To Hunt, To Shoot, To Entertain: Clericalism and the Catholic Laity

RUSSELL SHAW

To Hunt, To Shoot, To Entertain: Clericalism and the Catholic Laity

WIPF & STOCK · Eugene, Oregon

Wipf and Stock Publishers
199 W 8th Ave, Suite 3
Eugene, OR 97401

To Hunt, To Shoot, To Entertain
Clericalism and the Catholic Laity
By Shaw, Russell

ISBN 13: 978-1-61097-203-1
Publication date 8/1/2011
Previously published by Ignatius Press, 1993

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments 7

I. An Overview of Clericalism 9

II. A Brief History of Clericalism 39

III. Vatican II and After 83

IV. Problems of the Present Moment 111

V. From Power to Vocation 143

VI. Beyond Clericalism 173

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It will be apparent from the text that I am deeply indebted to Dr. Germain Grisez for many of the fundamental ideas that underlie this study. Less obvious, except in the results, are the innumerable practical criticisms that he offered for the book's improvement. I also owe a particular debt of gratitude to Mr. Carl Schmitt for his thoughtful reactions at several stages and especially for his suggestions regarding the second chapter.

In addition, I wish to express my gratitude for ideas and support of various kinds to the following: Dennis Bartlett, Dennis Bolster, David Byers, Rev. Robert Connor, John Crosby, Richard Doerflinger, Dwight Duncan, Robert Jackson, Rev. Msgr. George Kelly, Philip Lawler, Rev. Msgr. Richard Malone, William E. May, and Patrick Riley. If I have forgotten any, it is not for lack of appreciation of their kindness and generosity.

The translation of Scripture used here (except for Scripture passages embedded in other texts) is the Revised Standard Version, Catholic edition. The translation of the documents of the Second Vatican Council is *The Documents of Vatican II,* Walter M. Abbott, S.J., and Joseph Gallagher, eds. (New York: Guild Press, 1966).

I

AN OVERVIEW OF CLERICALISM

"Really," said the priest, a friend of mine, when I told him I was writing a book about clericalism, "I don't think it's much of a problem. There is a lot of *anti*clericalism out there among feminists over the women's ordination thing. But you don't find much clericalism any more."

I think that is wrong, for three reasons.

First, even though generous, large-minded priests no longer consciously espouse clerical elitism, the attitudes and assumptions of the clericalist mentality, often unrecognized as such, still find expression among clerics in a number of ways, some of them surprising.

Second, old-fashioned clericalism dominates the thinking and behavior of large numbers of Catholic laymen. The Catholic laity may now be more clericalized than their clergy.

Third, by a kind of dialectical process, the distorted views of the Church, clerics, and laymen that helped spawn the classic clericalism of the past are today giving rise to another set of confusions about priesthood and the lay condition that are the mirror image of clerical elitism.

Much of this book will be devoted to explaining these three statements. But at the outset we need to consider a basic question: What is clericalism? Rather than begin with a textbook definition, let us consider some instances of clericalism at work.

In April 1867, a British Catholic journal called the *Weekly Register* reported that Pope Pius IX had decided against allowing John Henry Newman to lead a Catholic return to Oxford. Considering the sensitivity of the assignment, the *Register*'s Rome correspondent wrote, "Only an Ultramontane without a taint in his fidelity" could be trusted.[1] This slur on Newman's loyalty produced dramatic results, among them an open letter addressed to Newman and signed by two hundred leading British lay Catholics, including all the Catholic members of Parliament, nearly all the Catholic peers, and other prominent persons. "We feel that every blow that touches you inflicts a wound upon the Catholic Church in this country", they told the distinguished convert.[2]

Gratifying as this may have been to Newman and his friends, not everyone was well pleased. Among the most displeased was Monsignor George Talbot, the British ultramontanists' man in Rome. He wrote Archbishop Henry Edward Manning of Westminster, bitterly assailing Newman and his lay supporters. Citing other recent incidents, Talbot warned that "if a check be not placed on the laity of England they will be the rulers of the Catholic Church in England instead of the Holy See and the Episcopate." Laymen, he said, "are beginning to show the cloven hoof". After more of the same, he delivered his rhetorical *coup de grace:*

"What is the province of the laity? To hunt, to shoot, to entertain? These matters they understand, but to meddle with ecclesiastical matters they have no right at all, and this affair of Newman is a matter purely ecclesiastical. . . . Dr. Newman is the most dangerous man in England, and you will see that he will make use of the laity against your Grace."[3]

[1] See Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 603; Robert Gray, *Cardinal Manning* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 214.

