Opinion
Vatican



by NCR Staff

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July 30, 2021
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Pope Francis cracked down July 16 on the spread of the old Latin Mass, reversing one of Pope Benedict XVI's signature decisions in a major challenge to traditionalist Catholics. Following are NCR reader responses to this story and other commentary about the decision. The letters have been edited for length and clarity.

While I enjoyed the analysis by Michael Sean Winters regarding Pope Francis tightening the strings on the Latin Mass, I wondered how long it would be before members of the U.S. hierarchy decided to ignore this order.

Sure enough it took a day, but they are now coming out of the woodwork, led by the Archbishop of San Francisco who says the Latin Mass will continue in his parishes as before. The U.S. hierarchy continues to defy Pope Francis and pull the church closer to schism. A soft schism is not sufficient for their desires.



Francis had an opportunity to play hardball with the U.S. contingent a few years ago, but instead chose the soft gloves of recommending a retreat which did not soften any hearts within the bunch. Pope John Paul II did not put up with dissent, and neither should Francis. So much for the neo-traditional members of the hierarchy obeying the orders from Rome. The U.S. hierarchy choses to follow who they wish to follow.

It is time for Francis to call the defiant members of the U.S. hierarchy on the carpet, if not ask for their resignations. The move by Francis is to promote unity in the church, but the actions of the U.S. contingent since 2013 shows anything but a desire for unity. The order takes effect immediately, at least how I read it, but not for the U.S. hierarchy who cling to a past, except for the part about obeying the pope.

THOMAS D. HOVEL

McFarland, Wisconsin

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The two articles; "Francis reimposes restrictions on Latin Mass" and Michael Sean Winters' column offer strong arguments against allowing a retrograde exclusive church rather than promoting one which is forward looking and inclusive. While I have many good memories of my service as an altar boy for Tridentine Masses, I still see that experience as exclusive since I was familiar with the language used and many, if not most, of the congregation were not. The responses from the congregation were muted with many just reading from their missals.

It was unfortunate that Pope Benedict XVI's attempt to bring unity resulted in exclusivity. The pre-conciliar church had the reputation for being authoritarian with rules that set the tenor for membership. That exclusivity also resulted in very few congregants receiving Communion since the rules governing the sacrament were rigid. One apparent result of the council was much greater attendance and far more access to Communion. Indeed, it was a call to a spiritual meal to be shared by all, not just the chosen few.

As our society becomes more polarized, with conservatives preferring retrograde politics, it follows that conservative Catholics would seem to relish a liturgy which separates themselves from others with whom they disagree politically. This intersection of politics and liturgy will result in a more polarized congregation reflective of our politics writ large. The bishops would be wise to arrest these Sunday morning divisions so perhaps make some inroads into promoting our unity as a people for at least the remainder of the week.

CHARLES A. LE GUERN

Granger, Indiana

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Michael Sean Winters' article on the Latin Mass is spot on! If the intention in support of this Mass is valid, it has sadly failed for most of the faithful.

In our diocese, with the support of our bishop, this is being promoted. To what extent I had no idea but after reading charlottelatinmass.org, I was appalled. There is no way this kind of blatant defiance should be permitted. Those priests, and they are multiplying here, should be directed by Rome to follow the lead of our Holy

Father.

We profess one, holy, Catholic and apostolic church each Sunday. Really? We Vatican II Catholics are being misled by those in authority and have no place to go — that is the reason many have headed for the door. How do you say that in Latin?

JANE FRANCISCO

Charlotte, North Carolina

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The recent *Traditiones Custodes* is far less about the Latin Mass than it is about the year 1955. For a Catholic subset, 1955 is a living, breathing ecclesiastical reality. (Perhaps the only ecclesiastical reality.) The *motu proprio* is a wake-up call to these folks: "If I want 1955 to continue to be my comfort zone —then where do I go and how do I get there?"

MIKE DEPUE

Springfield, Missouri

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Personally, I do not understand at all the heated debate among those who love the Latin Mass and those who prefer the vernacular Mass. I love both, whenever one is available. I was born and grew up in the Latin Mass, and I like the way the priest faced the altar, leading the way for us to God. But I also like the vernacular Mass because I can better understand what is being said and is happening.

Overarching all this is that whether in Latin or the vernacular, Jesus could be reverently remembered just as well. But if now the pope says let's have only the vernacular Mass, I have no trouble with that. Part of my remembering Christ in the Mass is to renew my obedience to his commands. And if God's alter ego on earth says let's stop the Latin Mass, or perhaps use it only on special occasions, why, I will simply obey. I firmly believe that the pope has excellent reasons for doing as he does, whose validity we will only know many years from now.

I still will, however, continue admiring the Latin Mass, especially since some prayers and hymns seem to be more elegantly said and more solemnly sung in Latin than in

any other language. So, as I obey the pope — and pray that his intentions in restricting Latin Mass be quickly realized — I quietly wish our local bishops allowed Latin Mass at least once in a while for those who would like to participate in one.

JOSE RAOUL C DIZON

Quezon City, Philippines

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Thank you, Pope Francis. It was clear to most working in churches in 2007 that Pope Benedict XVI's misplaced good will, or what most saw as caving in to wealthy Tridentine afficionados, was a terrible move.

