

# Launch Out Letter (LOL)

June 2020

## Clericalism: Why is inclusion still so difficult?

By Margaret Bearsley, Launch Out Candidate

For more than 40 years Christian women and men have been railing against the exclusion of women in the Church through the way language is used. In many denominations, not a great deal has changed.

It is well understood that words inevitably make us think in the images they conjure up. That's one of the reasons why writing is an artform. It's also one of the reasons why words have so much power. Indeed, Scripture tells us that God *spoke* creation into being.

The power of words is also one of the reasons that God is still today generally thought of as male. And this, even though there are many [feminine metaphors](#) for God in the Bible, such as she-bear, mother eagle, woman in labour, woman nursing her child, woman searching the house for a lost coin, mother hen.

People tend to respond to the suggestion that God is thought of as being male, along the lines of: *Of course I know God isn't male. He is Spirit.* And this response is totally in accord with the Catechism of the Catholic Church.<sup>1</sup>

People who are educated in faith might even add something like: *The use of the personal pronoun 'He' and the metaphor 'Father' simply identify that the God who is Spirit is a personal God who is in close relationship with us.* But try using the personal pronoun 'She' for God or calling God 'Mother', and even those who are educated in the faith tend to protest or to react as though you are joking or being radical.

How many of us acknowledge that just projecting God as male is idolatrous? God is not male. God is not female either. But God is a personal God who is in close relationship with us. God creates us and holds us in being.

So, can there be anything worse than the exclusive, masculine, language used in the Liturgy? It's used in two ways, both of them destructive. It's used as generic gender-based language for people, and it's used to describe God.

How many of us still have the word 'men' in the Creed at Mass: *For us men and for our salvation.* Like, REALLY? Are women and children really supposed to see themselves as included in this?

It is not acceptable in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century to tell women and children to just get over it and to identify themselves with the word 'men'. It simply is not! Let's have men think about being told to just get over it and identify themselves within the word 'women'. They wouldn't. And nor should they. That's obviously not a serious proposal.



So how is it, that in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century we still have to read from an exclusive language Lectionary? St Paul may have literally written "*brothers*" in his letters. He was a citizen of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century where exclusive language was the norm and where it was accepted that women and children would identify themselves within male gender-based language. But St Paul was clearly also addressing [women and whole households](#). How is it then, that in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, where it is not socially acceptable to address groups of people as 'men' (unless they

in fact happen to all be men), we are required to read what Paul meant, i.e., brothers and sisters, using the gender-based generic term *brothers*? Why? Why would anyone think that women and children would feel they are

*God is not male. God is not female either. But God is a personal God who is in close relationship with us. God creates us and holds us in being.*

<sup>1</sup>CCC 370: *In no way is God in man's image. He is neither man nor woman. God is pure Spirit in which there is no place for the difference between the sexes.*

included in a message from St Paul to his 'brothers'? Why is this not a scandal?

So here's my first 'clericalism' point: How is it not the highest priority in the Church to have inclusive language Lectionaries? I have been told when I read at Mass that it's a requirement to read the Lectionary as it is written; that it's not acceptable to avoid the exclusive language.

Here's my second clericalism point: I often hear it suggested that Catholic women questioning whether they may have a vocation to priesthood are after power. Of course, men responding to the call to priesthood are not seeking power. But women must be. It's simply not possible that women might have a genuine vocation to the priesthood, right?<sup>2</sup> Is the exclusively male priesthood in our tradition clericalism writ large?

My third clericalism point is this: gender-based generic terms like 'men' used to describe mixed communities of people (children, women and men) and an exclusively male priesthood are bad enough. But even worse is the idolatry of a 'male' God that has been established and concreted into Catholic prayer, worship and spirituality.

Even clergy who themselves do avoid exclusive language when proclaiming the Gospel at Mass (and God bless them!), still pronounce all the exclusively male language for God in the Missal. Even the nice and kind and genuinely open priests and Bishops do this.

Everybody knows that God isn't a female. But it's not so clear that the same can be said of God's 'maleness'.

---

<sup>2</sup>But see Rom 16:1-2!

<sup>3</sup>Psalms 132 (131).



YouTube

## Happy Birthday!

Birthday blessings to *Maya Bernardo on June 7 and Ann Williams on June 18.*

## Clericalism – from the inside



By Charles Cooper, Associate Pastor, Te Wairua Tapu Parish

In 1960, a few years before the Second Vatican Council, I was ordained priest into a Church still dominated by the Council of Trent. Three years before, I had been made a member of the clergy, having committed to memory the half page of 'privileges' and four pages of obligations – including non-attendance at horse races, taverns, and professional stage shows. Like my fellow ordinands, and priests before me, I had been 'processed' through the system: the seven years of formation.

