Opinion
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by NCR Staff

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Last month, NCR published reader responses to two opinion pieces on Latin Mass. The first, entitled "The Latin Mass becomes a cult of toxic tradition," says that the practice of Latin Mass needs major reform. The second, entitled "Traditional Latin Mass best expresses the reality of Christ's sacrifice," argues just the opposite, that Latin Mass is a "deeply peaceful experience." More readers wrote in after the first batch was published. The letters are edited for length and clarity.

I have just published a book called *Liturgy: The Pulse of the Universe*. Its intent is to discover the roots of the liturgy and articulate a liturgical spirituality. I did this after 30 years teaching theology and liturgy in our seminary college along with some 20 years worth of being a pastor.

Much of our initial catechesis to the liturgical reforms was aimed at getting congregations to understand the changes implemented after the council, but without in-depth digging into the depths of the liturgy.



Much of the cause of a desire to return to the so-called "traditional" Mass stems from a lack of understanding what is at the heart of the liturgy along with a search for some anchoring within a world which is unstable, insecure and without direction. However, Mass is not meant to be a security blanket but a call to extend what happens at liturgy into the world.

If liturgy is the work of 10 people as the name suggests then understanding what is being said and prayed along with being drawn, not into a private devotional prayer, but into the action of the ritual is essential. Liturgy is about the world and the universe and should be pulse of our world, and hence it is difficult to justify the race to Latin.

(Fr.) PETER HAMMETT, OSB

St. Benedict, Louisiana

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Anything that polarizes Catholics and sets them against each other is wrong. I attend the Eucharist in two churches where some parts are usually sung in Greek (Kyrie), Hebrew (Alleluya) and Latin (preface and its dialogue, sanctus, pater and agnus). It is however the *novus ordo* not the Tridentine extraordinary form. Are these Latin masses or what?

I do not believe that it is the presider who offers the sacrifice, but the people whom he represents who do so. I believe that the church teaches we are each an *alter Christus* not just the ordained. I believe that the Eucharist is a sacrament which seeks to make Jesus present in his body, the people of God. I believe that talk of the sacred and mystery risks denying the thrust of the Incarnation, that God became human to divinize humanity. I am saddened to hear of or meet Catholics who use the Eucharist for other purposes and pray that the voice of Jesus reaches their hearts: he does not speak Latin.

SIMON BRYDEN-BROOK

London, England

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I can only speak of my own experience at attending both events. As a young woman, I was awed by the experience of something way beyond what I knew; everything was so mysterious.

The changes came when I was in my mid-20s and my belief system opened up to a deeper level of not mere emotional understanding and interpretations from others, but a reaching into my soul so I could take this experience out into my life. I needed to understand the teachings of God and to bring these

understandings into my life.

JOAN GRIESER

Federal Way, Washington

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I believe a Latin Mass should be available for those who want it. I do not believe that we should either mandate or prohibit either of them, but let people choose which is meaningful to them.

PATRICIA McGRADY

Springfield, Virginia

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The discussion about the Latin Mass has me puzzled. Who speaks Latin these days in their everyday life? Who would go to a celebration and feel a part of that celebration where the language used was a language we did not use or know?

Is the celebration of Eucharist an action we are to participate in or one that we are to observe? If we are to observe, then the Latin Mass makes sense. However, if we are to celebrate (do this in memory of me) than we need to be active participants in this action.

JAMES OFFENBERGER

Vienna, West Virginia

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Jane Stannus writes a very persuasive article in support of the Latin Mass and the priesthood as she experiences it.

However, I would argue that it was a partial response to Zita Ballinger Fletcher's piece as were most responses of others in this conversation. The main thrust was of course around the consequences of clericalism, how its toxicity exists almost unnoticed in interactions between priest and laity and in rigid adherence to the requirements of the Latin Mass.

I can imagine her very personal account found a place in many hearts. I also believe it would support Fr. Peter Daly's very good commentary on clericalism and others I have read in this publication.

Does she have an axe to grind? You bet, so does Daly, Pope Francis and anyone else who writes in the name of truth, so Jesus definitely did.

Jesus of course chided the Pharisees witheringly about their inner emptiness, adherence to outward appearances and ritual.

Solemnity and beauty of worship is always valid, but it should not be viewed in isolation or allowed to blind anyone to the sickness existing in parts of the Catholic Church. Everyone is responsible for its return to health including the laity.

