Opinion
News



by NCR Staff

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

March 11, 2022
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

In early February, Phoenix Bishop Thomas Olmsted said baptisms performed by Fr. Andres Arango during years of ministry in the diocese are invalid, and the priest resigned as pastor of a local parish. According to a 2020 instruction from the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the baptisms were invalid because the priest said "We baptize" instead of "I baptize."

In a similar case in Michigan in 2020, Fr. Matthew Hood was re-baptized, given other sacraments and swiftly ordained again to the priesthood within days because his own initial baptism was found invalid. But the Archdiocese of Detroit still hasn't heard from hundreds of people whose rites were previously performed by Hood and are now considered invalid, despite outreach efforts and publicity.

Following are letters to the editor from NCR readers about invalid baptisms. The letters have been edited for length and clarity.

This is one of the most ridiculous, hurtful, and misinterpreted acts I have ever heard. The church is the people of God. Christ is the model for those people. The priest is no more Christ than those people of God.

To invalidate any sacrament because of the use of "we" as opposed to "I" is ludicrous. The priest or bishop who declared those baptisms invalid is a great deal too full of himself.

MARY SCHMIDT

Oak Park, Illinois



***

Has Phoenix Bishop Thomas Olmsted lost his mind? Another embarrassing topic to make Catholics look like nutcases. What would Jesus say about baptism not being valid because the poor priest said we and not I? This is fundamentalism and

pharisaical thinking which Jesus condemned.

This unfortunately is all over the news. Who reported the priest? I was always taught that it is intent and not words that matter. So now those who were baptized by Fr. Andres Arango need to be withheld from the Eucharist until they are properly baptized. This makes me so sad and angry that we are the laughingstocks again.

I read the Vatican's 2020 statement. I wonder if Pope Francis is aware of this incident and if he approves of what was released. I rather doubt it.

SUSANNE JONES

New Smyrna Beach, Florida

***

If the folks in the Vatican are still so mired in traditionalism that they believe a baptism is invalid if the minister says "we baptize" rather than "I baptize," what hope is there for real change? What do they think? Are the words for baptism some kind of magical formula?

Ironically, according to Catholic teaching, if the worst sexual predator or vicious murderer says the right words, the baptism is valid (*ex opere operantis*), but if a saint says "we" instead of "I," while fully intending what Christ and the church intend by baptism, the sacrament does not take place. This is beyond nuts!

FRANK MANNING

Edmond, Oklahoma

***

A significantly disheartened young man attended the same regional synod meeting as I did a few days ago. Dispirited with the church, he recounted "that priest" who did all the baptisms wrong and opined that as just more evidence the post-Vatican II church is off the rails.

The invalid baptisms article made the Cincinnati news a day or two later, so I'm sure the topic has, by that mark, been over-massaged from NPR to Fox News — but not NCR?

Yet, nowhere have I seen anyone address — or ask — whether or not the Catholic Church probes the wording used in baptismal rites administered in non-Catholic churches — baptisms we accept as valid when a non-Catholic seeks to enter the church.

RITA HESSLEY

Cincinnati, Ohio

***

Regarding the supposed "invalid baptisms" in the Diocese of Phoenix — does intent mean nothing in God's eyes? Would God really reject a baptism that did not use specific "magic words"? Is using "we" instead of "I" really that important?

When the pope uses "we" in his speech, does he mean that there are in fact several versions of himself? Do the faithful not understand that the pope means "we" as including the pope, priests and bishops and the church as a whole, as well as Jesus who is represented by the pope, priests and bishops? Does God not understand this?

If using "we" invalidates a baptism (and some subsequent sacraments), why would using English not invalidate a baptism as well, since the first baptisms were surely not conducted in English?

After the recent scandals in the church regarding the sexual abuse of children, this concern over the use of one word rather than another word which could mean virtually the same thing, seems very silly at best. Insulting at worst.

Bishops: please start getting upset over things that actually matter. We will all be better off.

FRANCIS J. CONSTANTINE

Erie, Pennsylvania

Advertisement

***

Regarding the recent incident in Arizona in which Fr. Andres Arango was censured for having used the word, "we" in his baptismal ceremonies instead of the approved "I" and the subsequent furor over the validity of additional sacraments received after that. If asked, Jesus might glare at the pharisaical diocesan rule enforcers and remark as he did to Peter in Mark 8:22-35, "Get thee behind me, Satan. You are thinking, not as God does, but as human beings do." He might accuse them of putting stumbling blocks before [those] who believe in him (Matthew 18: 6-16).

On the other hand, he could stoop and write in the dust before them, (John 8: 6) allowing them the opportunity to ponder times when they themselves might have changed a word or two or left out a part of the script while presiding at a liturgy. Or he might suggest they recall a story such as the one about the apostles eating the heads of wheat on the Sabbath (Matthew 12: 1-8) or the one in which they are caught not washing their hands appropriately before eating (Mark 7:1-14).

Ultimately, what it all boils down to is the true nature of Arango's sacred endeavor. His intention was obviously valid. Why make such a big deal out of it? Is there no one to defend him?

MARY DEAN LESHER

Grand Junction, Colorado

***

Scenario: A person goes to confession and confesses a mortal sin. The priest giving absolution is the recipient of an invalid baptism. The person receiving absolution is deceased so cannot re-confess. Did the person go to heaven, and if not, what happened to his soul?

I am so very upset by the Vatican's judgement on invalid baptisms. Does the pope realize the chaos this is causing — and over a couple of pronouns? I would think Jesus is appalled by the sheer stupidity of this decision. What happened to the practice of applying the spirit of the law rather than the letter of the law? To throw

the whole world into such confusion, uncertainty and doubt is unconscionable.

I do understand the distinction between the "we" and "I" controversy, but I think God/Jesus would not want all this upheaval over it. Doesn't the Vatican have anything of more merit to take care of? They are on this debacle with such immediacy. Why wasn't the problem of child abuse moved on with such alacrity? Sometimes I wonder if anyone in the Vatican has any common sense at all.

BRENDA ROBINSON

St. Paul, Minnesota

Join the Conversation

We cannot publish everything. We will do our best to represent the full range of letters received. Here are the rules:

- Letters to the editor should be submitted to letters@ncronline.org.
- Letters to the editor should be limited to 250 words.
- Letters must include your name, street address, city, state and zip code. We will publish your name and city, state, but not your full address.
- If the letter refers to a specific article published at ncronline.org, please send in the headline or the link of the article.
- Please include a daytime telephone number where we can reach you. We will not publish your phone number. It may be used for verification.

We can't guarantee publication of all letters, but you can be assured that your submission will receive careful consideration.

Published letters may be edited for length and style.

Letters containing misinformation or misleading content without correct sourcing will not be published.

Letters to the editor are published online each Friday.

This story appears in the **Your thoughts** feature series. View the full series.