[2] Ker, 605.

[3] Quoted in John Coulson, Introduction, in John Henry Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961), 41–42.

A long history, important to our subject, lies behind this outburst. It is convenient to begin the story in 1859.

In its issues of January and February of that year a lay-edited British Catholic journal called the *Rambler* published two articles arguing for Catholic cooperation with a royal commission set up to investigate the state of elementary education. Alas, the British bishops, fearing government interference in religious education, earlier had reached the opposite conclusion: Catholics should *not* cooperate.

This was not the first time the *Rambler* and its lay editors had crossed swords with the bishops. The new confrontation led rapidly to a shakeup of the review's editorial staff and to the suggestion that Dr. Newman, apparently deemed acceptable to all parties, take charge. He agreed in March, with the first issue under his direction appearing in May.[4]

It contained an unsigned editorial about the bishops and the royal commission. Wrote the new editor, "We do unfeignedly believe . . . that their Lordships really desire to know the opinions of the laity on subjects in which the laity are especially concerned. If even in the preparation of a dogmatic definition the faithful are consulted, as lately in the instance of the Immaculate Conception, it is at least as natural to anticipate such an act of kind feeling and sympathy in great practical questions."

Kind feeling and sympathy aside, the upshot of this sally was that on May 22 Newman found himself in an interview with his ordinary, the friendly Bishop Ullathorne of Birmingham. Newman reported the conversation this way: "He said something like 'Who are the laity?' I answered (not these words) that the Church would look foolish without them." On Ullathorne's suggestion, Newman resigned as editor of the *Rambler*.

The July issue, the last under Newman's direction, featured a long article entitled "On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine". It proved to be a bombshell that led to New-

[4] For an account of these events, see Coulson, 1–49.

man's delation to Rome and cast a cloud over his reputation for many years after, as the events of 1867 were so dramatically to show.

The argument of "On Consulting the Faithful" is that the bishops do well to ascertain the views of laymen not only about practical matters but also, as Newman had written in the *Rambler* in May, about doctrinal ones. That is because "the body of the faithful is one of the witnesses to the fact of the tradition of revealed doctrine, and because their *consensus* through Christendom is the voice of the Infallible Church".[5] Not that this lay consensus is itself infallible, but, where it truly exists, it points to the infallible faith of the Church as a whole.[6]

The author uses the history of the Arian heresy in the fourth century to illustrate his point. In face of this challenge, laymen by and large remained faithful to orthodox belief in the divinity of Christ, but many bishops went over to the heretics' camp. Newman's way of expressing this is not unprovocative: "The body of the episcopate was unfaithful to its commission, while the body of the laity was faithful to its baptism."[7]

After quoting a vivid contemporary account of the rejoicing with which the laity greeted the Council of Ephesus' declaration that the Virgin Mary was truly Mother of God, Newman ends with a justly famous observation of his own: "I think certainly that the *Ecclesia docens* is more happy when she has such enthusiastic partisans about her as are here represented, than when she cuts off the faithful from the study of her divine doctrines and the sympathy of her divine contemplations, and requires from them a *fides implicita* in her word, which in the educated classes will terminate in indifference, and in the poorer in superstition."[8]

[5] Newman, 63.
[6] See Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 12.
[7] Newman, 76.
[8] Ibid., 106.

Clericalism goes back far beyond the middle years of the nineteenth century, however, back even to the Church's very beginnings. Clericalism is *not* ultramontanism, *not* failure to consult the laity; it is something deeper and more pervasive.

Jesus was a victim of the clericalist mentality of his time and place. Having challenged the authority of the religious and social elite of a theocratic society, he paid with his life. His prosecution and death at his enemies' hands conform to a pattern to which he earlier called attention: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! . . . I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from town to town."[9]

In the Catholic Church today, of course, clericalism is not literally responsible for anybody's death. Although its victims are very numerous, they suffer mainly a psychological and spiritual martyrdom of which, very often, they are not even themselves fully aware. Yet the clericalist mind-set does fundamentally distort, disrupt, and poison the Christian lives of members of the Church, clergy and laity alike, and weakens the Church in her mission of service to the world. Clericalism is not the cause of every problem of the Church, but it causes many and is a factor in many more. Time and again, as we shall see, it plays a role in the debilitating controversies that today afflict the Catholic community in the United States and other countries.

