank you. This is immensely important not just for writers but for lay people. I will do my best to follow his advice. Old habits die hard. Blessings to all

ADDIE STREETER

Portland Oregon

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In gratitude to Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese's article on a request to change "the church" to " church hierarchy" when appropriate. The words "the church" is too broad of a term and too impersonal.

As a retired registered nurse, we were taught not to say " name of an illness/medical condition" in room such and such but to say the person's name and if appropriate their diagnosis. The medical condition was not the patient — the person was.

I see it the same way. "The church" is more than "the hierarchy." It is all the baptized — the laity along with those who have received the sacrament of Holy

Orders. In my life according to "the church," I am referred to as laity and my husband who has received the sacrament of Holy Orders is referred to as clergy and is seen as hierarchy.

Bless you Father Thomas for this request and may many who write about "the church " become aware as you have become and to begin to use "church hierarchy" as appropriate.

CHERI HALL

Louisville, Kentucky

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In reference to the use of the word "church," we do need to be careful. Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese is correct in pointing out that we should be more careful in how the word is used.

Sometimes the mistake is made when someone refers to a man entering the seminary as "joining the church," which is, of course, inaccurate.

When people ask me what the "church" teaches about something, I try to be careful to talk about the "official church" or "official teaching" or make some reference to the Catechism of the Catholic Church. I try to always recognize that the church is made up of all its people.

Sometimes we use a kind of shorthand which can in fact be an inaccuracy.

(Fr.) TOM ZELINSKI

Washington, Michigan

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Thank you, Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese, for calling us to renew our faith and recognize once again what Vatican II was about.

The renewal was about getting "to our roots." Religious women and men were called to acknowledge and renew who, why, what their founder/s were all about. Laity too were given words acknowledging that in our baptism we are gifted to be priest, prophet and kings. No big deal, just act like our founder, Jesus! Do sacrifices of love, talk and act out of love and serve the least among you with love.

The article couldn't come at a better time. In the upcoming weeks, we celebrate Jesus' having come (faith), will come, (hope), and comes (love) daily in so many ways. It's up to us to make Jesus present, for God is Emmanuel and we as children of God, are called to become like God in word and deed.

LEONA R. WIELAND

Sartell, Minnesota

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The article "Note to Newspaper Editors" speaks of the church contrasted to the Roman Catholic male hierarchy, well and good, but the author misses completely the necessary and righteous transformation that needs to happen for a healthy, holy church to grow. What has happened within the Roman Catholic Church is much more profound than being "the mess we are in today" as the author glibly states the case. Language, words do matter.

My note to newspaper editors is that what is generally called the Roman Catholic Church should now appropriately be called the Roman Catholic Crime Syndicate not the Catholic hierarchy. The Catholic hierarchy — all the way to the pope, bless him — is a now daily demonstrated criminal enterprise! Many of the hierarchy need to be finally prosecuted and put in jail. By any legal definition many are criminals, twisted thugs.

I grew up in an Irish Catholic family with uncles as priests and aunts as nuns. I was schooled by Dominican Nuns and Jesuits. As a former altar boy, the whole male hierarchy makes me nauseous.

Women priests and married clergy are the only way for a healthy church to rise up out of all the untold suffering. Bringing laity into all decision-making processes is

important, but it's a small measure next to the deeper transformations necessary to cure the disease.

Or just burn the whole thing down.

The never-ending revelations of perverted men covering up other criminals who they know are destroying children's lives has to stop. There is really nothing else worth talking about regarding the Roman Catholic Church at this point, until that happens.

KEVIN FETHERSTON

Seattle, Washington

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Thanks so much for Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese's remarks. Specificity never hurts.

There are two words that I have insisted for many years we only used in specific ways. The two words are "Bible" and "church." The church doesn't say anything. The Bible doesn't say anything. Some people in the church say things. Some places in the Bible say things. If you limit your thinking and your language to those two principles, you will probably be on more solid ground.

JOSEPH KOMADINA

St. Louis, Missouri

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