The following January I moved on from the purdah of the seminary to my first parish appointment as the junior curate in a household of four priests. Generally referred to as 'the young fellah' I was very conscious of having to find my way. After only two or three days there, an elderly Irish priest, visiting the house, took me aside and warned me "Father, you must always keep your distance from the laity, so as not to scandalize them. Few priests are fit to mingle with the laity." I was quite taken aback, already finding the formal style of living in the presbytery a challenge and soon made to realise my friendship with the local Anglican curate and his wife was barely tolerated.

Looking back, we need to realise it was another age in another world. As priests we were responsible, and answerable, for the different activities to which we were appointed in the parish, and we learnt to live with the discomfort of having people instantly standing when we entered a room, having everyone waiting to know "what Father thought" and "what Father wanted" and often enough, Father was expected to know all the answers. Comfortable or not, it was a way of life we got used to and learnt to live.

I think, unfortunately, we did not realise how much these customs and this way of life had become a part of us. After only two years, I was unexpectedly appointed a full-time, regular chaplain to the Royal NZ Air Force. The first time I walked into one of the public rooms of the Officers' Mess, I was taken aback that no one stood up! I soon found it was changing from one form of clericalism for another, and equally, got used to constantly being saluted. And I quickly learnt my place when I went to see my section commander to speak for an airman: "Padre, you may well be right. But of course, I can't accept the advice of a junior officer."

Before Vatican II, the accepted understanding of the Church, as an organisation, was as a Pyramid: the pope, 'with universal authority' at the top; then the various levels of the clergy: bishops, priests, deacons, minor clergy; each responsible to the level above them, then the baptised, 'the faithful', and at the bottom the Catechumen, while still members of the Church. The pre-Vatican II Code of Canon Law (published 1917) reflected that structure and, as such, even supported what we have come to call 'clericalism'. Added to that, then generally accepted sacramental theology understood that, like Baptism, Holy Orders, conferred a 'character' on the soul and thereby brought about an ontological change in their being and distinguished them from the rest of the faithful.

This whole concept of the Church was rejected by the assembled bishops at Vatican II and replaced with the Church being seen as the People of God--distinguished by their baptism as sons and daughters of God in addition to their having been made in God's likeness. They determined that the life of the Church is "Communio", first of all a participation in the life of the Godhead brought about by the Holy Spirit and through which we are members of the Body of Christ. Since there is no greater dignity than the relationship of Jesus with the Father, making us God's daughters and sons through Baptism. The different ministries within the Church community are not of power or authority but of service to their community.

*Since there is no greater dignity than the relationship of Jesus with the Father, making us God's daughters and sons through Baptism. The different ministries within the Church community are not of power or authority but of service to their community.*

Historically, a parallel to this is to be seen in St Benedict's Rule for the first monastic communities which were lay communities. One of their number was chosen to be ordained to be their priest and, by the Rule, was not allowed to be elected or appointed to any other office. And Vatican II envisaged new and other ministries would develop and come into being as times changed and needs arose.

Church historians tell us that it took just over 100 years for the decisions of the Council of Trent to become established in spite of the urgency for their need. We should expect the same for Vatican II. In the mid-1970s academics were claiming we were then beginning to understand what Vatican II was all about.



**"Mr Begley, I'm afraid there's rather more to being a bishop than having your own hat."**

There are Catholic universities and institutes of religious formation in different parts of the world still teaching theology much of which is pre-Vatican II. Many priests celebrate Mass with a pre-Vatican understanding of eucharistic theology. In 1986 I was taken aback to hear Pope John Paul II preaching the pre-Vatican II theology of the Sacrament of Anointing the Sick at his celebration of that sacrament in Wellington.

A number of our priests, including some coming to us from overseas, have a pre-Vatican II understanding of their priesthood and are made to feel insecure by talk of collaborative ministry, sensing their understanding of priesthood is being threatened. As a result, they cling to a form of clericalism. When Cardinal John told a gathering of priests that they have to realise the Archdiocese of Wellington is a Synodal Church, I'm sure a number of them didn't understand what he was saying.

So, in spite of Pope Francis' condemnation, clericalism will still be with us for a few years yet. That's bothersome and its perpetrators need to be pitied because they're missing out on the joy the priesthood becomes when it's shared with the collaborative ministry that Launch Out is giving to us all.

Credit: Clive Goddard via CartoonStock - [www.cartoonstock.com/cartoonview.asp?](http://www.cartoonstock.com/cartoonview.asp?)