Thinking it was the wave of the future, our bishop brought a Lutheran church and spent hundreds of thousands of dollars renovating it, a burden never repaid and becoming a burden to the entire diocese. Further money was spent creating altar rails in the churches chosen to regionally host the extraordinary rite. The priests brought into the diocese to celebrate the Tridentine Rite (Society of St. Peter) seldom to never participate in diocesan activities, and never concelebrate important or solemn Masses.

In the last 18 years, there has been no diminution of the arrogance which marks most trads, who feel only they are celebrating the Eucharist correctly. Their veils, genuflecting, kneeling, and facing the back of the priest are badges of honor, which make most of us who have straddled Vatican II, and accept Vatican II's reforms, feel like the inferior ones. A correction to what Benedict did has long been necessary, and I am sure, given the state of the entire church, that the reactions of some bishops will be mixed. How sad.

(Fr.) CHRISTOPHER SENK

Fort Myers, Florida

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This may seem like a stretch, but regarding the Tridentine Mass, I feel Pope Francis allowing the resigned pope to live on Vatican grounds as well as continuing to wear a white cassock helps those interested in pre-Vatican II atmosphere a boost of confidence?

We are a Vatican II people — the Spirit speaks.

(Fr.) JOE SPINA, OSF

Wilton Manors, Florida

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Some people have told me that the like the Latin Mass. When I asked if they could read, write or speak Latin they said, "no, but I like the way it sounds." Then I ask before Vatican II, what did you do during the Mass when it was all in Latin and you could barely hear the priest? The response, "Oh, I prayed the rosary, read my holy cards, or looked at the stained glass windows." These same people are upset if the bells are not rung loud and long.

Of course, their pastor uses all the Latin that is permitted in the current Roman missal. His reason, "Latin is the language of the universal Catholic Church that is what keeps all Catholics together." My bad, I thought we were together because of our love of God and our neighbors.

There is a growing faction of clergy and lay who believe we should have a "smaller purer church." That won't lead to a schism, it will lead to fewer and fewer people attending Mass.

RAYMOND D'ANGELO

Westerville, Ohio

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For those of us young parents in coastal, Northern California going through Catholic/Christian formation in the '60s, the Novus Ordo was like a fresh, ocean

breeze that awakened and nourished our spiritual senses. The liturgical shift from Latin to English gathered us for the first time into that active and intimate "we" participation of which Msgr. Kevin Irwin wrote in his enlightening article

Simply knowing that we, in fellowship with the clergy, were newly defined by the council as the people of God and were the church created a dynamic that made it a joy to respond actively to various, parish ministries, a joy to be part of satisfying, ecumenical outreaches within our communities and beyond.

Yes, we were aware of the consternation of our elders and felt sorry for them during that early transition period when many were vulnerable to the likes of Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre and other rebellious, cultish clergymen who refused to give up the Latin Mass. Many of their flocks doubled down on beloved Marian devotionals and took pleasure in dispensing the latest harrowing messages from Mary through favored seers. In truth, it was a relief when an uneasy truce allowed the rite's restricted continuance with cultists free to opt out of Novus Ordo and be within their Latin rite, comfort zones.

The majority of us, though, were well served in our parishes by young priests who were trained to help a new generation transition smoothly into the Novus Ordo and the thrilling revelations of Vatican II, not the least of which was its encouragement to dust off the family bibles, become better acquainted with Jesus Christ and marvel at his gospel of inclusive love for humankind, especially the poor and marginalized.

Thank you, Holy Spirit, for guiding Pope Francis toward mandating a long, overdue correction.

NANCY McGUNAGLE

Kalispell, Montana

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In his recent article "Time to put the 'catholic' back into the Catholic Church," Michael Sean Winters at one point refers to the "journalists at LifeSiteNews."

I suggest that referring to these people and the vile venom they regularly spew in this manner is to do a disservice to journalists of true integrity. I have seen firsthand the damage that they do to the reputations and even the health and physical/mental

wellbeing of their victims. In my view, they are little more than parasites exploiting and feeding off the resentments of disaffected people while doing nothing to address those issues in a positive and healthy fashion. In short, they are the very antithesis of life.

(Fr.) DON MCLEOD, CSB

Scarborough, Ontario

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It's very seldom I disagree with Michael Sean Winters, but this time, I have to talk back.

I find it hard to be sympathetic to those who want to hang on to the church of the past. I know people my age (Boomers who mainly grew up post Vatican II) and young people in their 30s and 40s and even younger, who prefer the Tridentine Mass because it's more "reverent" or "mysterious."

Almost all of them are very theologically and politically conservative, and have very little kind things to say about Pope Francis, with some implying that he is an illegitimate pope. There's a whiff of "holier than thou" about them, as if they consider the "regular" Mass to be inferior. In my more uncharitable moments, I think of them, especially the young ones, as "Catholic cosplayers." The young seminarians and priests of this ilk are downright scary.

I'd hazard a guess there are very few people still living today who want to attend a Tridentine Mass out of genuine good-faith nostalgia, with no underlying agenda. The current liturgy can be celebrated in Latin for those who love the language and the Gregorian chant. I love some chant from time to time myself.

Pope Francis has done the right thing. He is trying to heal an angry, ailing, broken body of Christ. I'm not sure he alone can do it (we need some powerful Holy Spirit down here!) It's time for the Tridentine Mass to fade away. Those who want it back long not for a liturgy but for a church that either never was, or needs to be consigned to the dark past. The church, and liturgy, need to be alive, vibrant and growing.

TERRI RING

Cary, North Carolina

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