Opinion



by NCR Staff

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Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese has written two columns recently about liturgical reform. In his first column, Reese has advice for the Italian bishop who was asked by Pope Francis to complete a visitation of the Congregation for the Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, which oversees liturgy for the church. In a second column, Reese offers his own ideas on improving liturgy as an attempt to get the conversation going, inviting liturgical scholars and others to consider his proposals. Many NCR readers reached out with their own ideas on how to reform Catholic liturgy. Responses have been edited for length and clarity.

The two articles by Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese on liturgical reform are refreshing and encouraging.

The church needs more participation to drag it into the 21st century, especially regarding liturgy and more, both by those ordained and non-ordained. We are all priests by our baptism.

Let's not forget God is also our Mother and not just "father." This needs to be celebrated and clearly addressed by all.

We should have new Eucharistic prayers to refocus our attention to the cosmos; the evolution human life on a small speck of rock in one of billions of galaxies in the known universe; and our intimate interrelationship with all of creation.

New Eucharistic prayers that are not only spoken by the presider, but spoken aloud by all participants at liturgy. There is no "magic" in the "priest's actions" at the altar or in any other sacrament. These are human created rituals that need to be inviting and empowering for all, not simply something limited to be just a participating observer.

If liturgical human rituals do not evoke empowerment for all, then they cease to have intrinsic value and purpose for human life.

God does not need rituals; human beings need rituals.

JOSEPH WEBER

Arlington Heights, Illinois



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I read with great interest the article on opening dialogue regarding the liturgy by Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese. While it is insightful, thoughtful and passionate, it is unlikely this article and those like it will have any impact as the church continues its self-inflicted downhill spiral.

By and large, as parishes are linked, merged or closed, and money is God, does anyone really think most priests are interested in continuing liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council? Pastors are too busy being bled dry by dioceses while trying to stay afloat. (Funny how dioceses don't merge though, given all the closures and merges. Makes one think.)

I hope one day priests and laity can truly sit down and plan weekly liturgies in a manner described by Reese — as the norm, not the exception.

ANTHONY J. BURKE

Ansonia, Connecticut

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Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese's suggestions are appropriate and needed. The problem for some is an intransigent bishop and priests ordained and yet to be ordained who live in the 17th century and love being there. What recourse do those people have?

JANE FRANCISCO

Charlotte, North Carolina

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I believe that Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese is at least partly blind to the needs of the faithful when he declares that the Tridentine Mass must disappear. The congregation at the Tridentine Mass at Blessed Sacrament Church in Honolulu is attended by (my estimate) 70% under the age of 50, with many young people and children.

Even though both of my sons are accomplished guitarists, both stopped attending Mass when our parish brought out the guitars. They both said that what they found

attractive about attending Mass was that it was different from their experiences in the everyday world — including their enjoying traditional music at Mass.

The attempts to cater to and attract young people has failed many of our youth. Many contemporary Masses are a sea of grey (or dyed) hair. I pray that the Tridentine Mass continues to be an option for all who prefer it and respond spiritually to it, including young people and children.

HUGH HAZENFIELD

Honolulu, Hawaii

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Both the presider's invitation to prayer and the congregation's response at the end of the offertory need to be changed.

Pray brothers and sisters that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the almighty Father.

May the Lord accept the sacrifice from your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy church.

We need to emphasize:

1. That it is the offering of the whole church.

2. That the Mass is offered for the glory of God and for the salvation of all, and not limited to "the good of all his holy church."

The French text of the Mass says it simply and is theologically correct.

Presider: Let us pray together as we offer the sacrifice of the whole church.

Congregation: For the glory of God and the salvation of the world.

(Fr.) BRIAN DE BÚRCA, OMI

Dublin, Ireland

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I recently had a conversation with a friend of mine (we have known each other for over 50 years) concerning liturgical issues. I commented that the pandemic has been a blessing for me since it allowed me to find a parish where the liturgies are vibrant, the preaching is life challenging and blessing.

In one of our many topics, we talked about priest conference days. He recently had the experience of wanting to assist the priests of his diocese with a workshop on liturgical celebrations. Unfortunately, he was met with the comment that the priest did not need someone to talk/teach them about "how to say Mass." My comment was that is exactly what they need.

Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese's article talks about the change that this possible with the right people on the right committees. I would offer that that could be very helpful but it will not help the situation of priests who "say Mass" rather than "celebrate liturgy." Seminary preparation needs to revert to former days when future priests were given tools to be "strong, loving, wise" in their presiding at liturgies. I shudder to think how they are being taught to celebrate the greatest mystery, the greatest banquet we have. From preaching to the style of presiding at liturgies, all of this needs reviewed and revised.

JAMES OFFENBERGER

Vienna, West Virginia

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Reading Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese's article was both encouraging and at the same time disconcerting.

Encouraging in the sense that finally a contemporary Biblically-based understanding of the Eucharist is being explained and promoted. Taking a cue from the readings assigned for the Third Sunday of Easter, the risen one is made manifest in the "breaking of the bread." The Eucharistic mystery is a means of becoming Christ. By virtue of the Eucharistic liturgy, we become his body, we become his blood, we become his presence in space and time, we become his resurrection. In the context of Pauline theology, we "put on Christ," the resurrected Christ. With St. Paul, we are

enabled to claim "I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me."

Disconcerting in that the new translation of the liturgy seems to reflect a "Barthian" understanding of God as "wholly other" with an emphasis on a seemingly unreachable transcendentalism in addition to a sense of the intrinsic sinfulness of the petitioner. As an 83-year-old still teaching history and politics in a Catholic high school, I refuse to use the new translation which seem to be so removed from the lives of the faithful. Unless deferring to the practice of local parishes, when at school, I say Mass with an old American 1974 Missal which is so positive, so clear and so up-lifting.

(Fr.) WILLIAM B. THOMPSON, OMI

London, Ontario

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I write in regard to suggestions for the reform of the liturgy, specifically the current English translation of the Mass. I think that this most recent English translation reflects bad theology and bad anthropology.

When writing the English translation, the first principle that should be kept in mind are these words of Jesus, "I came to serve, not be served," and "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath." So, to paraphrase, the liturgy, the translation of the liturgy, the English translation, these are made to serve us, not us them. We were not made to serve the liturgy, we were not made to serve the Latin language or an English translation that favors Latin.

Therefore, when formulating a translation of the liturgy from Latin to English or to any of the local languages, the translation should be made in favor of the local language, in favor of the people, instead of in favor of Latin. The translation should serve our worship of God and our active participation in the liturgy, thus true and profound holiness and reverence, instead of serving someone's superficial notion of holiness and reverence that results in us trying to use English words that we rarely if ever use, words that have little or no meaning, with terrible sentence structure and grammar.

Let us please get rid of the terrible theology and terrible anthropology reflected in the new translation that basically seems to say, "Well, God, completely ignoring the salvation that you have already accomplished for us in Jesus Christ, and everything that you have already done for us and given us in Jesus Christ, ignoring that everything is a completely free gift from you that we cannot earn or merit or be worthy of, and by the way, you never asked us to, instead, we are groveling before you and begging you to give to us what you have already given us and we are asking that we merit and that we be worthy of that which we cannot merit or be worthy, and, because of Jesus Christ, we don't have to."

If we really believe in the Apostolic faith that has been handed on to us and that we profess in every Mass, then our prayers and our words should be totally focused on simply thanking and praising God for everything that he has already given to us and done for us in Jesus Christ.

(Fr.) MARK WOOD

Little Rock, Arkansas

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