

TOPIC: LANGUAGE

To begin...

1. **The Sex Discrimination Act passed in 1984** was the first piece of Australian legislation to be written in gender-neutral language and all legislation following this has used inclusive language. Every document produced by the Australian Government is written in inclusive language. It is used in all major publications in Australia.

2. **The NSW Ecumenical Council has issues the following Guidelines for the use of non-Discriminatory Language (2001):**

As the community of the followers of Jesus Christ we try to live with the value of inclusivity which offers people a sense of belonging and acceptance. We are conscious of the role that language plays in shaping our understanding of ourselves, of other and of God. Inclusive language can enhance our relationships with one another.

These Guidelines are offered to increase our awareness and enable us to use language inclusively when speaking and writing:

Generics and personal pronouns:

The Bible was undoubtedly written in a very male-centered culture where women's role was very limited. This led to its tendency to assume that being male is the norm and to use male pronouns as generic language. Women's experience and perspective is omitted or under-represented. Sometimes the use of language makes women invisible e.g. the use of the words 'sons' and 'brothers' to describe the believing community even when women are included. At other times the exclusive use of masculine pronouns and images in relation to God has worked to celebrate the experiences of men leaving, women's experience unnamed, secondary and ultimately, less valid.

Here are some useful alternative ways of saying things:

Concerning people

Instead of:	Use
men	people, women and men, everyone, all
mankind	humanity, people
sons	sons and daughters
brothers	sisters and brothers, friends
forefathers	ancestors, forebears, mothers and fathers

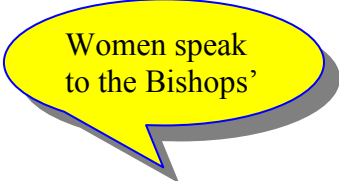
- 'By this shall all men know that you are my disciples' becomes 'By this will others know that you are my disciples.' (Aust Hymn Book 571)
- Gen 1:26 God said: 'Let us make man in our own image...' has been translated as Then God said: 'Let us make human kind in our image...' (NRSV)

Concerning God

Here are some ways of speaking about God which do not have gender bias:

- Creator, Liberating God, Redeemer, Source of our Being, Sustainer, Renewer, Reconciler, God of Peace, Friend, Loving God, Holy One, You who are truth, light and love...
- 'May his face shine upon you.' may be said as 'May God's face shine upon you.'
- 'God created the world and then he rested.' becomes 'God created the world and then rested.'

The above changes are not used in the official lectionary for use in Catholic Church worship or in the documents which come from the Vatican. Why do you think that the Church has not made changes to keep pace with language usage in government and society in general? What can each person do to begin the change to inclusive language in the Church so that it is in line with the rest of society today?



Women speak
to the Bishops'

As a woman with a strong Catholic background, I feel alienated by the maleness of the Church, and excluded by the language used in the liturgy. p. 93

All language for God is metaphorical yet the constant and almost exclusive use of the word 'Father' for God in the liturgy of the Mass has left many with a single image of God – a male parent...

- *It limits extraordinarily our relationship with the Divine Mystery at the centre of our lives*
- *It denies us communion with the whole feminine side of God, the God wholeness within the depths of our hearts. It creates a Church which is unable to accept fully the gifts of women or celebrate their experiences of God*
- *It creates a Church which can, and does, easily slip into dominance and control; which divides rather than unites.*
- *The wonderful life-giving gift of the Eucharist is being denied to many because it is couched in male, patriarchal terms. p.99*

The issue of exclusive social language represented a serious barrier, especially for younger women. For example, the following quotation is taken from a submission from a multi-cultural parish in a 'working-class' area of Adelaide. It was reported that the parish conducted two meetings which involved women ranging in age from 30 through to 82 years of age:

In the areas of liturgy serious barrier exist, quite apart from the exclusion from ordination. The exclusive language of the liturgy offended younger women in particular, while older women who had grown up with it, did not see it as such a serious issue. Younger women see it as alienating (and they included here the translation of Church documents, the Pope's talks, and the Catechism) p. 100

A majority of presenters said that inclusive language and images of God should be used while a minority said they should not:

It is now over 15 years since all Federal Governmental documents had to be written in inclusive language! It is a simple human decision – a Gospel decision surely – to include everyone and exclude no-one. It is not fair to God to attempt to limit Godness by any one symbol. “Let God be God” and, as a Church let us dare to practise using a variety of symbols explore who God is –male symbols, female symbols, gender-free symbols. It’s liberating, life-giving and fairer to God. We’ll be a better People of God if we are to explore God. p.214

Church documents- The Catholic Catechism.

The recent Catholic Catechism was originally written in inclusive language; before publication the English version it has to be re-written in ‘male’ language e.g.

Below is an extract from its Table of Contents:

Prologue

I The Life of Man – to know and love God

Part 1 The Profession of Faith

Ch 1 Man’s capacity for God

Ch 2 God comes to meet man

Ch 3 etc

Below are two versions of extracts from the Catholic Catechism: the original inclusive language version on the left and the re-working into non-inclusive language which has to be done before it could be published:

1. To Live Is to Know and Love God

God’s own perfection and happiness are infinite. In the plan of his good pleasure, the Father freely created the human race to share his blessed life and so is close to us at all times and in all places. He calls us and helps us seek, know and love him with all our strength. God gathers the human race, scattered and divided by sin, into the unity of his family, the Church through his Son, whom he sent in the fullness of time to redeem and save us. Through Christ and in the Holy Spirit, the Father invites us to become his adopted sons and daughters and heirs to divine happiness...



1. The Life of Man – To know and Love God

God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength. He calls together all men, scattered and divided by sin, into the unity of his family, the Church. To accomplish this, when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son as Redeemer and Saviour. In his Son and through him, he invites men to become, in the Holy Spirit, his adopted children and thus heirs of his blessed life...

What image of God do you get from each passage?

Read the published version on the right hand side substituting ‘woman’ for ‘man’ each time it occurs.

Below is another extract from the Catholic Catechism. Re-write it as it would look in inclusive language using some suggestions from the Guidelines above. Afterwards do the same for a hymn or an extract from the Gospel.

Inclusive language:

Non-inclusive language:

Father,...this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. God our Saviour desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.