## Updates

- The Catholic Centre is open, but most staff are working from home most of the time. If you are thinking of dropping by to see someone, it would be good to send them an email first
- Our dear Theresa Begley has discerned to leave Launch Out. Theresa has worked many years with her husband Rex, as local missionaries in the diocese of Palmerston North, and they would like to focus on continuing to carry out their shared ministry
- If you are already running your Pastoral Projects please invite your mentors to attend one of your activities
- I am still not sure at this point when we will (if we will) have our retreat or the status of our future projects. I will keep you all posted

## Lumen Gentium and the Laity

By Bridget Taumoepeau

# LUMEN GENTIUM



DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION  
ON THE CHURCH

VATICAN COUNCIL II

From: <https://acnuk.org/products/vatican-ii-lumen-gentium-on-the-church-2/>

Before the Second Vatican Council (VCI) the laity were often simply seen as being obedient to the hierarchy of the Church. Cardinal Ratzinger (later Benedict XVI), who was a peritus at the Council, remarked that there was “no positive concept of the laity”. By this he meant that no proper role had been defined for the laity.

Lumen Gentium (LG) is one of the four Dogmatic Constitutions of VCI. They are the most important of the VCI documents. LG addresses ‘The Church’ and starts with the phrase ‘Christ is the light of the nations....’ Austin Flannery gives it importance by recording it first in his book of the translated documents, although it was not the first to be finalised. (That honour went to Sacrosanctum Concilium on the Sacred Liturgy).

Chapter 4 of LG addresses The Laity. It is significant that the Laity are given a separate chapter, alongside The Mystery of the Church; The People of God; The Church is Hierarchical; The Universal Call to Holiness; Religious; The Pilgrim Church and Our Lady. There are no specific chapters devoted to bishops, priests or deacons, although they are discussed under the heading of the hierarchical church.

Cardinal Ratzinger goes on to ask ‘whether there are positive ecclesiastical categories in the Church besides those of priest and monk?’ He refers to 1 Cor 12 which describes the many and varied gifts of the Holy Spirit and the importance of all of us to each other in the church – one Body with many members. All the baptised are the body of Christ. This scriptural reference is contained in the text of the Constitution (LG 32).

*By baptism, all share a common dignity and are incorporated into Christ and made to share in his priestly, prophetic and kingly work - empowered to play an active part in the mission of the Church.*

LG locates the laity within the context of the whole people of God. ‘Everything that has been said of the people of God is addressed EQUALLY to laity, religious and clergy.’ (LG 30. My emphasis). By baptism, all share a common dignity and are incorporated into Christ and made to share in his priestly, prophetic and kingly work - empowered to play an active part in the mission of the Church. LG describes the distinctive contribution of the laity, as people seeking God’s kingdom in the temporal world. Not to create a division between the laity in the world and the clergy in the church, but to acknowledge that most lay people work in the world, have jobs, raise families etc. By so doing it recognises the variety of ways that laypeople serve within the church.

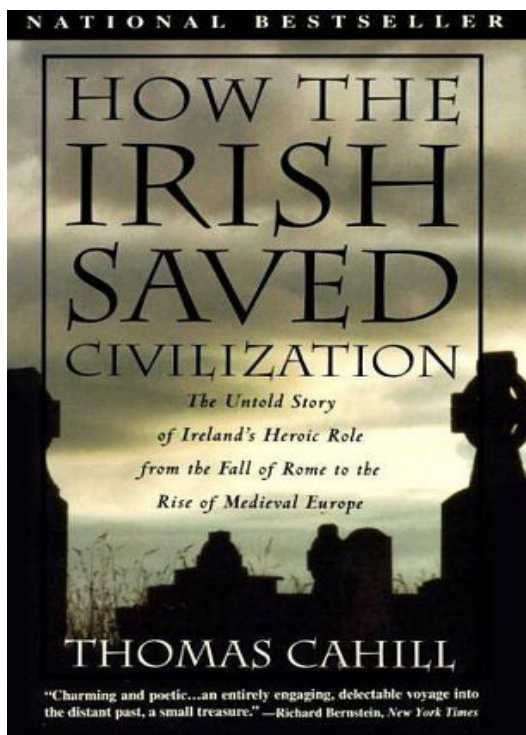
This is the first time that a Council has addressed laity as important contributors to the life of the church and as a special vocation to seek the kingdom of God in the world. Following on from this there was a burgeoning of lay involvement in the church – governance; lay organisations; academic positions; parish roles; education etc.

#### References:

Auston Flannery O.P. – *Vatican Council II – Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*. Chapter 4.

Joseph Ratzinger – *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*.

Edward P. Hahnenberg – *A Concise Guide to the Documents of Vatican II*.