Clericalism assumes that clerics not only are but also are *meant* to be the active, dominant elite in the Church, and laymen the passive, subservient mass. As a result, the laity are discouraged from taking seriously their responsibility for the Church's mission, and evangelization is neglected. So are efforts to influence the structures of secular society on behalf of the values of the gospel—the evangelization of culture, as it is called. A large part of the program of the Second

[9] Mt 23:29, 34.

Vatican Council remains not only unaccomplished but also unattempted.

Clericalism deepens the confusion about lay and clerical identity and roles that is a factor in the morale problems apparently troubling some priests. In this way it also deepens the so-called vocations crisis in the Church in this and other Western countries. Although the clericalist mentality typically defines this crisis as a shortfall of new candidates for the priesthood and religious life, the crisis of vocations in its entirety also includes the apparent failure of many laymen not only to discern their vocations but even to give serious thought to the question of vocation. Clericalism likewise is a factor in the inappropriate political activism of some clerics, and it plays a role in the controversy over women's ordination. We shall consider all these matters below.

Perhaps most serious of all, clericalism tends to discourage laymen from cultivating a spirituality that rises above a rather low level of fervor and intensity. As the clericalist mentality sees it, the serious pursuit of sanctity is the business of priests and religious. For the laity, Vatican II's universal call to holiness remains a muted trumpet. Minimalistic religious practice and legalistic morality are all that are asked of laymen and all many ask of themselves, while the idea that they should aspire to sanctity is dismissed as spiritual pretentiousness—"salvation in the fast lane".[10]

We need to be aware, though, not just of the harm done directly and visibly by the mentality of clerical elitism but also of the destructive operation of a kind of clericalist dialectic. This process has produced a number of troublesome offspring in reaction to the original abuse.

History is instructive on this point. The clericalist mentality in its political guise—a form of overreaching that usurped the role of the laity in the political order—helps account for the rise of European anticlericalism in the eighteenth and

[10] Clifford Longley, book review in *The Tablet,* May 27, 1989.

nineteenth centuries. That is hardly surprising, since, as Yves Congar remarks, "forgetfulness of the true role of lay people leads both to clericalism in the Church and to laicism in the world".[11] This laicism has been marked by its fierce determination to exclude religious influence from public life and, in its most virulent forms, by overt or covert persecution of religion. Its malign influence continues to be felt in the United States even today: for example, in certain absolutist ways of thinking about church-state separation and as an element in the mind-set of secular humanism.

Within the Church, the dialectic of clericalism now generates still other bad results. Notable among these is an exaggerated interest on the part of some laity and clergy in power-sharing arrangements based on the assumption that the advancement of laymen requires admitting them to offices and functions previously reserved for clerics—allowing them to look and act like priests. Lay ministries, for all that can and should be said in their favor, sometimes reflect this way of thinking.

The underlying problem expresses itself in many ways and contexts. Consider the findings of a survey asking Catholics which option they would prefer in the face of a shortage of priests, the recruitment of more clergy or "think[ing] of new ways to structure parish leadership to include more deacons, sisters and lay persons".[12] Older Catholics generally preferred the first approach; younger Catholics, the second.

The trouble with this Hobson's choice is not that the alternatives are, exactly, wrong but that they do not reach the heart of the problem and its solution. When finding people for ministry is reduced to the either/or of clerical recruitment on the one hand and structural tinkering on the other, one is entitled to respond, "As a long-term response—neither, thank you." I hope to show at length before I am done that the long-term solution to this problem requires that every

[11] Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985), 53.

[12] John A. Coleman, S. J., "Young Adults: A Look at the Demographics", *Commonweal,* Sept. 14, 1990.

member of the Church realize that he has a vocation and engage in discernment to learn what it is.

Today, too, the clericalist dialectic gives rise to a kind of neocongregationalism, expressed in the writings of some theologians and theological popularizers and apparently acted out here and there by people who see themselves as an avant-garde underground Church.[13] Like many other exaggerations, neocongregationalism starts from an important truth: the common priesthood of the faithful. Long neglected in Catholic thought and practice, this ancient doctrine has come to the fore in the years since Vatican Council II, but at a price—the confusions embodied in neocongregationalism.