I salute Ballinger Fletcher and her journalistic efforts in the name of those truths we have all been taught.

VIVIENNE DRAY

Kent, England

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Why this battle over the benefits and drawbacks of Latin Mass? Name calling?

As long as the Tridentine Mass is part of our approved Roman liturgy, Catholics may attend. There is no right or wrong in selecting one style of worship over the other. Respect others' choices, and move on.

If you're looking for a battle, I suggest you declare war on those who deny climate change. That is one fight worth embracing.

THOMAS LYNCH

Oak Park, Illinois

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As I read these comments, I smile and remember what my 93-year-old dad told me when I became upset by all of the retro church rituals. "Remember Jane, he would say, it's all window dressing."

I so often wonder what Jesus thinks when he observes we imperfect creatures, arguing over perfection. Live what he taught and let others do the same.

JANE FRANCISCO

Charlotte, North Carolina

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I am 78-years-old and as a child, I loved the Latin Mass and think that it still has a place in the church, but only as a sacred historical presentation on the occasion that it is now offered. Vatican Council II was the most important event in my life as a Catholic.

I love the current form of the Mass in which it is offered in the language of the people attending. In this way, even relatively uneducated people can hear and understand the Mass being offered. I find Mass in my language and in its current form is sacred.

When Jesus taught the crowds, he did so in the language of the people, rather than in a language suited best to academics and those who have enjoyed the luxury of additional learning. He wanted each person to understand what he said, and he told his disciples to go out to all nations to teach the Gospel.

Even common sense understands that he expected them to teach the Gospel in the language of the people of that nation.

PAT WILSON

Marietta, Georgia

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Why do individuals seek to justify the surface behavior rather than the heart of the matter? This is my body, this is my blood, do this in remembrance of me and who eats my body and drinks my blood shall have eternal life — to paraphrase what is significance. Beyond that we have tradition which is flexible.

The meaning embedded in Jesus words is that of grace, love, presence and personal relationship. Grace that companions us, loves us and grace that leads us. Grace that sustains us and leads us in this life and to the next. Grace that takes us to our heavenly father through the work of the Holy Spirit. This is what is permanent. It is

not about veils or no veils and so forth but honor and respect something we can offer to one another too.

MAREE SOBOLEWSKI

Albury, Australia

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I remember the Latin Mass since I was born in 1940 and that was all there was. I like the vernacular Mass because it allows people to participate and understand what is being prayed where the Latin Mass does not. If you like listening to and not participating or understanding what is being said, that is your choice.

I do not know anyone that speaks Latin though I have been a Catholic for almost 80 years. If you enjoy listening to something being spoken or sung in a foreign language, there are many beautiful operas with lovely costuming.

ANTHONY ALBERT

Corvallis, Oregon

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These days I am more interested in the kind of liturgical praying that engages persons, like you and me, in the risky encounter with Christ where we live. And we live as a divided, divisive people. Hurt people hurt people.

Do I regularly seek out a liturgy that reinforces the views of my ideologically compatible group? Of course. This allows me to continue to disdain "them," whoever "they" are without accounting for whatever fuels my rampant evasion of those hurts I inflict on others.

Perhaps liturgical praying today helps me rather maintain my version of the status quo than situate me in relationship with the Christ whom I habitually resist finding me as I am.

(Fr.) ROC O'CONNOR, SJ

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

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When will the "pro-Latin Catholics" and the "anti-Latin Catholics" stop making the liturgy a punching bag? I grew up in the Latin age, loved the Mass, especially serving solemn high Masses. Although I had studied Latin in high school and college and could read a Latin text with the help of a dictionary, I enthusiastically welcomed the changes in the liturgy that Vatican II instituted.

The liturgy that we celebrate in the vernacular is as reverent as the liturgy celebrated in Latin. For either side of the Latin argument to say one is more reverent than the other is arrogant. St. John Paul II celebrated Mass, facing the people and in the vernacular, with reverence.

Responding to the priest was a privilege for the servers of my generation to represent the community. Vatican II, however, eliminated the need for a representative when it promoted the full participation of each worshipper.

Regarding Zita Ballinger Fletcher's letter, although I believe that her experiences were true, she then goes on to draw conclusions, many of which, are *non sequiturs* (pardon the Latin). The tone of her article comes across as mean-spirited and negative, beginning with the title of her article to its ending. She is in attack mode that doesn't further any meaningful discussion. I think the editors should have exercised more discretion in publishing it.

