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Jesuit advocates 'do-it-yourself church'

by Dan Morris-Young



Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese (© Rick Reinhard 2012)

Catholics have to "face the fact that today we live in a do-it-yourself church," step forward to "take responsibility," and "no longer wait for Father or Sister to do it anymore," said Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese, who addresses that theme in a new book, *A Survival Guide for Thinking Catholics*.

The well-known author, social scientist and commentator mentioned the book, which does not yet have a publisher, during a recent *NCR* interview.

In the book, Reese says he advocates facing issues head-on, such as the exodus of faithful from the church.

"The problem with most books like this is that the last chapter begins, 'The bishops should' or 'The pope should do X, Y and Z.' I think, frankly, that is a waste of time," Reese said. "I am tired of reading those books. I think what we have to do is say, 'OK, these are the problems that are facing the church. What do I need to do? What do we have to do?'"

One of the advantages of fewer priests and religious sisters in today's church "is that the laity have to

grow up," he said.

"The church needs to develop a new style of teaching and proclaiming the Gospel, one that is dialogical, one that listens as much as speaks," he added. "At times we seem totally incapable of doing that."

At the same time, Reese said, "Clericalism is two sides of the same coin. There is authoritarianism on one side. The other is laity wanting [clerics] to do everything for them."

Currently a senior fellow at the Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown University in Washington, Reese was editor of the Jesuit weekly magazine *America* from 1998 to 2005. He resigned after prolonged tension with the Vatican over the magazine's open treatment of sensitive church topics, from priestly celibacy and the ordination of women to stem-cell research and reception of Communion by pro-choice Catholic politicians.

Reese is the author of a half-dozen other books, most of which focus on church organizational and political structures and challenges. His 1989 book, *Archbishop: Inside the Power Structure of the American Catholic Church*, for example, was a nuts-and-bolts research volume based on more than 400 interviews and participation from 31 American archbishops, including all the cardinals.

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