From: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:How\\_the\\_Irish\\_Saved\\_Civilization.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:How_the_Irish_Saved_Civilization.jpg)

## Book Review - by Joe Green

**How the Irish Saved Civilization – the untold story of Ireland’s heroic role from the fall of Rome to the rise of medieval Europe. By Thomas Cahill, 1995. Anchor Books. (Kindle Edition).**

I’ve done the *Ancestry.com* thing. My genetic roots are securely in Ireland and Cornwall (the Polish part didn’t show, as my father said to me ‘it’s not strong, you would have lost any Polish blood you had in the first nose bleed!’). So, when looking for lockdown reading my eye was drawn to the title of this book.

What really excited me about this book was not just the history, but the theological implications of Ireland’s role in what we call civilization. As Cahill points out, had the theology and praxis of Patrick prevailed over that of Augustine, our Church might have been a considerably gentler place (he describes Augustine as ‘the father of the inquisition’, loc. 836), with less focus on the nature of sin, especially sexual sin (which Cahill describes as ‘haunting’ the Church), and more focus on living a giving life!

So, looking at the title, what was lost from the fall of Rome, and what was Ireland’s role in the rise of medieval Europe? Cahill summarises it thus: ‘as Roman culture died out and was replaced by vibrant new barbarian growths, people forgot many things – how to read, how to think, how to build magnificently’.



And so we come to Patrick, described by Cahill as one of the ‘first missionary bishops’ (loc. 1364). Cahill found it remarkable ‘not that Patrick should have felt an overwhelming sense of mission but that in the four centuries between Paul and Patrick there are no missionaries’! And Cahill even considers that Paul, as great a missionary as he was, never ventured beyond the boundaries and comparative safety of the Roman controlled world. Patrick went to the *pagus*, the uncultivated countryside, the area on maps of the day labelled with “here be monsters” (loc. 1379). Augustine and the other Roman bishops certainly never ventured beyond the boundaries of the cities.

And in his mission to the Irish Patrick started a raging fire that has never been quenched, and which created a thirst for learning. By 461CE, the year of Patrick’s death, while ‘the Roman lands went from peace to chaos, the land of Ireland was rushing even more rapidly from chaos to peace’ (loc. 1572).

This peace originated from Patrick, ‘issuing from his person like a fragrance’ (Cahill, loc. 1621). Patrick gained considerably credibility with the Irish by such radical actions as speaking out against slavery – ‘the first human being in the history of the world to speak out unequivocally against slavery’ (Cahill, loc. 1458). He appointed bishops who were connected to local kings. In this environment monastic cities flourished, reading, writing, and copying of the scriptures and books flourished. Art and creative activity of all forms grew. Farming methods improved.

The Irish grabbed every bit of literature they could from around the largely illiterate, uncaring world. And then, later, they took all this back to the world. Once a community reached 150, another was formed, and in this way the Irish monastic system was far reaching, with some indication that Irish monastic capability extended to Linisfarne, Iona, Europe and possibly North America.

From Patrick a greater sense of the world as God’s creation, of God as ‘the Creator of Creation’ (St Patrick’s Breastplate opens and closes with this phrase (loc. 1674). ‘The magical world, though full of adventures and surprise, is no longer full of dread. Rather, Christ has trodden all pathways before us’ (loc. 1682). Cahill (loc. 1694) suggests that ‘this sense of the world as holy, as the book of God, as a healing mystery, fraught with divine messages, could never have risen out of Greco-Roman civilization’. And perhaps this is the greatest of Patrick’s, and the Irish, legacy.

So, why did Patrick’s approach not surpass that of Augustine in the thinking of the Church? Cahill cites William V. Shannon (loc. 1858): ‘supreme egotism and utter seriousness are necessary for the greatest accomplishment, and these (we) Irish find hard to sustain; at some point, the instinct to see life in a comic light becomes irresistible, and ambition falls before it’. While Cahill describes Patrick as ‘a hard-bitten man’ (loc. 1858), his praxis ‘put Patrick as a further remove from his fellow bishop and confessor, the self-obsessed Augustine’ (loc. 1865).

‘Patrick’s gift to the Irish was his Christianity – the first de-Romanised Christianity in human history, a Christianity without the socio-political baggage of the Greco-Roman world’ (loc. 1871). And as Cahill ends his story of How the Irish Saved Civilization, we might be reminded that ‘if our civilization is to be saved – forget about our civilization, which, as Patrick would say, may pass “in a moment like a cloud or smoke that is scattered by the wind” – if we are to be saved, it will not be by Romans but by saints’.

*Cahill (loc. 1694) suggests that ‘this sense of the world as holy, as the book of God, as a healing mystery, fraught with divine messages, could never have risen out of Greco-Roman civilization’. And perhaps this is the greatest*



*When he had finished eating, he said to Simon, “Launch out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch”.*

*Luke 5: 4*