There is a strong draught of it in the account provided by a Canadian theologian, Remi Parent. Observing that the baptismal condition "constitutes *an unsurpassable horizon of life, of intelligibility, and of action*", he asserts, "Nothing, absolutely nothing, can be experienced, understood, or done that can be situated *above* or *beside* the baptismal priesthood."[14] On this basis he draws the following conclusion: "[T]he presbyteral and episcopal service is not humanly viable unless, by rediscovering the unicity of the priesthood of Christ, one recognizes a single historical participation in this priesthood, that which constitutes precisely the *baptismal priesthood. . . . [T]here cannot be in history any other Christian priesthood than the baptismal priesthood.*"[15]

Does this dictum apply to the Eucharist? In fact, Parent argues, especially there: "Christians must . . . rediscover that the eucharist does not exist for them if they do not take the

[13] A recent survey of the theological literature: Patrick J. Dunn, *Priesthood: A Re-examination of the Roman Catholic Theology of the Presbyterate* (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1990), 19–44.

[14] Remi Parent, *A Church of the Baptized: Overcoming the Tension between the Clergy and the Laity* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1989), 76–77; italics in original.

[15] Ibid., 99, 101.

(always historical) responsibility of making it exist." And, lest there be any doubt about what that means: "Is this to say that the clerics lose all place at the mass? One thing is certain: they will lose it if they do not cease to be and to behave like clerics. . . . Furthermore, they have in fact already lost their old place where certain persons and communities have begun to forsake the schemas of the magical mentality"[16] — in other words, where nonordained persons attempt to celebrate the Eucharist in the absence of an ordained priest.

It hardly needs saying that this way of thinking marks a radical departure from the teaching of Vatican II that the common priesthood and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood "differ from one another in essence and not only in degree".[17] And Vatican II's teaching on this matter is, of course, by no means new; it restates a truth of Catholic Faith already definitively taught by the Council of Trent.[18]

While Vatican II does not go into detail about the nature of the difference between ordained and nonordained, there have been helpful efforts to clarify it in the years since then. An important paper published in 1970 by the International Theological Commission identifies the distinctiveness of the ordained priesthood this way: "[T]he Christian who is called to the priestly ministry receives by his ordination not a merely external function but a new sharing in the priesthood of Christ, by virtue of which he represents Christ at the head of the community and, as it were, facing the community. The ministry is therefore a specific way of exercising the Christian service in the Church. This specific character is seen especially in the priest's role of presiding at the Eucharist, a role that is necessary for the full realization of the Christian worship."[19]

[16] Ibid., 124–25.

[17] *Lumen Gentium*, 10.

[18] DS 1771–78.

[19] "The Priestly Ministry", in Michael Sharkey, ed., *International Theological Commission: Texts and Documents, 1969–1985* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 87.

Later, in pursuing this question, we shall follow up these themes.

It is my intention, however, not to enter into a debate with Catholic neocongregationalism but only to take note of it as a byproduct of the clericalist dialectic. Although its exaggerated emphasis upon baptismal priesthood is sometimes depicted as a healthy reaction against clericalism, it actually is a mirror image of clericalist values that arises from essentially the same sources: deep-seated confusion on the subject of vocation, pervasive depreciation of the secular order and the laity's duties there, and an implicit conviction that, for laymen *really* to enjoy dignity in the Church, they must become and begin to do exactly what the ordained clergy are and do. (That is to say, the progress of the laity requires that they be clericalized.)

In the final analysis, as neocongregationalism sees things, an autonomous baptismal ministry carried on by Christians in and to the world does not count for much after all. What matters is the familiar clericalist model of Christian life, with its stress on roles and functions within the safe structures of the ecclesiastical institution.

The shortage of priests and of new priestly vocations in the United States and other Western countries makes it likely that many of the problems under examination here will grow worse in the years just ahead. No longer, it seems, can the brittle carapace of clericalism shield the priesthood against a hostile culture; and as the priesthood suffers, so does the rest of the Church.

According to one study, the number of active diocesan priests in the United States is on its way to a 40 percent drop over a forty-year span—from thirty-five thousand in 1966 to twenty-one thousand by 2005. The situation is said to be much the same for religious order priests—a 35 percent decline from about twenty thousand in 1975 to thirteen thou-

sand in 2005.[20] For our purposes it makes little difference whether these figures somewhat overestimate or underestimate the decline or get it exactly right. A serious shortage of pastoral care already exists in some places in this country, and it is sure to grow worse in the years ahead. Priestless parishes and priestless Sundays are now part of the reality of Catholic America. We shall see much more of them.