PATRICK T. DARCY

Columbia, Missouri

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I have read and re-read both of these articles, as well as the letters to the editor in response. I have also attended and celebrated both forms of the liturgy, as well as attended divine liturgy in a variety of Eastern rites. Mass more of a spectator sport than an actual rite of worship.

I also find it interesting that so many of those in favor of the old Mass to focus more on the esthetics of the rite as being what draws them. It isn't as much as connection and participation in the sacrifice, which we are called to be, as it is an emotion experience with no real depth.

I also find it interesting that most of those who are so gung ho Latin Massers are not those who grew up with it and experienced it every day. Most of the elderly Catholics I know and in the past 60 years I have known many, have said that they were happy when the Mass changed and they would finally understand everything and take part in everything.

These neo-trads seem to be younger folks, and all too often converts who bring their previous religious experiences over with them, always searching for the most rigid orthodoxy and othopraxis. And in doing so, losing sight of the fact that Catholicism never has been a religion where everything was the tightly run ship that so many trads, and even the magisterium itself, would have us to believe.

DON DAVIDSON

Topeka, Kansas

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I am 78-years-old and, hence, grew up with the traditional Latin Mass. I was an organist as a teenager and one of my summer jobs was travelling by bus to a Catholic Church in Kansas City early every weekday morning where I played the organ and sang all the parts of the Latin Mass at the 6 a.m., 6:30 a.m. and 7 a.m. Masses. I did it uncritically because that is what we did. My recollections are not of any particular "holiness, reverence, mystery" in the traditional Latin Mass.

My own experience of holiness, reverence and mystery in the Mass emerged after Vatican II when the priest moved down closer to the congregation and celebrated Mass in English on a table style altar as Christ did at the Last Supper. The occasional home Mass brought the reality of the Mass we were celebrating even more into focus for me. Jesus spoke in the language of the people. The English language used in the Mass now allows full understanding and dialogue between the priest celebrant

and the people responding from the pews.

I particularly experienced holiness, reverence and mystery in the celebration of the Mass in English when I thought of those early days of the church in the few hundred years after the death and resurrection of Christ when the early Christians met and prayed the Mass in the homes of Christians. Now since Vatican II the church has returned to its early roots.

I was sad to read of the cult like practices related to the Latin Mass detailed in Zita Ballinger Fletcher's article. As a female, my only ongoing issue with the Catholic Church is that our supposedly celibate all-male clergy has sexually abused our children in Catholic dioceses all over the world. To me that is a clear sign that women need to be included in the clergy and governance of the Catholic Church. An all-male clergy is clearly toxic. But this is another topic.

MARY ANN YEATS

Perth, Western Australia

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I have read all the letters on your website concerning Latin Mass preferences. They leave me sad and disappointed. All that I can contribute are prayers for all those on both sides of this issue.

Our church is clearly in the middle of a serious split, between those who reject or never accepted the reforms of Vatican II and those of us who have. This split goes far beyond language choices and clothing. I personally have no desire to turn back the clock to the liturgy in which I was raised, but others find it so difficult to move on from what they consider the practices of "the saints."

Quoting biblical texts cannot settle an argument, since they were written in a different cultural time and require difficult levels of interpretation and understanding. I believe we must have a living church and that its future is in in the hands of a living Holy Spirit. Nothing else seems to avoid a coming calamity of faith.

RICHARD ST. JOHN

Spokane, Washington

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I'm am so grateful to NCR for facilitating the conversation about Latin Mass in the church today by way of these letters. This conversation is happening among my friends and family and coworkers (I work in the church) but I so often only see it reflected in the media as one-sided screeds or book-length tomes — neither of which are very effective in helping the people of God understand one another.

I was touched by the sincerity of these letters. In them, I found myself better understanding and appreciating those whose opinions differ from my own.

I think the church needs a similar conversation about other touchy issues like communion for the divorced and remarried, homosexuality among Catholics, married clergy, the decline of Catholic schools, — issues that have gut-level real-world implications and as well as serious theological/ecclesial implications.

In fact, I think it's so important as a service to the church that you ought to consider something like you did for the Global Sisters Report and create a distinct identity for the project. And that would make it easier to get funding for it from grant makers and other sources beyond subscriptions.

To be frank I only occasionally read NCR because I perceive in it a clear progressive bias. Reading these letters and seeing you encourage the conversation makes me want to check back more regularly.

TONY DIIULIO

Fairfield, Pennsylvania

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