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by NCR Staff

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Some readers [have already responded to the news](#) from the Vatican that changing the words of the formula for baptism renders the sacrament invalid. But a recent column from [Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese has stirred up debate again](#). "Even under Pope Francis, who is all about compassion and forgiveness, the literalists appear to be alive and well in the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith," Reese writes. Letters to the editor have been edited for length and clarity. If you want to join the conversation, follow the guidelines below.

This flap, which is totally out of proportion, has caused me great dismay. It reminds me of the Trump administration's tactics of distraction.

This is a distraction from what is truly and most importantly meaningful. That meaning is the message of Pope Francis' latest encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*. The liturgy police have triumphed in the battle over this and officials at the Vatican have succumbed to their persuasion.

HILDEGARD PLEVA

Kingston, New York



I'm tempted to dismiss this article as just so much garbage, as I suspect Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese is, but in a far more gentle and rational way.

What about the role of intention? Surely this is just another example of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith trying to say that their pronouncements are of far greater significance than anything Jesus said such as when "he attacked the Scribes and the Pharisees for their emphasis on the minutiae of the law."

JOHN QUINN

St. Catharines, Ontario

I am writing in reference to Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese's column entitled "Vatican causes chaos by invalidating baptismal formula." I must commend Reese for stating so cogently what is at stake here having read earlier the [Fr. Matthew Hood case](#), I was shocked at the whole matter.

"Whatever happened to *ecclesia supplet*" I wondered. Having taught sacramental theology for years, I was grateful that someone with the stature of Reese decided to point out the foolishness on the Vatican decision in this regard.

(Fr.) PAUL BERNIER, SSS

Cleveland, Ohio

Pope Francis simply cannot reform the church all on his own. Frankly, he has far more important things to attend to than valid baptism formulas.

Which, of course, provides an opportunity for some at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to "dance like mice on the table when the cat is away," as the Dutch saying goes. The disease I call "nomodoctrinophilia" may not be harmful to those who have it, but is indeed very serious to those who are affected by the deeds/screed of those having and displaying the odious symptoms of it.

Which, in turn, places the ultimate responsibility at the feet of the pope. Obviously, he has no control of the literalists of which there are all too many in the Vatican.

I long for the day when all U.S. bishops stand up and say: "Enough! Pull that nonsense back or we won't give a cent anymore."

EDGAR BRENNINKMEYER

Boston, Massachusetts

Such minutiae will alienate more Catholics. An absolute absurdity! I follow the teachings and example of Jesus for his social aspects, not for using correct wording as dictated by out-of-touch and narrow-minded men in power.

Not only do I have no idea what words were used at my baptism nor of those of my daughters, it is of absolutely no importance to me. If I am a Catholic in my heart, all the rigmarole that is supposed to validate my membership in this community which might actually invalidate it, is downright insulting.

I am also not about to attempt to ascertain the doctrinal purity of the priests that I am in contact with. The church has enough problems, both internally and in the greater world, that it ought not be making more for itself.

CARLA CACCAMISE ASH

East Hampton, New York

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I read the article about the Vatican denouncing baptisms if the priest said "we baptize you " instead of "I baptize you." I find it ironic for the church who's been changing a few words here and there in the liturgy for the past several years, to quibble with wording now.

I hate, absolutely hate that practice, yet they're also trying to return to at least some Latin prayers. Why the ever changed the words of the liturgy in the first place is questionable.

MARY K. CALO

Marlton, New Jersey

The church as a spiritual unity is composed of the regenerate. Baptism alone doesn't exclude or guarantee the work of the Holy Spirit. Who gave John the authority to baptize Jesus? "Was it from heaven or from men?" What words did he use?

The issue is important, but the answers are probably not in the words, but in the sincere attempt to follow the Bible and to respect those who are trying to follow the Bible.

MARK HARBOUR

Dalin, Taiwan

I'm not Catholic so I tread lightly, but how is the power in baptism found in a formula of words and not the reality of its truth? The grace of baptism, is it not from God, not "we" or "I"?

ALAN LEONARD

New Providence, New Jersey

I have some observations about the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith hinging the validity of the sacrament of baptism on the words rather than intention.

Catholic teaching, as I remember it, emphasized the importance of intention. If a person is beginning to perform a mortally sinful act and then, for some reason, can't carry it through, then that person is still culpable.

Even the teachings regarding baptism recognize the importance of intention. Remember the "baptism of desire"? This pertains to situations where the individual is unable to receive the sacrament for geographical or political reasons, for example. In its broadest interpretation, even the godly person, who has never heard of Christ, is baptized by desire.

So the sacramentality of baptism is not limited to the right use of words. There is the primacy of intention (even, perhaps, implicit intention). No need for people to scramble to repeat the action because, with no bad intention, words not sanctioned

by the congregation were used.

JAMES ERICKSON

Brentwood, California

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