As long as clericalist ways of thinking persist, we also are likely to find that efforts to deal with the shortage of priests by multiplying lay ministers—something that arguably should and must be done—will heighten the confusion that already exists concerning lay and clerical roles and identities. We are likely to find more credence given—out of desperation, if for no other reason—to the leveling proposal of neocongregationalism.[21] As these trends feed off and reinforce one another, we may even find the shortage of priests and priestly vocations becoming worse than current projections suggest.

These things need not happen. Clericalism increases the chances that they will.

Still, it would be wrong to speak only of problems and dangers, as if nothing good had happened since Vatican II with respect to the position of laymen in the Church and their relationship to the clergy.

Not even in the past did clericalism keep either the laity or priests from living wholesome, productive lives, achieving personal holiness, and serving the Church and the world in a multitude of ways. During the past three decades Vatican II and postconciliar developments like the revised Code of Canon Law published in 1983, the 1987 Synod of Bishops

[20] See Richard A. Schoenherr and Lawrence A. Young, *The Catholic Priest in the U.S.: Demographic Investigations* (Madison, Wis.: Comparative Religious Organization Studies Publications, 1990).

[21] See, e.g., Bernard Cooke, "Entire Faith Community Performs Eucharist", *National Catholic Reporter,* May 18, 1990.

on the Laity, and Pope John Paul II's postsynodal apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici* ("On the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World") have broken new ground in thinking and practice concerning laymen. One purpose of this book is to call attention to the breakthroughs, so that they will consciously be used as the basis for further progress in the future.

Pope John Paul gives a positive summary of what has been happening in these years: "[T]he new manner of active collaboration among priests, religious and the lay faithful; the active participation in the Liturgy, in the proclamation of the Word of God and catechesis; the multiplicity of services and tasks entrusted to the lay faithful and fulfilled by them; the flourishing of groups, associations, and spiritual movements as well as a lay commitment in the life of the Church; and . . . the fuller and meaningful participation of women in the development of society."[22]

Noteworthy, too, has been the rise of the lay "groups, associations, and spiritual movements" upon which Pope John Paul remarks. As Hans Urs von Balthasar points out, these truly are something new under the sun: "Not until our own century do we see the spread of such a flourishing variety of self-sufficient lay movements in the Church."[23]

Even so, the persistence of old-fashioned clericalism and the emergence, through a dialectical process, of recent byproducts of the clericalist mentality underline the presence, in the Catholic psyche as well as in the structures of the Church, of some deep-rooted, largely unrecognized problem or cluster of problems. If abuses like these continue to flourish despite so much manifest goodwill and intelligence, they must have their source in a fundamental error of concept or structure.

[22] *Christifideles Laici*, 2.

[23] Hans Urs von Balthasar, 1982 position paper for the Pontifical Council for the Laity, quoted in Paul Josef Cordes, *In the Midst of Our World: Forces of Spiritual Renewal* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 22.

We need to probe deeply to learn what accounts for the passivity of many laymen and the bitterness of many others, for the identity crisis of some priests and the morale problems to which it seemingly gives rise, for the dearth of new priestly and religious vocations, and for the many continuing tensions and conflicts marring relationships between clerics and laymen.

Why do we not simply accept the fact that, in all the Church is and does, clergy and laymen play complementary roles? That priests and laymen, far from being locked in an endless struggle for power, absolutely require one another in order to live out their respective, God-given vocations? Why does the warning, decades after Vatican II, that we now face the twin perils of a "reclericalization of the Church" and the "secularization of the clergy" appear both apt and timely?[24] The answers lie in unlocking the riddle of clericalism.

First, though, we must recognize another grave problem arising from the same malignant source. The clericalist mentality shared by clerics and laity alike goes a long way to explain the failure of Catholic laymen to play the role that Vatican II envisaged for them in bringing Christian values to bear upon the institutions of secular culture. While perfect realization of the ideal proposed by the Council must no doubt forever elude our grasp in this present life, it is worth asking not merely why we fall short but why, today, American Catholics seem to be hastening in just the opposite direction. Here we touch upon the question of political engagement by the Church.

Over the last twenty years, acting through their national organizations, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the United States Catholic Conference, the bishops of

[24] Giovanni Magnani, S. J., "Does the So-Called Theology of the Laity Possess a Theological Status?" in René Latourelle, ed., *Vatican II Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty-Five Years After* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1988), 590.